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Entertainment & Life

Like a good dance partner, Ballet Austin romances fans with 'Pieces of Passion'

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Multiple guests told me Sunday at the Long Center that **Ballet Austin's** annual concerts that are timed to coincide loosely with Valentine's Day are their favorites of the season.

1. They often portray romance and passion. Some are unreservedly sexy.
2. They are all about dance, not as much about other stage elements.
3. They often introduce new dance makers.
4. If not, they bring back a proven creative artist.
5. They almost always fit under the heading of contemporary rather than classical or neoclassical ballet.

The company previously presented **Annabelle Lopez Ochoa's** startling "Requiem for a Rose" in 2103. It was an instant February hit.

This time around, Colombian-Belgian choreographer's work made up the entire program for "Pieces of Passion."

"Requiem for a Rose," set mostly to the Adagio from **Franz Schubert's** Quintet in C, returned for the program's first act in all its glory.

Like the smaller pieces that made up the second act, this dance blends pure, almost abstract movement with subtly suggestive storylines. In this case, the curtain rises on a single female dancer holding a rose between her teeth while she moves in a jagged, almost desperate fashion. Is she the dying rose? Or dying romance?

She is joined first by men, then women attired in bud-like red skirts below shirtless or near shirtless torsos. They interact in groups and pairs by way of bold yet lyrical movements. Do they represent the romances of the past?

The dancer with the rose returns and ends up alone on the stage.

My interpretations of this beautiful dance don't matter. What matters is that Ballet Austin dancers transfixed the audience with their blazing, flawless performances.

The second act opened with two duets. **Courtney Holland** and **Morgan Stillman** made "A Deux" into something of a romantic/sexual competition. Since they shared the stage with performers who mimicked movie stagehands shifting lighting instruments, one couldn't shake comparisons to those epic duets from Hollywood's Golden Age, when two dance stars pushed all their efforts to exhausting extremes to outdo each other.

If "A Deux" felt like a white-hot black-and-white movie, "Symbiotic Twin" was more of a fantasy of color and curly-cues, played out perfectly by **Katherine Deutch** and **Max Azro**.

"Sombbrero" humorously presents men in jaunty hats and explores the way that men act interchangeably in masculine-only gangs. When they break up into duos, however, their social demeanor seems to improve, an acute observation about the dynamics of group male behavior.

Lopez Ochoa has plenty of fun with hat tricks and the dancers played their deliciously unstable roles to the hilt.