

Fall 2017

# Ballet Review



***The Fairy's Kiss* in Miami from  
Ballet Review Fall 2017**

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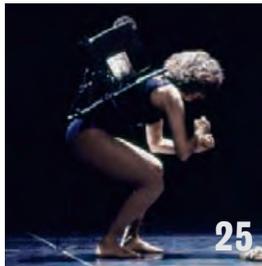
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Cover photograph by Paul Kolnik, New York City Ballet:  
Teresa Reichlen and Russell Janzen in *Diamonds*.



Simone Messmer and Renan Cerdeiro.(Photo: Gene Schiavone, Miami City Ballet)

# The Fairy's Kiss in Miami

Michael Langlois

Balanchine's *Walpurgisnacht Ballet* opened the program and despite the fact that it was new to the company, it demonstrated a command of technique and a degree of artistry as fine as a warm, February walk on South Beach. And the second ballet, Chris Wheeldon's *Polyphonia* (last danced here in 2014), was simply further proof that after five years, Lourdes Lopez has collected a coterie of dancers whose development from year to year has been nothing short of startling to behold.

But the focus of the evening, as Alastair Macaulay's presence bore witness, was Alexei Ratmansky and what he would create for our home team with this world premiere of *The Fairy's Kiss*, his third attempt at the ballet. The story involves an infant, orphaned boy who is kissed by a fairy and henceforth obligated (on his wedding night, I might add) to abandon his fiancé and the familiar pleasures of poverty in order to live the rarified life of the artiste. Midway through this coproduction with The National Ballet of Canada, I was reminded of Atlanta Falcons owner Arthur Blank and the look on his face as he stood on the sidelines watching Tom Brady slowly and inexorably dismantle his team's hopes of a Super Bowl victory. Why? Well, for starters, not five minutes after the curtain rose there was a baby-tossing scene that had me scratching my head and audience members chuckling in disbelief. Yes, you read that correctly: *A baby-tossing scene*. And what do you suppose would top a baby-tossing scene? A barrage of fouettés from the baby-tossing Fairy, Simone Messmer, of course.

This *Swan Lake* stunt was just the bromide the Miami audience needed in order to prevent them from alerting the Department of Children and Family Services. And they promptly put their cell phones away and ap-

plauded. How is Mr. Ratmansky going to dig himself out of this Bad-Ballet hole, I mused? But then he stuck his Ukrainian shovel in the ground and jumped on it again for what we then witnessed was our now-five-year-old protagonist – who had somehow miraculously avoided shaken baby syndrome (or maybe he didn't) after being tossed around like a football – emerge from within a crowd onstage. Walking toward the audience, he stared indifferently at us while we stared indifferently at him wondering how his deceased mother, Jordan-Elizabeth Long (a white girl from Blacksburg, Virginia), managed to give birth to a Black boy. Without dancing a step, he returned onstage into the crowd. Seconds later he reappeared as the twenty-five year old Brazilian dancer, Renan Cerdeiro, dressed as the overall-clad Jethro from *The Beverly Hillbillies*. More disbelief. More chuckles from the audience.

One might logically conclude that these bizarre, half-baked dramatic turns would hold one's attention but, no – for during the long, melodramatic pas de deux between the Fairy and her naïve protégé, Messmer remained covered in a white veil that completely concealed her facial expressions. The plot of this ballet is thin enough. To neuter her for the entirety of this central duet threw a wet blanket over whatever drama Ratmansky was striving to create. And since there was nothing much to engage the imagination, I spent most of this interlude staring at the long, lovely white dress that was, along with the veil, upstaging both the ballerina and the ballet. In fact, the costuming of this ballet was so dreadfully incongruous I began to wonder if the costume designer, Jérôme Kaplan, was getting paid by the yard. Marry all this with some moribund sets (two-dimensional houses with no doors, upon which the poor fiancé, Jeanette Delgado, must pretend to knock), oddly ponderous music (sorry, Mr. Stravinsky), and lighting that seemed as unfocused as the entire production, and you find yourself glancing at your watch.

The most redeeming moments of this *Fairy's*



Kiss came during the finale when Ratmansky decided to lift a page from the *Bayadère* playbook and bring on every member of the company in a Kingdom of the Shades attempt to seduce us into forgetting how much money was spent on this latest version in a long line of stabs at *Le Baiser de la Fée* (Nijinska: 1, Balanchine: 3½, MacMillan: 2). If only. Here, the boys were topless with flesh-colored tights while the girls wore diaphanous, flesh-colored skirts, with similarly colored leotards and tights. The tableaux were grand and Grecian and I felt as if someone had finally opened a window after I'd come down with a protracted bout of the flu.

Our male protagonist, who was still dressed as Jethro, gazed at the Apollonian masses as they struck various poses meant to remind him



Simone Messmer and baby at top, and with male ensemble at bottom. (Photos: Gene Schiavone, MCB)



Jeanette Delgado and Renan Cerdeiro. (Photo: Gene Schiavone, MCB)



(Photo: Gene Schiavone, MCB)

of the weighty artistic destiny that awaited. Meanwhile, I was wondering just what sort of a philandering rube our young Albrecht really was, since he spent a good portion of the ballet cheating on his betrothed with the woman he would only later discover as the Fairy. Fodder for further inquiry, perhaps. At

long last the end appeared blessedly near. The dancers amassed for one last pose as our dead mother was resurrected for a photo op with the Fairy and the jilted fiancé. I sat there, glassy-eyed, the curtain falling on this slobbering mess of a Fairy's Kiss, applause burbling into the ether.