

DREAMS AND SIGHS, WISHES AND TEARS

Eugene Ballet dazzles with two premieres and a beloved favorite

Eugene Ballet's annual foray into more-contemporary work is always a treat to look forward to, and their performance this weekend was nothing short of breathtaking. The program brought out rich subtleties in EBC's strong corps, and along with a familiar favorite, featured premieres by two notable choreographers.

Suzanne Haag's *The Surrounding Third* opened the show.

Set to Barber's mournful *Adagio for Strings*, Haag's choreography walks an exquisite line between suppressed emotion and total dissolve. Yuki Beppu manages a great blue fabric, aloft and windswept behind her, as she twists with strong, carving movement.

A lighting shift reveals the rounded backs of three male dancers — Cory Betts, Isaac Jones and Reed South-er — facing upstage. The quartet explores oppositional dynamics through layered canons, leaping over and sliding under the fabric. The piece builds organically through lush turns, jumps and lifts, creating a sense of tension and resilience.

Next up, guest choreographer Stephanie Martinez premiered her work, commissioned by EBC, *Wandering On*.

With a pulsing sharpness, the dance arrests from the get-go, bringing into focus a gestural accessibility — a pointed finger in the air, a palm on the forehead and on the back of the skull.

A poignant duet between Betts and Colton West reveals a forlorn, playful quality, as if the two are grasping to remember a fading memory.

Then a section with all women — balancing and shifting their weight — creates a picture of daily doing, the work of life. A duet between Danielle Tolmie and Sarah Stockwell suggests, through its relational connections and changes of focus, the tug between caregiving and caretaking.

And Tolmie and Jones' duet, a meditation on loss and suffering, plays with the polarity between animation and lifelessness.

A brash male quartet — energy passing like water rolling downhill — commands attention through jumps, kicks and sweeping rolls.

The overall work is poetic and brave, pulling from the core. And the EBC dancers own every single moment.

Choreographer Doris Humphrey once said every dance needs a good ending, and, boy howdy, Martinez finds one in Mark Tucker and Sarah Stockwell's stunning elevated shape. Bravo!

After intermission, it was on to Toni Pimble's *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, first choreographed in 1987 and danced with live music here for the first time thanks to the hardworking musicians (and fundraisers) of Brian McWhorter's OrchestraNext.

The Cantabile Collective, under the direction of Chris Dobson, with soloists Abigail Cote and Emma Rose Lynn rounds out the multisensory offering.

But MVP goes to Betts as Puck, that rascally sprite who's supposed to do King Oberon's fairy bidding, but bungles it all in delightfully sitcom-like fashion. Betts is a shoo-in for the role. Magnetic and athletic, he maneuvers about Peter Dean Beck's insanely great set with impish charm. ■

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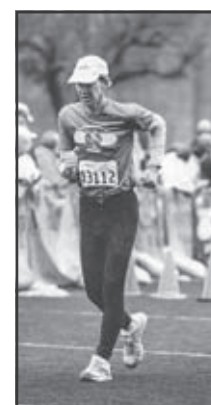
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