

**THE GLOBE AND MAIL** 

Delphine Leroux and Tyler Gledhill perform in Beethoven's 9th, 1st Movement, choreographed by ProArteDanza

## Revivals provide the evening's best ballet

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ProArteDanza is arguably the best small-scale contemporary ballet company in Canada. The dancers are strong and the choreography is compelling. The audience's adoration is palpable.

The strongest works on the latest program, however, are revivals, while the world premiere, *Expire*, co-choreographed by artistic director Roberto Campanella and artistic associate Robert Glumbek, is problematic.

Both men are fathers, which is probably why they care so passionately about the environment. The last image of the piece is a projection of children gambolling in a lush green park beside a lake. It represents hope for the human race. The dance that precedes it is like a fight for survival.

On a dimly lit stage littered with pieces of paper, *Expire* opens with the 10 dancers blowing air into paper bags. When one of the dancers punches his bag to break it, the loud pop causes the others to drop to floor. Their prone bodies create more litter.

There are also projections of landscapes on a sheet wrapped around the raised body of dancer Mami Hata. She is like the figurehead of a ship, one armed raised as she strains forward. The

image is either the harbinger of doom or a prayer for salvation.

The piece, set to electronic music by Hauschka and Hildur Guonadottir, is made up of vignettes. Dancers come and go in various combinations. All the sequences are centred on the act of breathing , or on the anxiety that can impact negatively on breathing.

For example, dancers clap their hands over the mouths of others while their arms form a choking hammerlock around the neck. The victims' struggle to escape is manifested in challenging duets and trios in which bodies twist and turn and collide .

While the over-long dance is earnest and the sentiment is worthy, there is a "been there, done that" feel to *Expire*. No matter how fetching the animal imagery, or how brutal the human suffering, the piece really brings nothing new to the subject.

On the other hand, *Expire* is eminently watchable because it contains Campanella's and Glumbek's trademark dangerous lifts and unpredictable changes of directions. It's fascinating how bodies are woven together. The dancers slide over shoulders, burrow through legs and wrap around waists, all at lightning speed in continuous, fluid movement. Also eye-catching are solos of total physicality.

The major revival is *Beethoven's 9th – 1st Movement* (2009), also by Campanella and Glumbek. What is so wonderful about the choreography is that it is not a recreation of music in dance, but a response in dance to the music. Emotions – not beats or rhythms – rule the choreography. Louis Laberge-Côté, as the Beethoven figure, leads the dancers through the rapture and ecstasy of the theme and variations.

Campanella's *Decorum* (2005), an on-point work beautifully performed by Kristen Dennis and Tyler Gledhill and set to Arvo Part's moody score, reveals the torn underbelly of a relationship. The gorgeous *pas de deux* is one of increasing tension as the superficial politeness is stripped bare. This passionate work is a classic of contemporary ballet.

Kevin O'Day's enigmatic *We will...* (2008) is a *tour de force* for dancers Hata and Glumbek. The delight of the piece is the shifting landscape. Is the relationship beginning or ending? Is she stronger, or is he? Vigorous, muscular choreography dominates the piece.

*ProArteDanza continues at the Fleck Dance Theatre through Saturday.*

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