Ballet Notes

The Four Temperaments & Watch her & Glass Pieces

November 25 – 29, 2009

Artists of the Ballet in Glass Pieces. Photo by Bruce Zinger.
The 2009/10 season is presented by: 

Wednesday, November 25 at 7:30 pm
Thursday, November 26 at 7:30 pm
Friday, November 27 at 7:30 pm
Saturday, November 28 at 2:00 pm and 7:30 pm
Sunday, November 29 at 2:00 pm

Conductor: David Briskin, Music Director and Principal Conductor

BMO Financial Group presents:

The Four Temperaments

Choreography: George Balanchine
Staged by: Joysanne Sidimus
Music: Paul Hindemith, Theme and Four Variations – The Four Temperaments

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Lighting Design: Ronald Bates
Piano Soloist: Mark Harjes
Repetiteurs: Joysanne Sidimus, Lindsay Fischer

Premiere: Ballet Society, November 20, 1946 – Central High School of Needle Trades, New York City, New York
The National Ballet of Canada Premiere: March 24, 1969 – Toronto, Ontario

The Four Temperaments is a gift from THE VOLUNTEER COMMITTEE, THE NATIONAL BALLET OF CANADA.

The performance of The Four Temperaments, a Balanchine® Ballet, is presented by arrangement with The George Balanchine Trust® and has been produced by arrangement with the Balanchine Style® and Balanchine Technique® Service standards established and provided by the Trust.

Theme

1. Bridgett Zehr and Patrick Lavoie (Nov 25, 28 eve)
   Krista Dowson and McGee Maddox (Nov 26, 28 mat)
   Chelsy Meiss and Joseph Welbes (Nov 27, 29)

2. Jillian Vanstone and Robert Stephen (Nov 25, 28 eve)
   Tina Pereira and Wei Chen (Nov 26, 28 mat)
   Jenna Savella and Naoya Ebe (Nov 27, 29)

3. Tanya Howard and Etienne Lavigne (Nov 25, 28 eve)
   Grace Hanley and James Shee (Nov 26, 28 mat)
   Rebekah Rimsay and Jonathan Renna (Nov 27, 29)
First Variation: Melancholic
Zdenek Konvalina (Nov 25, 28 eve, 29)
Keiichi Hirano (Nov 26, 27, 28 mat)
Tina Pereira and Jenna Savella (Nov 25, 28 eve)
Tiffany Mosher and Lise-Marie Jourdain (Nov 26, 28 mat)
Jillian Vanstone and Klara Houdet (Nov 27, 29)
Tiffany Mosher or Elizabeth Marrable, Andreea Olteanu or Antonella Martinelli, Amber Munro, Chelsy Meiss or Selene Guerrero-Trujillo

Second Variation: Sanguinic
Heather Ogden and Piotr Stanczyk (Nov 25, 28 eve)
Stacey Shiori Minagawa and Richard Landry (Nov 26, 28 mat)
Sonia Rodriguez and Aleksandar Antonijevic (Nov 27, 29)
Klara Houdet or Shino Mori, Jordana Daumec, Elena Lobasanova, Shino Mori or Marissa Parzei

Third Variation: Phlegmatic
Aleksandar Antonijevic (Nov 25, 28 eve)
Nan Wang (Nov 26, 28 mat)
Brett van Sickle (Nov 27, 29)
Krista Dowson or Nadine Drouin, Juri Hiraoka, Alexandra MacDonald, Grace Hanley or Sarah Elena Wolff

Fourth Variation: Choleric
Xiao Nan Yu (Nov 25, 28 eve)
Stephanie Hutchison (Nov 26, 28 mat)
Bridgett Zehr (Nov 27, 29)

and Ensemble

Intermission

Artists of the Ballet in The Four Temperaments.
Photo by Cylla von Tiedemann.
Watch her

World Premiere
Choreography/Direction*: Aszure Barton
Assistant to Ms. Barton: Charlaine Katsuyoshi
   By arrangement with G. Schimer, Inc. publisher and copyright owner.
Set and Costume Design: Yannik Larivée
Lighting Design: Christopher Dennis
Repetiteurs: Peter Ottmann, Rex Harrington

Watch her is generously supported by Walter Carsen, O.C. and the Board of Directors of The National Ballet of Canada.

Sonia Rodriguez
Bridgett Zehr or Xiao Nan Yu
Heather Ogden


Understudies: Ryan Booth, Selene Guerrero-Trujillo, Marissa Parzei, Brendan Saye

*created in collaboration with the Artists of the Ballet
Glass Pieces

Choreography: Jerome Robbins
Staged by: Jean-Pierre Frohlich
Music: Philip Glass, Rubric, Facades, Funeral from Akhnaten


Set Design: Jerome Robbins and Ronald Bates
Costume Design: Ben Benson
Costume Consultant: Holly Hynes
Lighting Design: Jennifer Tipton
Repetiteur: Mandy-Jayne Richardson

The National Ballet of Canada Premiere: November 8, 2007 – Toronto, Ontario

Performed by permission of The Robbins Rights Trust.

Glass Pieces is a gift from THE VOLUNTEER COMMITTEE, THE NATIONAL BALLET OF CANADA.

I  Rubric
Tanya Howard, Tiffany Mosher, Krista Dowson
Keiichi Hirano, Patrick Lavoie, Etienne Lavigne (Nov 25, 27, 28 eve)

Chelsy Meiss, Tina Pereira, Jordana Daumec
Brett van Sickle, Noah Long, Richard Landry (Nov 26, 28 mat, 29)

Artists of the Ballet

II  Facades
Bridgett Zehr and Zdenek Konvalina (Nov 25, 27)
Xiao Nan Yu and Aleksandar Antonijevic (Nov 26, 28 eve)
Tanya Howard and Etienne Lavigne (Nov 28 mat, 29)

Artists of the Ballet

III  Funeral from Akhnaten
Artists of the Ballet

All casting is subject to change.
George Balanchine’s *The Four Temperaments* has a rather interesting history. Subtitled *A Dance without a Plot*, the ballet was created for Ballet Society – one of Balanchine’s earliest American troupes – and premiered on November 20, 1946, at the Central High School of Needle Trades in New York City. It proved to be a turning point in Balanchine’s career, anticipating a new classical style that he would later elaborate on in *Agon* (1957), *Symphony in Three Movements* (1963), *Ivesiana* (1954) and *Episodes* (1959). As New York dance critic Clive Barnes wrote: “The ballet is of historic as well as historical importance, for it marked Balanchine’s new style of ‘character classicism’ (the use of gesture for its emotive and aesthetic effect rather than its narrative meaning), which was to play a vital part in the development of American ballet.”

Paul Hindemith’s 1940 score for *The Four Temperaments*, entitled *Theme with Four Variations*, alluding to the four medieval temperaments, was translated by Balanchine into a non-narrative form of dance. The ballet was specifically created with the high school’s stage in mind. It was so small – a low, broad platform with little depth – that Balanchine had to treat his movement as a type of bas relief composed in linear sequence. Today, the choreography remains unchanged, even though it is presented on larger stages, making for consistently interesting pattern formations. *The Four Temperaments* heralded a new age in movement. As new sounds are found in language, Balanchine had found a new way of executing the steps of the classical ballet vocabulary, giving dance a whole new look. The ballet had a more modern look with inverted and distorted movements as well as angular steps and patterns, which were shocking to audiences.

Balanchine challenged his audience with the introduction of flexed feet, extreme contrasts, and movements that turned in on themselves, rather than the traditional outward motions. Classical ballet no longer needed to be airborne, precise and pretty, but could aspire to the difficult, the deliberately evasive and the challenging through choreography that demanded speed, precision, abrupt shifts in direction, brilliance and clean execution. Though it lay within a plotless context, *The Four Temperaments* challenged all the senses in a new venue of jarring inventiveness.

**The Four Medieval Temperaments**

The four temperaments or humours were, according to the ancient Greeks, components of human personality. The *melancholic temperament* is a tendency to sadness and depression. The *sanguinie
A szure Barton is a dancer’s choreographer – someone who understands how to propose movement to expectant bodies. One might assume that having been a dancer herself that this would come naturally but often dancer-turned-choreographers are too much in their own heads to be immediately intelligible to their dancers. Barton is just the opposite: in the studio she is calm, assured and attentive and able to get the best out of her dancers because she wants the best for them.

Some might believe that Barton acquired such self-assurance through her close association with the great Mikhail Baryshnikov. In 2005, Baryshnikov invited Barton to become Artist-in-Residence at the Baryshnikov Arts Center in New York City. While Barton may still marvel at the honour and the mentorship that ensued, Baryshnikov was certainly never in any doubt about her considerable skills as a choreographer.

Artistic Director of her own company, Aszure Barton & Artists, Barton was also Resident Choreographer for Les Ballets Jazz de Montréal from 2005 to 2008 and was recently named the official Ambassador of Contemporary Choreography in Edmonton, Alberta, her hometown. Trained at Canada’s National Ballet School, Canada’s Royal Ballet School, Alberta Ballet School and the John Cranko-Schule in Stuttgart, Barton demonstrated a unique choreographic voice from an early age. At only 33, she has already earned an international reputation as “a risk taker and a speaker of truths” who delivers “quicksilver, unpredictable movement.”

For Barton, her commission for The National Ballet of Canada started with the music. Referring to it as a “sacred score” she has chosen a 21st-century composition by the prodigious 35-year-old Russian-American composer Lera Auerbach. Auerbach defected from the former Soviet Union when she was only 19 years old so that she might pursue further training in piano and composition. Auerbach earned both her Bachelor’s and

Balanchine went on to add, “Although the score is based on this idea of the four temperaments, neither the music nor the ballet itself makes specific or literal interpretation of the idea. An understanding of the Greek and medieval notion of the temperaments was merely the point of departure for both composer and choreographer.”

The National Ballet of Canada first performed The Four Temperaments in 1969. It was revived in 1984 as part of The Tribute to Balanchine after the great choreographer’s death in 1983.

– The National Ballet of Canada

Watch her
Master’s Degrees from The Juilliard School before going on to study at the Hochschule für Musik in Hanover, Germany.

A gifted composer and celebrated poet, Auerbach is never short of inspiration. Dialogues on Stabat Mater is a composition for violin, viola, vibraphone and string orchestra commissioned by Musikfest Bremen and the Lucerne Festival in 2005. Taking her cues from early baroque composer Giovanni Battista Pergolesi’s 1736 work Stabat Mater, Auerbach’s piece has created a conversation or bridge between the early 18th century and the present – Igor Stravinsky engaged in a similar commentary when he based his 1922 ballet Pulcinella on a series of Pergolesi’s themes. Auerbach has reassigned Pergolesi’s original work, written, in the composer’s dying days, for two solo voices to the violin and viola with the obligato for solo vibraphone providing a slow, mysterious undercurrent. Though the new work has distinct baroque overtones, Auerbach’s composition in nine movements has a postmodern, melting quality that does not reveal itself easily. Though her Dialogues was not originally intended for dance, its strong emotional core and sense of timelessness lends itself well to movement.

Recalling the minimalism of Japanese architect Tadao Ando, Yannik Larivée’s set is cold and barren. Designed so that the perspective is slightly skewed to give a surrealist effect that speaks to the dissonances of Auerbach’s score, it consists of three bare concrete walls with doors leading to the wings and a single leafless tree ascending to the darkness. Larivée’s costumes have the women in full skirts, reminiscent of Doris Humphrey’s The Shakers, and the men in tailored suits and waistcoats, replete with idiosyncratic accessories. Larivée observes that, dramaturgically, the space he has created invokes qualities of Alice in Wonderland and Rigoletto.

In terms of the movement, Barton’s choreography for the entire company is gestural and eccentric, conveying a sense of overlapping clarity. Dancers are challenged to the limits of their dexterity with complex isolations of the upper body while their legs and feet carry them assertively across the stage. There are moments of youthful insouciance, with playful swivels of the hips and torsos, shy Juliet steps and flexed feet. Barton’s idea was to inspire a study on the foibles of communication where dancers often appear to be labouring under a misapprehension, a desire to connect that goes unanswered. She has cast Kevin D. Bowles as an outsider, trying to catch Sonia Rodriguez’s eye as she submits to the common will. Singular moments include Bridgett Zehr’s “don’t speak” developpé in her pas de deux with Noah Long and a men’s section that has the dancers snaking across the floor supported on their forearms. Overall, Barton’s intention is to pay utmost respect to the music, appreciating its flavour and finding the spaces and stillnesses between the notes.

– Bridget Cauthery
The writer Fran Lebowitz, who assisted Jerome Robbins in the creation of *Glass Pieces*, tells an amusing story about the rehearsal period: “It’s the only art where the elements of the art are unfortunately alive... I remember... the dancers sitting on the floor glaring at him [Jerry] through a haze of cigarette smoke... It’s as if all the words in the dictionary glared at me while I was trying to put them together.” (Lawrence, 457)

But if Robbins’ dancers did not enjoy rehearsals with their taskmaster, many balletgoers have since enjoyed the end result. *Glass Pieces* is a balletic interpretation of the minimalist aesthetic embraced by the American composer Philip Glass (b.1937), whose music is characterized by simple harmonic and melodic patterns endlessly repeated. Minimalism is an attempt to explore the essential elements of an art form, and just as Glass’ music is stripped down to explorations of timbre and rhythm rather than developments of melody, Robbins strips down his dancers (almost literally, since they appear in form-hugging unitards) to the basics of movement. Pointe work, however, can hardly be considered a “basic”, but Robbins was the first choreographer to set dancers on pointe to Glass, though modern dance choreographers had used Glass’ music before him.

Since walking is one of the most basic human movements, the first part of the ballet (to *Rubric* from *Glassworks*) has the dancers walking hurriedly across the stage, like harried commuters in rush hour, passing one another, avoiding one another, going back and forth and interweaving in a kind of organized chaos but without ever engaging with one another. Out of this toing and froing, a couple starts to dance, followed by four other couples. It is as if in spite of the relentlessly hectic and trance-inducing rhythms of modern life, there is still room for dance and artistic creation to emerge from the basic movement patterns that all humans share.

The second section (to *Facades* from *Glassworks*) starts with a procession of corps dancers silhouetted against the backdrop, not unlike a minimalist version of the Dance of the Shades in *La Bayadère*, which continues, frieze-like, throughout. Before them, a couple performs a sinuous, sexy pas de deux. This has been seen as an image of the search for meaningful relationships amidst the anonymity and alienation of modern life.

Finally, the vibrant and energetic third movement, set to the ballet music from Glass’ opera *Akhnaten*, is full of exuberant leaping by the men and whirling by the women, with each set of dancers working to different counts until they come to a sudden standstill.

– Katherine Barber