

# DANCE

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Xiao Nan Yu and Nehemiah Kish of The National Ballet of Canada in *Polyphonia*.

## Dance Salad Festival

Wortham Center, Cullen Theater  
Houston, TX  
March 20–22, 2008  
Reviewed by Nancy Wozny

The 13th season of Houston's only international dance festival was a study in contrasts, with offerings mostly divided between the dark and light. National Ballet Theater, Prague; Polish National Opera Ballet; Jacoby & Pronk; and the National Ballet of Canada, all new to the festival, made impressive debuts.

Beijing LDTX Modern Dance Company's excerpt of *The Cold Dagger*, choreographed by Li Han-zhong and Ma Bo, owned the dark side in a study of yin and yang, tension and even more tension, and an explosive mastery of control. Dressed in layered lace skirts, a team in white sparred with the black-skirted folks. Images of combat such as boxing and

martial arts peppered the piece. A potent section positioned four men as a shifting landscape for a single female dancer. Balancing her lithe body on their heads created a striking moment. Unfortunately, the mesmerizing spell broke at the very end when the dancers traveled under the floor and poked through, revealing rather industrial looking seams in the flooring. With that the piece came crashing down to earth. Clocking in at 40 minutes, the excerpt was too long for a mixed program.

Staying within a cool theme was Annabelle Lopez Ochoa's steely duet *One*, for Drew Jacoby and Rubinald Rofino Pronk. Ochoa showcased Jacoby and Pronk's knife-edged limbs, razor-sharp technique, and sensual chemistry.

The National Ballet of Canada looked flawlessly polished in Christopher Wheeldon's abstract *Polyphonia*, set to Ligeti's bold piano concerto. Four couples began with abrupt robotic arm gestures that eventually gave way to more sinewy and expressive vocabulary.

In the total cut-up department, Paradox On (formerly Nederlands Dans Theater III), delivered a smashing performance of Jirí Kylián's *BIRTH-DAY*. Part film and live performance, the piece explores the wonderfully expressive interior lives of five eccentric Mozartian characters complete with feathers, baking flour, and a generous dose of hilarity. The piece was sumptuously performed by the five members of NDT III: Sabine Kupferberg, Gioconda Barbuto, David Krügel, Gérard LeMaitre, and Egon Madsen. Kylián also sent the National

Ballet Theater, Prague, loose like a herd of feral horses in *Stomping Ground*. Backs bucked and heads clucked in Kylián's raw animal energy. And that's not all the Kylián; the evening included a rare viewing of his Felliniesque film, *CAR-MEN*, shot in a Polish coal mine of all places.

On the light and super-short note, Polish National Opera Ballet's Marcin Krajewski pulled off spectacular leaps and fabulously drunken landings complete with a cigarette dangling from his mouth in Ben Van Cawbenberg's *Les Bourgeois*, the evening's most virtuoso display. Prague's National Ballet Theater kept the giggles flowing in Petr Zuska's sweet romp, *Maria's Dream*. Four white tutu-ed but topless men appear to a lone woman on a bench to taunt, tease, and amuse. And amuse they did, especially when they dropped their tulle skirts and bourrée'd bare-bottomed across the stage to Saint-Saëns's "The Swan." Soraya Bruno and Martin Buczkó of Staatsballett Berlin teased each other in Benvindo Fonseca's light but steamy *La Casa de Bernarda Alba*.

Yaroslav Invaneko's *Ne m'oubliez pas* (Don't Forget Me) occupied the subtle ground between the dark and light, and was elegantly performed by Helene Bouchet and Invaneko of the Hamburg Ballet. Invaneko explored the entanglement of trust with a serpentine and earthy tone, elevating the neutral zone to a breathtaking place that was neither somber nor jovial.