

# The Register-Guard

Entertainment & Life

## Review: Eugene Ballet masterfully conveys Mills' 'Hamlet'

By Gwen Curran For The Register-Guard

Posted Oct 7, 2018 at 5:20 PM

Updated Oct 7, 2018 at 5:20 PM

"To be, or not to be, that is the question ..."

"Hamlet" is in every way one of the most interesting plays ever written. Apart from Hamlet's character, the text is full of problems. It teems with allusions. For the last 150 years critics have competed in offering their key to the heart of "Hamlet's" mystery.

Stephen Mills, artistic director of Ballet Austin, has chosen to crack open the mystery by eliminating Shakespeare's words, telling the story through a kind of dance prestidigitation. Eugene Ballet Company performed it Saturday at The Hult Center. Moving dancers through the intricate and complex plot seems a daunting task, but the alchemy of emotional music by Phillip Glass, driving choreography, modern costumes by Christopher McCollum (inspired by Giorgio Armani) and inventive sets provides breathtaking gold.

Glass's music was spot on both in tone and rhythm. It included "Anima Mundi," "Upper Room," and "Concerto for Violin and Orchestra."

Mills' choreography was kaleidoscopic. He incorporated modern, jazz and classic ballet to provide a constantly moving story. His incorporation of the female and male ensembles propelled and sustained. And the surprises — vaulting, bounding, dropping, rising, falling whether measured or spirited animated the ongoing tale of Hamlet. An astonishing feat.

The sets and lighting by Jeffrey Main, Tony Tucci and Chad Jung were inventive and visionary.

Reed Southern was a perfect Hamlet. His dynamic athletic performance contrasted with his inner mystic turmoil, providing the audience with a collision of male love and hate as he attempts to deal with the horror of familial murder and deceit. He owned the stage.

Vivien Farrell's Ophelia was equally arresting. At once feminine and strong, she too struggled with the reality of love found and lost. Her pas de deux with Hamlet was sensual and potent. Her descent into madness echoed the female struggle in all of us.

Danielle Tolme as Hamlet's mother, Gertrude, captured the strong tie to her son, but the even stronger lust for Claudius, danced by Mark Tucker. Both these dancers were given an almost impossible emotional path to murder. Their presence was striking.

Colton West danced a brilliant Laertes. He wore the role as well as he wore his suit. The emotional toil he projected during Ophelia's funeral was palpable. His anger toward Hamlet understandable. The fencing scene was electrifying unto his death.

Cory Betts, as Polonius, provided a maturity as the father. We all gasped as Hamlet stabbed him by mistake.

Will Robichaud as the ghost of Hamlet's father was a tad scary with his white clothes smeared with his own blood and his insistence that Hamlet revenge his death.

Mills added three Hamlets to shadow or extend Hamlet's power on stage. Kenta Taniguchi, Koki Yamaguchi and Alessandro Angelini were dynamic with superb technique and timing.

Hiro Kitazume, Yamil Maldonado and Erina Tanaka danced the players, engaged by Hamlet to act out the sordid murder. Yuki Peppu, Sarah Kosterman, and Erin Johnson captivated in Ophelia's dream.

"Good night, sweet Prince, and flights of angels sing thee to thy rest!"

*Gwen Curran of Eugene reviews dance for The Register-Guard.*