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Ballet BC: Ballet with Brains

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[Ballet BC](#) has opened its new season with three works on a program that goes from strength to strength. The best one not only comes last in the program. It also originated closest to home.

Called *3 Fold*, the three works by three very different choreographers shows the many strengths of the company. With plenty of intensely physical and challenging dance, inventive staging, and dramatic lighting, opening night on Thursday was an evening of ballet with brains that never forgot the heart.

The opening work was *Diversion* by [Robert Glumbek](#). A contemporary choreographer based in Toronto, it's his first work en pointe but you wouldn't know it from seeing the finished product. Inspired by the modern battle between men and women and by Glumbek's impressions of Vancouver street life, the work looked like ballet that had been a little roughed up.

Many of the duets were combative. Men held women who tried to wriggle away or men aggressively swiped their outstretched arms over the heads of the women. Pairs circled each other like wary competitors. In one surprising sequence, several female dancers leaped out of the dark void into the arms of Gilbert Small who kept falling to the ground with his heavy burden. But then he managed to catch and hold the last one in a beautifully tender embrace.

The second work was *Parole Sospese (Words Suspended)* by Italian choreographer Walter Matteini. In the program, Matteini says that the starting point for the work was the writing of the 16th century Italian poet Ludovico Ariosto. He pointed out that he's not interested in literally representing the poet's words but in exploring "how people's feelings, their thinking and society have or have not evolved through the centuries."

After seeing the work I can say that the work stands on its own without knowing anything about Ariosto's poetry. Matteini may have been inspired by words but in the end, he's created dance – an art form place where words are often suspended.

The most theatrical of the three works, the most dramatic part occurred when an array of light bulbs on cords descended down to about a metre above the stage floor. As Alexis Fletcher and other company dancers moved through the grid, their faces and bodies glowed with an eerie presence. It was one of those moments that caught my breath and made me watch with rapt attention.

Parole Sospese has a complex architecture. There were times when up to five different groupings of dancers were moving in different patterns on stage. It made me a much more active participant in what I was seeing by having to choose which ones to watch. One of the different groupings that caught my eye was a solo by Alexander Burton when he covered his eyes with his hands in a sign of desperate grief.

The program ended with *Doppeling*, which has been expanded since [Simone Orlando](#), a former star dancer Ballet BC, created it for the company in 2009.

From the opening moment, I couldn't take my eyes from the stage. The dancers looked fantastic in skin-coloured and skin-tight costumes that evened out the gender differences between men and women. The levelling extended to the hair as all the dancers wore either platinum blond or brunette wigs cut in a bob style.

But *Doppeling* is about more than the way ballet creates similar body types. Through movement and dance, it tells a story about conformity and an individual's desire to break away from the pack. It's both lighthearted and serious and full of optimism and hope without being in any way being saccharine. It's dance I could watch over and over again.

Ballet BC's [*3 Fold*](#) continues this evening and Saturday at the Queen Elizabeth Theatre.

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