



[Ballet BC](#)'s artistic director [Emily Molnar](#) could have celebrated the company's 25th anniversary performance with a program with a selection of the best works from the past. Instead, she did something much bolder: she created a night of four world premieres by Canadian choreographers with live music performed by the [Turning Point Ensemble](#).

The program opened with [Wen Wei Wang's](#) *In Motion*. With a title that is a play on the word emotion, Wang's piece was the first that the former Ballet BC has created for the company. *In Motion* was full of feeling, emotion, humour and wonderful dancing. Wang really knows how to show off his dancers. They're great dancers and he made them look it.

The staging in the work was innovative. Wang placed the musicians in a row at the back of the stage with their backs to the audience. He reversed the usual positioning of the conductor and placed Owen Underhill in front of them facing us in the audience. Both were behind a scrim. What this did was bring the musicians and conductor into the performance and made their movements part of the performance on stage rather than hiding them in the orchestra pit. In particular, the musicians were foregrounded twice. On the first occasion, flautist Brenda Fedoruk stepped onto the stage and played a duet with Alexis Fletcher. Then violist Mary Sokol Brown played as Gilbert Small and Dario Dinuzzi danced a duet. Both were beautifully danced sections by dancers at the top of their form.

In Motion was a rare opportunity for Wang to create a piece en pointe. Although the women were the only ones in pointe shoes, there were several occasions when the men were on demi-pointe in a way that played around with ballet's severe gender divisions when it comes to elongating the foot. The final pas de deux was danced by Donald Sales and Makaila Wallace in what looked a partnership between equals. The piece ended in silence with the two of them dancing on stage as the curtain came down.

Not only did Sales dance in two of the four works, he created one: *Moth*. It was an absolutely powerful and emotional piece about his own struggle with grief. The program notes mention that *Moth* is dedicated to Sales' eldest brother Delbert Lee Sales Jr who died in 1999. "Twelve years later, I've found my acceptance," Donald Sales says in the program.

As an emerging choreographer, Sales has created a strong, strong piece with great dancing and wonderful staging and lighting that all reinforce the central idea. A single bulb hangs above the

the back wall of the Queen Elizabeth Theatre with the piping and concrete wall where the women are dancing. I couldn't help but think how stripping the stage bare was a metaphor for how grief can just strip the sufferer to the core.

Peter Smida dances a solo in his bare chest that is heartwrenching. And then he does it again in a wonderful duet with Wallace that embodies how grief can be debilitating and immobilizing.

My favorite piece of music of the night was *Counting Games for Julia Robinson*, a percussive, moody piece that received its world premiere Thursday along with Serge Bennathan's *Les chercheurs de dieu* which it accompanied. *Les chercheurs* had an innovative start: as audience members returned to their seats, the curtain slowly rose at first showing only dancing legs and then lifting to reveal the cast dancing. There were some interesting choreographic elements such as groups of men and women dancing together in a tight group with their hands moving like sea anemones above their heads. The dancers certainly worked hard but I found the work more about getting the dancers to emote at the expense of moving in interesting and unexpected patterns.

The evening ended with Gioconda Barbuto's *TOUCH*. Danced in costumes dominated by red, *TOUCH* was inspired by photos of and walks through Stanley Park. Although I couldn't see that particular connection in the movement, I did enjoy hearing the dancers speak lines that I could barely hear but sounded like they were about trees and nature. They weren't trying to act so much as speaking language as part of the soundscape.

Ballet BC's 25th anniversary celebration continues Friday, April 15 and Saturday, April 16 at the Queen Elizabeth Theatre at 8 p.m.

**Alyson Fretz, Makaila Wallace and Delphine Lerroux from Ballet BC. Photo: Chris Randle*