

ProArteDanza, the bold Toronto-based troupe that seamlessly blends ballet and modern dance in viscerally exciting performances, returns for its fifth hometown season with an ambitious program of three new works. While the results are mixed in terms of choreographic interest, the quality of dancing throughout makes for a compelling evening.

Both as a dancer and choreographer, Polish-born Robert Glumbek has been a key figure in ProArteDanza's evolution, and his new work, *Re-Collections* and later performance in guest choreographer Kevin O'Day's *We will ...* serve to underline his continuing importance to the troupe's success.

Re-Collections, so Glumbek's program note informs us, "explores the resilience of friendship and the bonds forged through shared experiences, particularly those of formative years."

Early in the piece, we hear a door slam ominously and emphatically shut. Through the gloom we see a figure staring out through a window frame, suspended in space. There will be lots more staring out through this window as *Re-Collections* unfolds.

A prison? Likely not, since there are no bars, but a generalized sense of incarceration nevertheless permeates a work that pitches its five male dancers into a variety of contrasting situations.

With the support of an Eric Cadesky score that morphs effectively from sound as aural backdrop to music that specifically propels movement, the characters in *Re-Collections* reveal themselves as high-spirited youths, at once competitive and collegial. They josh around. They head-butt. They strut, groove and vogue. They support each other, occasionally reveal glimpses of inner turmoil and ultimately bond.

In one of the work's later sequences, a dormitory scene, each lies down in a tightly defined oblong of light. These young men are clearly hormonally agitated, so it comes as no surprise that soon after we are shown two of them going at it with initially tentative but ultimately sweaty abandon.

While Glumbek's latest choreographic essay is hardly an endorsement of all-boys residential schools, neither is it a condemnation. He presents situations unjudgementally, even with tinges of nostalgia. Glumbek's concerns are the social dynamics of involuntary companionship, and these he explores with considerable subtlety.

Kevin O'Day's contribution to the program returns to one of theatrical dance's most familiar formats, a man-woman duet. However, *We will ...* is far from your saccharine, garden variety romantic pas de deux. For one thing, apart from occasional drifts of "Lascia ch'io pancia" from Handel's *Rinaldo*, much of it is performed in silence.

Additionally, the relationship portrayed by Glumbek and Emily Molnar is one of those conflicted can't-live-with-you/can't-live-without-you seesaws. "Can we start again?" first Molnar, then Glumbek exclaims. Clearly they are not referring to the choreography, although O'Day allows it to guide them if not exactly to a resolution then at least to a truce. Glumbek partners the amazing, long-limbed Molnar superbly. She dances with the kind of total self-possession and purposefulness that rivets one's attention.

If only Molnar, now based in Vancouver, could achieve the same as a choreographer. She started out in the National Ballet of Canada but, being exceptionally tall for a female dancer, found a more accommodating home in maverick choreographer William Forsyth's Frankfurt Ballet. Forsyth is an ideas man and, understandably, his approach appears to have influenced Molnar.

Her contribution to the evening, as it is now, despite some exciting moments, is in its totality vapid. Molnar describes as it is now as a "series of choreographic and improvisational scenarios." She seeks to "investigate" -- always a red-alert word in choreographers' program notes -- "the idea of possibility." Fair enough. And kudos to Molnar for the inventiveness of some of the movement, particularly in duet mode. Still, as it is now comes across as one of those dances that is more fun for the performers than it is for an audience. - *ProArteDanza performs until Saturday at Fleck Dance Theatre, Harbourfront Centre, 207 Queens Quay W., Toronto. Tickets from \$20; tickets. harbourfrontcentre.com or 416-973-4000.*