



Arts & Entertainment

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Fresh new works grace the PNB stage with energy and emotion

By [R.M. CAMPBELL](#)
P-I DANCE CRITIC

When Peter Boal took over the artistic reins of Pacific Northwest Ballet last year, he promised to introduce new work and new choreographers to the company's repertory. This season he is making good on his promise in a major way, with premieres of one sort or another all season.

On the mixed bill that opened Thursday night at McCaw Hall, four pieces were danced, all fresh to Seattle and one, Victor Quijada's "Suspension of Belief," brand new.

The only choreographer who was wholly unfamiliar was Quijada, whom Boal knew in New York and invited to do a piece for his own ensemble and PNB. The young choreographer, keen on fusing his experience in hip-hop, modern dance and ballet into a coherent whole, had never worked on such a large scale, but that lack of experience was not evident. The work for 11 dancers held the stage easily with its diverse movement and electric style.

Dressed in a kind of downtown chic, slim and a touch ragged, by Mark Zappone, the dancers radiated hipness and cool, even when they were in a fevered state. Focus and commitment was all, which the dancers provided, but they were skillful at masking the source of their expression. They moved in small groups and large, often the men together and then the women. Quijada likes to couple something amusing with something deadly serious, but the underlying feeling is one of intensity.

Quijada chose his cast well. They suited his varied temperament and moved decisively from one mood to the other. They caught the quickness of his gestures and their fun-serious duality, also the essential youthfulness and sense of spontaneity in what Quijada is doing.

"Suspension of Belief" is not entirely a success, due in part to a lackluster score by Mitchell Akiyama, but Quijada has unquestionable talent. Yan Lee Chan's lighting design complements Quijada's choreography deftly.

DANCE REVIEW

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PACIFIC NORTHWEST BALLET

WHEN: Through Nov. 12

WHERE: McCaw Hall

TICKETS: \$18-\$145;
206-441-2424 or
www.pnb.org

Two works, by completely different choreographers, compete for the title of the most poignant: Ulysses Dove's "Dancing on the Porch of Heaven" and Peter Martins' Valse Triste." Last season Dove's "Red Angels" was given its local premiere by PNB. It was a huge success. "Dancing" is entirely different -- more elegiac, more moving -- but no less effective.

Choreographed for six dancers, "Dancing" is what Dove called "a poetic monument over people I loved." Patricia Barker, Lindsy Dec, Ariana Lallone, Batkhurel Bold, Christopher Maraval and Stanko Milov gave the piece that quality of loss, melancholy and introspection. Arvo Part's "Cantus in Memory of Benjamin Britten" suits Dove's piece perfectly.

Martins' "Valse Triste" is an exercise in visual beauty, a pas de deux set to music of Sibelius, that is romantic, playful and with its own feeling of loss. It is hard to know Martins' intentions always, but the music, which his choreography so closely mirrors, tells the tale. Louise Nadeau and Jeffrey Stanton danced with beauty and long line. Although the male partner gets one set of great turns -- executed with precision and speed by Stanton -- it is the woman who gets the lion's share of the attention. Nadeau is one of PNB's most gifted dancers, not so much in her bravura but in the way she fills out a phrase and the attention she pays to the music. She was a lyric muse in this performance -- refined and majestic, one phrase linking to another without a break.

Twyla Tharp, who is almost becoming a regular on PNB programs, contributed the closing number -- "Waterbaby Bagatelles," premiered by Boston Ballet in 1994. It is exactly what the title says, a series of bagatelles, none too serious, none too long. A water element is evoked but without great effect.

The piece is first-rate Tharp and second-rate Tharp. While she is on her edge, there is glory to behold on stage. When she isn't, well, the work seems long and a little tired. The men get the starring roles, beginning with Le Yin who opens and closes the work. Although he has been a principal dancer since 2002, he often has not been cast in leading roles on opening night. I have never seen him dance better than Thursday. He had welcome vitality and bravado, confidence and poise, ticking off Tharp's multiple demands with relish and a smile. Nadeau and Maraval did a nice little number as did Kaori Nakamura and Lucien Postlewaite.

Tharp gave the men in the company the assignment of thrilling the audience with all sorts of jumps and turns and leaps, even wiggles. The men from PNB did just that. Each one had something individual to offer, like a lot of pizzazz, and caused the audience to break out in loud applause. Benjamin Griffiths, whom Boal brought to PNB, revealed himself to be a dancer of playful ebullience and energetic style. Others included Kiyon Gaines, Josh Spell and James Moore, all members of the corps. It is heartening to see so much talent beyond the principal and soloist ranks.