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### DANCE

## Oregon Ballet Theatre: Come 'Closer'

OBT's season-ending program at BodyVox puts premieres in your lap

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When they named it "Closer," they weren't kidding.

The Oregon Ballet Theatre show title is a play on words: "Closer," now running through June 3, closes the 2017-2018 season. And as danced in the intimate confines of BodyVox's studio, it offers a much better view of OBT's dancers than you get at the Keller or Newmark.

"They're actually people-sized," rightly observed BodyVox dancer Daniel Kirk, who served on the opening-night crew. From this vantage point, you can see rib cages heaving and sweat flying, a reminder of the sheer effort involved in looking effortless.

And, too, the four world premieres on the program offer a closer look at the creative potential of ballet and its practitioners, something dancers already understand and viewers may be happily surprised to discover.

Following 2017's Choreography XX Project, for which OBT Artistic Director Kevin Irving commissioned new works from international female ballet choreographers (a vastly underrepresented group in the dance world), "Closer" drew new talent from closer to home. OBT company members were invited to submit a proposal and show five minutes of work to be considered for this program. OBT dancers Katherine Monogue, Makino Hayashi and Peter Franc, plus OBT rehearsal director Lisa Kipp, made the cut. Each collaborated on original music for their pieces with Portland resident Andre Allen Anjos (aka RAC), who also happens to be a Grammy-winning remix artist; you might know him from The Shins' "Sleeping Lessons (RAC Mix)."



*Xuan Cheng and Michael Linsmeier performing Makino Hayashi's world premiere 'What do you see...,' part of Oregon Ballet Theatre's Closer, May 24 – June 3, 2018 at the BodyVox Dance Center. Photo by Chris Peddecord*

"Closer" is an evening in two parts; the premieres debut in the latter half. Because they're all set to the same composer, they feel in some sense like a suite of dances, although they're

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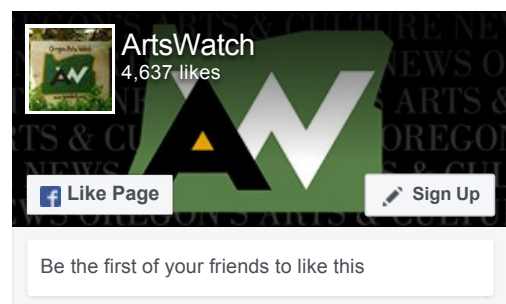
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choreographically divergent. Kipp, whose *Trance of Wondrous Thought* is the most classically balletic of the four, traces the different stages of a dancer's career through ballet's hierarchy. Three couples, from apprentice Alexa Domenden to principal dancer Chauncey Parsons, sail through lyrical pas de deux, the women en pointe. It's deliberately pretty: As Kipp noted in her onstage introduction, "Sometimes it can be very touching to see something pretty."

Hayashi, meanwhile, goes the furthest afield from classicism in *What do you see....* She and dancers Xuan Cheng and Michael Linsmeier shroud themselves in the long gowns they all wear, creating muscular moving shapes across the floor. There's a nice stretchy quality to the work, particularly when Cheng extends herself into the space in front of her, slowly pulling away from Linsmeier, who grasps her by the ankle.



*Christopher Kaiser and Hannah Davis performing Peter Franc's world premiere 'Sarkah', part of Oregon Ballet Theatre's Closer, May 24 – June 3, 2018 at the BodyVox Dance Center. Photo by Chris Peddecord*



Katherine Monogue's *Suadade*, based on the Portuguese word for longing or nostalgia, is a shadowy swirl of movement by four women in blue slip dresses and pointe shoes, and three men in white shirts and blue slacks. Choreographically, it lies somewhere between Kipp and Hayashi, as does the close, sinewy partnering for two couples in Franc's *Sarakah*, which is accented by odd gestures and ends with a dramatic group pose.



*Hannah Davis, Kimberly Nobriga, and Jessica Lind performing in Helen Simoneau's 'Departures', part of Oregon Ballet Theatre's Closer, May 24 – June 3, 2018 at the BodyVox Dance Center. Photo by Chris Peddecord*

But is this ballet? Yes, it is—primarily the contemporary kind, which toys with the lines, angles and

conventions of classical vocabulary—arabesques, développés, piqué turns and so on. The same is true of Helen Simoneau's *Departure*, one of the Choreography XX commissions, which makes its welcome return here as the program opener. Seeing this deftly constructed work up close—a mosaic of inventive partnering—is a pleasure, revealing moments that I missed at last year's debut in Washington Park.

The rest of the program is devoted to an open rehearsal for a Nacho Duato duet, in which Irving coaches two OBT couples chosen live, lottery-style. If you enjoy the behind-the-scenes process, as I do, you may find it interesting, although it runs long and may or may not have been sanitized for our protection. Lastly, there's *Rising*, Patrick Weishampel's short film following a handful of OBT dancers through *Nutcracker* season, sharing their dreams and frustrations in snippets of their day-to-day professional lives. Combined with the premieres, it shows dancers as the multifaceted people they are.

Like musicians who try their hand at composing, dancers who turn to choreography will experience missteps and breakthroughs along the way (and, as Kipp admitted, "moments of crippling self-doubt"). Although the creators probably felt otherwise during the process, these premieres aren't terribly long, and there is plenty of beauty and interest to be found within them. If you want a window onto what it's like to make and perform ballet, see "Closer." I hope OBT will continue to nurture artistic experimentation in programs like these—there's a win in them for everyone.

Oregon Ballet Theatre's "Closer" runs May 24-June 3 at BodyVox Dance Center, 1201 NW 17th Avenue.



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