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### Ballet BC's Volo

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*Ballet BC photographed by Chris Randle.*

Ballet BC is on fire. *Volo*, the company's latest evening of contemporary ballet, delights its audience with four exciting dance works from some of the world's most cutting edge choreographers. Artistic Director Emily Molnar continues to shepherd her company towards a new era of innovative choreography and virtuosic dancing.

Opening the show is *sweet*, choreographed by Shawn Hounsell. And sweet it is; the costumes are inspired by a candy pink palette, with the men in patterned trousers and short sleeved shirts, and the women in camisoles and flouncy shorts. The colour theme continues with moving shapes projected on the cyclorama, offering a rosy backdrop to the choreography. At the beginning, a recorded voice speaks about the brain processing information. From that moment on I see the dancers as "brainwaves" who take one established phrase of movement, and continually deconstruct it in many ways. The movement itself is quick fire, abstract and classical in flavour, with a sprinkle of idiosyncratic arm work and staccato gesture. Ultimately, my brainwave concept and the repetition of the movement doesn't sustain me for the entire 30-minute piece, but with the ace pointe work of Ballet BC's powerhouse female dancers, and the effervescent charisma of its men, there is still much to appreciate.

The next piece is an excerpt of Jiri Kylian's *Toss of a Dice*. Danced by guest artists Lesley Telford and Medhi Walerski (choreographer of the final piece of the evening), this excerpt leaves me wanting to see more.

The dancers are outstanding. They are strong in their solo moments, and even stronger in their moments of partnership. The decidedly un-balletic vocabulary is dense, a compelling mix of fast, sharp movements and languid, arresting duet work. A play of light and darkness, the dancers are often mere shadows. During the moments in which they are fully illuminated, the light reveals their vulnerabilities, strengths and a grounded presence in the moment. It is beautiful to watch.

*1<sup>st</sup> Flash* follows, a sextet choreographed by Finnish-born Jorma Elo. The set design is terrific. A large, rectangular-shaped black box hangs on an angle from a corner of the stage, and smaller light boxes are suspended high across the back. The rectangle glides up and down during the piece, and sometimes light radiates from it. At times, the smaller lights surge, sometimes to maximum brightness, sometimes to a gentle glow. Thrusting themselves into the movement with incredible energy, the performers boldly dance a whirlwind of fantastic, athletic and virtuosic choreography. It is absolutely manic. Building speed and energy until its final moments, *1<sup>st</sup> Flash* is pure excitement.

The most memorable piece of the evening, however, is Medhi Walerski's *Petite Cérémonie*. Midway through the second intermission the main drape opens to reveal a bare cavern of theatre space. The stage has been stripped of all blacks and other curtains. Cement grey walls, equipment, pipes, exposed lighting booms—the guts of the theatre are on display and it looks fantastic. Painted wooden boxes line either side of the stage and lighting pipes fly in and out briefly as a technician makes final adjustments. It's a fascinating place to start.


In the program notes Walerski writes that he began his creation with a question to the dancers: What does "life in a box" mean to you? The piece emerged from the dancer's answers to this question. First, a black-suited dancer enters the playing area. He starts a tiny step-touch movement, where one foot is placed on the other foot before step-touching to the other side. As he repeats the step, the rest of the company, dressed in black suits and cocktail dresses, enter from the audience and join him in a straight line.

*Petite Cérémonie* is the most charming dance work I have seen in a very long time. There are wonderful theatrical moments, where the company is grouped together, performing gestures and movements in precise unison. There are comedic moments where, in one example, the amazing Dario Dinuzzi juggles while walking sideways across the stage, telling us a clever story about his favourite box while another dancer amplifies his voice with a microphone. There are surprising black outs and musical effects and lots of chit chat while dancing. And the dancing...in the middle of the piece a section of gorgeous duets reminds you that you are watching some of the best ballet dancers in the country.

The dancers perform with great heart, and it's their passion, physical abandonment and humanity that sweeps me away so completely. Near the end of the piece the boxes are being rolled every which way, the dancers are dancing like fiends, and in a rush and tumble the boxes are somehow stacked in a tall pyramid. Finally, in a flurry of movement, the

dancers surround and climb this precarious pile and pose, as if for a portrait. When they release the posture with a sigh, the performance ends with a satisfying snap to black.

A delightful evening of dance, yet again. Many congratulations to Ballet BC.

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