



Flash Extra! 3-31: Dancers as Dancemakers Discovering S.F. Ballet's Native Choreographers

(Editor's Note: Due to illness, we asked Dance Insider West Coast bureau chief Aimee Ts'ao to step in as a last-minute replacement to Flash the following performance. Aimee is a veteran dancer and ballet educator, who covers dance for the Bay Area Reporter. Kind of like having Babe Ruth pinch-hit for you; we think you'll like the results!)

By Aimée Ts'ao
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SAN FRANCISCO--Thursday was opening night at the War Memorial Opera House for the second of San Francisco Ballet's two Discovery Programs, evenings of new choreography from mostly company members. This one included "Opus 50" by Christopher Stowell; "Night," the latest creation of Julia Adam; and Yuri Possokhov's "Magritomania." Given that I had gone with no intention of reviewing (though out of habit and to compensate for a fading memory, I did take notes, thank God) and only found out this morning that I needed to pull a review together, this is going to be the flashiest of Flashes.

Stowell's "Opus 50" to the second movement of Tchaikovsky's Trio for Piano, Violin and Cello in A minor, op. 50, was serviceable to a point. He tends to cram too many steps into too few counts and the result is that all the movement phrases lose their individual identity. Some are quite inventive, but need more time to show them off and be legible to the audience. The opening, with the dancers sitting on stools, in military jackets for the men and gowns for the women, evoked a "Graduation Ball" atmosphere, but with a twist. Joanna Berman was exquisite, as always, as the woman abandoned, reclaimed and left for good at the end.

Adam's "Night" received an instant, cheering standing ovation from the crowd. While I enjoyed the dancers' energy, the choreography needed more working out (but then, I know these choreographers did not get enough rehearsal time--what else is new?). But it was very successful in conveying all the weirdness and otherworldliness of the time and space we pass through drifting in and out of sleeping and dreaming states. The commissioned score by Matthew Pierce could have been more extreme in exploring altered states; as it was it was pleasant without propelling the ideas on stage. Overall, a good piece that could use some tweaking to make it even better.

For me, the most elegant piece of the evening was Possokhov's "Magritomania," using images from the Belgian artist's paintings, both as decor and costumes. The music, by Yuri Krasavin, was actually a film score using Beethoven as a springboard. The surreal quality of the classical phrases distorted and added to other contrasting sounds was a perfect match for the ballet. While a bit too classical in some places for my taste, Possokhov manages still to build a beautiful overall structure for the choreography, create some wonderful movement phrases and, most importantly, draw some very expressive performances out of dancers who normally don't move this well or with such feeling.

Discovery Program B is a program worth seeing for these last two pieces. It repeats and closes Saturday afternoon.