

## THE REVIEW OF “WATCH HER”

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Watch Her

National Ballet of Canada

Choreographed by Aszure Barton

Four Seasons Centre in Toronto

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The National Ballet of Canada’s fall mixed program is one of the best ever. Even if you’re not a ballet fan, you should buy a ticket to this one.

George Balanchine’s 1946 neo-classical tour de force “The Four Temperaments”, and Jerome Robbins’ “Glass Pieces”, a 1983 brilliant movement manifestation of the music of Philip Glass, are the bookends of the concert. The company pulls these pieces off in stunning fashion.

All eyes, however, were on Aszure Barton’s world premiere “Watch Her”. New York-based, Edmonton-born Barton has a growing international reputation as a formidable choreographer, and this powerful piece does not disappoint. The minute it was over, I wanted to press the replay button so I could begin to come to grips with the Barton’s many layers, particularly her detailed gestural language.

39 dancers in gorgeous costumes by Yannik Larivée (dresses for the women, suits for the men), performing in Larivée’s arresting box set with oddly placed windows and narrow doors, enact an almost gothic tale of love, loss and obsession. Lera Auerbach’s modern/baroque score is a fascinating rethink of Pergolesi’s 1736 masterpiece “Stabat Mater”.

The formality of the dance reflects the formal structure of the music. The men, in particular, are often rigidly upright with their

arms clasped behind their backs. When hormones rage, jackets come off, but soon reappear as a sop to polite society and public image.

The throughline is Sonia Rodriguez (who has never appeared so choreographically cold), and her more gentle alter egos, Bridgett Zehr and Heather Ogden. Rodriguez *The Siren* teases the very life out of Kevin D. Bowles (and other men) who are fixated on her, while Rodriguez *The Cruel* exercises indifference with equal measure. The ensemble at large seems to be acting out various aspects of Rodriguez's personality, be it passion, cunning or apathy.

The movement itself is a paradox. Simple pedestrianisms interact with virtuoso turns and jumps in a jam-packed sea of restless physicality. The stage is awash in tightly controlled entrances and exits. The very density and speed of the movement, and the continual ebb and flow of dancers in various combinations, contribute to the work's complexity.

The final result is a searing depiction of the beautiful people in-crowd and their marginalized victims. This dark work will continue to reveal its riches for years to come.