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New Works (Review)

Cincinnati Ballet's season opener offers crowd-pleasing, modern-leaning good time

By Julie Mullins



Critic's Pick

Dance is never better than when paired with live music. Starting its season, Cincinnati Ballet's *New Works* opening-night Thursday marked the sole performance featuring live musical accompaniment from popular local artists for three of five local choreographers' works (plus one cool Italian native).

Right off the bat, West Chester native and former Cincinnati Ballet dancer Joy Jovet's jubilant "Queen City Dream" had the audience clapping along to old-timey Folk tunes played by Jake Speed & the Freddies. Neoclassical ballet (with the ladies en pointe) mixed with flirty folk dance sounds like an improbable mix, but the charming feet-kicking, kiss-blowing and skirt-swishing felt genuine, even Balanchine-like.

Dawn Kelly and Joshua Burnham appeared relaxed even as they flew through conventional ballet staples: pirouettes galore and fast footwork. Nothing particularly groundbreaking here, but on and off stage everyone appeared to have a grand ol' time.

New Works is a more democratic show: Rank matters somewhat less for casting than in regular season productions, granting opportunity for all company dancers to shine, from newbies to principals.

"Retrospective," from Exhale Dance Tribe's founding Artistic Directors Missy Lay Zimmer and Andrew Hubbard, casts new dancer Kelly Yankle in an impassioned breakaway role and Corps de Ballet dancer Liang Fu also stood out in his smooth, Jazz-tinged undulations. Although Zimmer and Hubbard's loose-looking, yet intricate choreography came to life within Cincinnati Ballet's dancers to varying degrees, I missed the sense of devil-may-care abandonment seen in Exhale's performers. Or perhaps it was the mellow music (Over the Rhine's "Professional Daydreamers" and "Ohio"). In any case, I admire the risks taken here.

Set to Peter Frampton recordings, Cincinnati Ballet's Associate Artistic Director Devon Carney's "Into Night" shifts comfortably between contemporary and neoclassical stylings as it explores a long-term relationship's various stages. Real-life couple Jill Marlow and Anthony Krutzkamp eloquently conveyed the piece's inherent romanticism and moodiness, yet the work felt relatively safe alongside the rest of the program.

New Works also presented a showcase for seeing the dancers in more "outside the box" roles where they can show off a broader range of what they do best. Heather Britt's Cincinnati Ballet choreographic debut "All Too Wonderful" boasted a cast of 19 in a sweeping display of astounding skill and kinetic energy. Britt says the dancers came up with some of the material on their own, a promising way to discover untapped moves the dancer loves and can do well.

Cervilio Amador's explosive solo thrills were also highlights — he tore at his shirt with ferocious fervor inter-cut with boundless pirouettes, hands splaying. His gravity-defying leaps propelled him high into the air, back arched, where he suspended longer than seemed possible.

Peter Adams' soaring violin and vocals enhanced the piece's emotional ride and rich expression. Judging by audience reaction, this new work lived up to its title.

Some of the greatest pleasures in *New Works* revolve around the intimacy of the Ballet's studio performance space: The dancers are close enough that you can see them expressing, even breathing, on a finer scale. Luca Veggetti's haunting contemporary duet, "Script" — performed elegantly opening night by Kristi Capps and Anthony Krutzkamp — provided such a compelling experience.

The details of Capps' avian arms and sky-high longitudinal foot arches in soft shoes could readily be seen. The duo's seamless and complex relations maintained a palpable tension akin to a planet and its satellite, connected by an unseen, yet ever-present force. Gravity played out as they acted and reacted to one another in a shifting balance of lightness and weight. Paolo Aralla's ambient, tonal electronic composition and Trad Burns' cool, understated lighting design enhanced the overall effect.

During a brief pre-show chat with the choreographers, Veggetti aptly described the program's lone non-narrative piece: "It's not about anything; it's a thing in itself."

Like *New Works*, it's something to see.

NEW WORKS continues through Sunday at Cincinnati Ballet's Mickey Jarson Kaplan Performance Studio in Over-the-Rhine. Buy tickets, check out performance times and get venue details [here](#). Read Julie Mullins' interview with Cincinnati Ballet Artistic Director Victoria Morgan about *New Works* [here](#).

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