

Dance in LA

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Luminario Ballet Receives a Warm Welcome

Luminario Ballet's Friday evening performance at the El Portal Theater in NoHo clearly delighted audience members – many of whom expressed their appreciation with a standing ovation as the ensemble bowed and excited chatter in pauses throughout the show. Friday kicked off the new company's second and final weekend of premiere concerts, and the audience's enthusiasm bodes well for Luminario's future in Los Angeles. Envisioned by managing director Judith Flex Helle as a high caliber ballet company dedicated to and reflecting the unique qualities of Los Angeles, Luminario offered an impressive variety of works that indicate ties to the entertainment industry, the wider world of contemporary ballet, the aerial dance movement, the acrobatic traditions of Cirque du Soleil, and LA's own rich modern dance heritage.

"If the Walls Could Scream," Jamal Story's slick and often dark look at the emotional turmoil of male-female relationships, opens the show. Women in lingerie (including some distractingly minimal briefs) stalk on bent legs, stooped forward. Tight embraces and quick manipulations with male partners turn rough as they are thrown up onto shoulders, spun at dizzying speeds, and dropped down again. A showdown of the sexes ensues, and in terms of memorable dancing the men win, hands-down. Melting into the floor on shins and rolling up out of it over shoulders, they lean and counterbalance and snake through their bodies without transition between upright and otherwise. The men's malleability actually highlights the restrictive clunkiness of their partners' point shoes, even though the women thrust limbs into extreme extension with definite power and strength.

Luminario offers a special gift with "Recuerdo," translated "I remember," by LA modern dance treasure Bella Lewitzky. First presented at UC Irvine in 1990, and here performed five years after Ms. Lewitzky's death, the work is a magnificently potent and enduringly relevant example of expressionistic modern dance. Although joined at times by a stoic female chorus or tender lover (Stevan Novakovich), Brianna Haynes journeys through memories of love and loss alone. Her red dress emphasizes Haynes' isolation from the black-clad chorus of dancers who place and embrace her with indifference until a scrim descends between them and she continues on her own. Larry Attaway's minimal, dissonant piano shifts to flowing arpeggios while the woman in red waltzes and pivots, sliding flat bare feet to inscribe soft circles. Novakovich joins her for a time by moving in close complement; her drop to the floor hinges his arms and waist, and he hovers close by. When some kind of death pulls him up and away from a seated embrace, she struggles to stay in his lap and, clutching his waist, walks with him – her feet glued to his knees. While Haynes demonstrates great ability throughout the evening, she does not quite achieve the recklessness that the "Recuerdo" solos require. The choreography is hardly diminished, however, and Lewitzky's work ends in stark silence as the woman who remembers takes her place with those in her past, forming an eerie family portrait.

Delphine Perroud lies alone in a pool of white light, the outline of her arching body drawn clearly in shadow. Alex Stabler happens upon her and, enraptured, they dance the late Michael Smuin's liquid, luminous duet, "Bouquet," first performed by the San Francisco Ballet in 1981. With abandon made possible by complete trust and intimacy, Perroud falls forward toward her partner, and he meets her at precisely the right moment to accelerate the movement sideways; they slide off together and Perroud magically tumbles into an ecstatic, reaching lift. Although technically danced quite beautifully, I found Perroud and Stabler's performance too light and showy for Smuin's passionate movement; the lovers often seem oriented more toward their audience than each other, racing perfunctorily through some of the work's most tender caresses.

LedZAerial (2003), an aerial ballet suite danced, flipped, climbed, hung and swung to the music of Led Zeppelin, follows intermission. The three dances of *LedZAerial* build in intensity, and in excellent theatrical form, choreographers Judith Flex Helle, Bianca Sapetto, Russ Stark and Drea Weber unleash increasingly impressive effects as the suite continues. Suspended high above the stage in rings and curtains of cloth, dancers twist and flip with such speed and dexterity that I lose track of which limbs are arms,

which legs, and whether heads are up or down, but see only morphing shapes, centrifugal motion, and perilous falls. In the last two sections, the uninterrupted symmetry of spatial design and movement dulls the visual impact of the three aerialists' remarkable maneuvers. However, Brett Womack and Alex Stabler's rolls, unwinding down the lengths of cloth to the stage, and Bianca Sapetto's exhilarating abandon in swings and drops still alter my breathing as I think and write about them now.

Posted by Anna Reed at [12:01 PM](#) 

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