BWW Review: Another Stunning UP CLOSE ON HOPE from Festival Ballet Providence

by Andria Tieman  Mar. 12, 2018

Festival Ballet's Spring offering of their Up Close on Hope series offers a charming mix of old favorites and exciting new works. There are two world premiere pieces in this selection, as well as a new interpretation of a world premiere from two years ago.

The program begins with Lady of the Camellias, a production that Festival premiered two years ago, with Jennifer Ricci reprising the titular role of Marguerite—the Lady of the Camellias. Based on the novel by Alexandre Dumas, Lady tells the story of a courtesan known for the camellia blossoms she wears in her hair, and that she bestows on suitors as tokens of affection. This spring's offering is arranged somewhat differently, and the storyline is expanded, but the beauty and tragedy still packs a powerful punch. One of the additional scenes is an excellent fight sequence between David DuBois in the role of Armand, and Alex Lanz as his father. Lanz is thoroughly menacing wearing a boxy morning coat and humorless expression, and Dubois manages to convey a tremendous array of emotions in the fight scenes, and in his more intimate scenes with Ricci.

Eugenia Zinovieva also deserves praise as Flora, Marguerite's "friend" who seems outwardly well-meaning, but schemes behind the scenes. Her character brings a few moments of much needed levity to the
tragic love story, and Zinovieva's impish
smirks are charming, even though she's
(largely) up to no good.

The true star of this production is Jennifer
Ricci, who once again commands the stage
seemingly effortlessly, though her pax de
deus partner David DuBois is no slouch
either, and the two of them have amazing
chemistry together. Good ballet dancers
always have to both dance beautifully and
act well, but Ricci in particular manages to
use her face in such a way that she
communicates volumes. The Lady of the
Camellias is a complicated character and we see her conflict, her love, her emotional
strength and her worry all writ large across Ricci's brow. Especially having embodied
this part before, she's learned her character that much more in this second production,
and that makes it all the more heartbreaking.

The second half of the evening includes two
world premiere pieces: Thrust, with music by
Ezio Bosso and Choreography by Kurt
Douglas; and The Rite of Spring Part 1 with
choreography by yon Tande, music by Igor
Stravinsky. Thrust is a modern production
with dancers clad in high performance
sports gear. The costumes and movements
convey a kind of athletic endeavor, almost
like the running of a marathon, with each of
the dancers in a female/female & male/male
pair, running forward and then slumping in
defeat. The piece builds in intensity and
reaches a fever pitch before settling back
into a regular, metronomic rhythm. It's incredibly difficult to describe, but fascinating. It
feels not like something you're watching, but like something you're experiencing along
with the dancers.

The Rite of Spring Part 1: Veneration of the Earth is a work in progress and in keeping
with the theme of The Rite of Spring, this piece is very raw, and primitive in movement
and recalls early man forming a civilization. Elizabeth Mochizuki plays Elder, who
awakens a community of men and women who then celebrate the earth, while learning to interact with each other. Mochizuki gives a commanding performance with powerful movements and intense facial expressions that play well with the dissonance of the music and the thunderous drums. This will no doubt be a good piece once it's finished, but in this work-in-progress state, it's a little underwhelming.

As always, Festival Ballet gives the audience solid performances, and something else to look forward to. In particular, this reviewer hopes to see more partnerships with choreographers like Kurt Douglas who push for new and challenging performances that leave the audience wanting more.

Up Close on Hope runs March 9-18, 2018 with performances

Friday March 9, 2018 - 8:00pm
Saturday March 10, 2018 - 7:30pm
Sunday March 11, 2018 - 6:00pm
Friday March 16, 2018 - 8:00pm
Saturday March 17, 2018 - 7:30pm
Sunday March 18, 2018 - 6:00pm

FBP Black Box Theatre (825 Hope St., Providence, RI 02906; location information)
Tickets at festivalballet.com
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