

Unlikely duo forges unforgettable ballet

The Fiddle and the Drum, now a full-length work, polished yet still fresh

DANCE REVIEW

Joni Mitchell's *The Fiddle and the Drum*

Company: Alberta Ballet
When: Friday
Where: Jubilee Auditorium

SALENA KITTINGHAM
Special to The Journal

The legendary Joni Mitchell and Alberta Ballet's Jean Grand-Maitre are an artistic coalition bringing a green message of peace and love with their gutsy and stimulating ballet *The Fiddle and the Drum*.

The unlikely duo have remarkably fused the politically charged and poetic themes inherent in Mitchell's songs; humanity's capacity to create tremendous beauty and mass destruction, with projections of her visual art stirring distorted imagery, sometimes overlaid with the words of her lyrics and the orchestrated movement of the bold Alberta Ballet dancers symbiotically so it all washes over the senses, seeping into the mind and spirit.

Friday night, the newly expanded full-length version of the ballet hit the stage in Edmonton, after making its way through a tour of several Prairie cities. Much to the delight of local audiences, the ballet arrived in full bloom, brilliantly polished but still fresh and exuberant.

It was pure pleasure to see the company dancing so very well right now as a tightly knit group, a strong and mature ensemble made up of self-confident and sexy individual artists full of passion and heart.

Costumed androgynously, the company is simply cast as dancing people; human bodies moving together in a universal semi-abstract language, unconstrained by the typical gender-based conventions of classical ballet.

Grand-Maitre's choreography is intensely physical and very dependent on the dancers being versatile and adept at hitting extreme shapes and hard angles and transitioning quickly from concave contractions to long, suspended lines.

A child played by Clara Stripe weaves in and out, representing the fragile future that hangs in the balance of our past and present human behaviours. Her youthful energy is channelled by the stream of dancers often soaring across the back of the stage, echoing the moral conscience like a Greek chorus in a classical play.

Kelley McKinlay and Jonathan Byrne Ollivier, two of the company's powerful and masculine dancers, were paired to deliver a compassionate and tender duet in *Passion Play*. Nicole Caron was



SUPPLIED: DONALD LEE COMPANY

The Alberta Ballet production of Joni Mitchell's *The Fiddle and the Drum* was presented Friday and Saturday nights at the Jubilee Auditorium.

bang on in *The Three Stimulants*, more than able to keep up with the sheer speed and precise athleticism of the boys, Yukichi Hattori and Davidson Jaconello. And the entire company got down and groovy for *Woodstock*.

The genius of Grand-Maitre and Mitchell's collaboration was no better made apparent than in Act 2's breath-taking *Ethiopia*.

The song is deliberately not one of Mitchell's most easy-to-listen-to tunes on its own, and resolving it choreographically is a complex and challenging task, not unlike the very issues and

problems the vast continent of Africa faces. But what we witnessed here was nothing less than the work of both artists pulled up to a whole other plane when seen together. Mitchell's music demands that the choreographer work completely out of his comfort zone, and Grand-Maitre rolled up his sleeves and dived right in, colliding his distinctive contemporary ballet movement vocabulary inventively with traditional Afro-dance and jazz.

The effect was astonishingly haunting and stunningly beautiful at the same time.

At least four ways to leave your love

Good fun, bad behaviour from a calculating

LIZ NICHOLLS
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EDMONTON

"Just making sure we're ... no harm/no foul, that sort of thing, no big deal," says a guy named Guy, explaining his cross-country tour of abandoned ex-girlfriends to one of them.

Some Girl(s) being by Neil LaBute, America's leading theatrical repository of male brutality and bile, there is both harm and foul in everything Guy does — as you'll discover in the four anonymously upscale hotel rooms of Trevor Schmidt's kick-butt Canadian premiere. Even the scene changes are unsettling.

What's Guy, a successful 30-ish writer (author of *The Calculus of Desire*), really up to when he calls up exes he thinks he may have treated badly? He frames it as a sort of expiation pilgrimage, a cleansing of possible past sins and making of amends before his upcoming marriage. Actually, he's a bit, er, vague about the 22-year-old nursing student in question. She's "some girl," hence the dismissive title, and he's "kind of taken this vow thing here ..."

To Christopher Schulz falls the LaButian task of embodying this kind of male ambivalence and toxicity, the serial betrayer/cannibalizer of women who may be a mystery even to himself. As Guy, the actor taps an earnest suavity that is too judicious about charm to make the mistake of overt cockiness. You're not entirely sure if Schulz's Guy is calculating his unctuous tone or the long, awkward appraising pauses between small-talk gambits that the women feel compelled to fill with reprodding of their bruises. The uncertainty is suitably unsettling, and comic in a flagellating sort of way. It's a smart performance, that adds up.

What becomes clear is that while Guy may invoke responsibility, he finds a way to let himself off the hook. As all four women discover, Guy's resilience, even in the face of damning accusation, is remarkable. He's impossible to out-face; we laugh, we cringe.

With the high school sweetheart he dumped without so much as an adios, played by Laura Raboud in a veritable

THEATRE REVIEW

Some Girl(s)

Theatre: Northern Light Theatre
Written by: Neil LaBute
Directed by: Trevor Schmidt
Starring: Christopher Schulz, Myla Southward, Laura Raboud, Ian Jackson, Grass, Lorianna Lombardi
Where: The Third Street Theatre, 11516 103rd Street, Edmonton
Running: Through March 15
Tickets: 780-471-1586 or 780-420-1586

open wound of a performance. "You ended it," she says, rejecting "the 'we' thing." In a question, he muses on her relationship with hubby and kids. "You know exactly how I thought you were."

On the surface, Tyler (Lorianna Lombardi) would seem to be the most complicated of the women, the spirit party girl who's so carefree she wouldn't mind a tumble. But her scars seem to goad Guy into further cruelty. She even shoves "girls like you" and his "Wow, before rising to a kind of dignified 'confession' that she was in his heart or mind.

Guy's last two encounters are complex, the women better than they fight back. Linda Grass is formidable, married and unrepentant who skewers all Guy's verbal bets hurt is your number 1. Myla Southward is a smart woman who calls Guy on his every self-justification. At least her layered skepticism elicits a response that is actually nonplussed.

"I always meant well" and "it if I'm complex." Both performances are just excellent, their scenes with Guy full of grit and surprise.

It's an evening of good, suspense and bad behaviour. Schmidt gives us, as line heard, and sometimes us around us.

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Northern Light Theatre's production of *Some Girl(s)* by Neil LaBute, starring Christopher Schulz and Myla Southward.