



Back to Climaxes of choreography

Climaxes of choreography

December 27, 2010

Michael Crabb

From a year that included watching almost 100 performances in 10 cities across Canada and abroad, these are my personal choices of works that stood out for innovative and compelling choreography and powerfully expressive dancing.

1. **Chroma:** The National Ballet of Canada's November company premiere of Wayne McGregor's *Chroma* introduced Toronto audiences to a dazzlingly inventive contemporary dance masterwork that has dancers exploring new boundaries of physical articulation. It also proved, in case there was any doubt, that NBC's artists are top of their game and know how to rise superbly to a major choreographic challenge.

2. **Busk:** Judging by the way she moves them, Edmonton-born choreographer Azure Barton thinks her dancers are made of rubber. *Busk*, the highlight of her New York-based troupe's Toronto debut in April, had them stretching, recoiling, cork-screwing and careening across the stage in an abstract yet humanly evocative riff on the theme of street performers.

3. **Full Bloom:** Three impressive dancer/choreographers, all forty-something, evoke the pains and pleasures of mid-life transition in an intensely personal, often hyper-physical 70-minute work. Hatched in Germany and brought to Toronto – thanks to the dance-friendly Young Centre – in January, *Full Bloom* struck such a resonant chord it was back by popular demand just two weeks ago.

4. **Leonce and Lena:** Toronto dance lovers have reason to regret the prolonged absence of Montreal's Les Grands Ballets Canadiens from local stages. The 35-dancer company was exhilaratingly vibrant and dramatically acute in the October North American debut of *Leonce and Lena*, German-choreographer Christian Spuck's adaptation of Georg Büchner's satirical play about two reluctant royals fleeing arranged marriages and finding true love where they least expected.

5. **Love Lies Bleeding:** Cynics might accuse Calgary-based Alberta Ballet of populist opportunism in creating a work to the songs of Elton John but company director/choreographer Jean Grand-Maître had so much exuberant fun with them and his dancers responded with such extravagant flair that it became an irresistible dance entertainment. Premiered in May, it now has Sir John's blessing to tour – hopefully in our direction.

6. **Giselle:** Talk about messing with tradition! Dublin's Fabulous Beast Dance Theatre ripped the tulle and toe shoes from one of the Romantic era's most revered ballets to fashion a tale of contemporary dystopia and dysfunction in the fictional village of Ballyfenny. Over the top at times, this radical, ribald revision – a mix of dance, speech and song – was as refreshing as it was outrageous.

7. **Cockpit:** Vancouver choreographer Wen Wei Wang taps into memories of his Chinese youth in a work, shown here in April, that travels far beyond autobiographical reflection as it explores the psychological dynamics of male bonding and competition. Who could have imagined how many metaphors a choreographer can squeeze from strategically attached pheasant feathers?



Daphne Strothmann and Milos Galko in *Giselle*, a Fabulous Beast Dance Theatre production.

T CHARLES ERICKSON

8. **The bliss that from their limbs all movement takes:** Two years ago, Vancouver's financially strapped Ballet BC looked as if it was down for the count. The November premiere of Montreal choreographer José Navas' fast-paced and intricately patterned new work to a Philip Glass/Ravi Shankar score — part of an impressive contemporary-ballet triple bill — proves the troupe is rebounding confidently towards a much brighter future.

9. **Punto Ciego Abreviado:** Although Montreal's Rubberbandance only gave us an abbreviated version of company founder Victor Quijada's full-evening *Punto Ciego* during a rare Toronto visit last month, it was enough to underline the funky possibilities of his unique dance mash-up. Break dance, hip hop and contemporary ballet blend explosively, proving that super cool can also be very hot.

10. **Dusk Dances:** The summer of 2010 was a banner year for this long-running outdoor, family oriented programme of contemporary dances at Toronto's Withrow Park. It may not be high art but sometimes a little levity and high-spirited antics can be just the ticket.