

Queensland youth ballet company delights

27 January 2020

An ambitious double bill of *Swan Lake*, Act II, and *Graduation Ball* was presented by the youth ballet company, Ballet Theatre Queensland (BTQ), from January 22 to 25, at the Queensland Performing Arts Centre. The production was the first for new Artistic Director Clare Morehen (ex-Queensland Ballet principal dancer), and provided the 52 company members with the opportunity to showcase the diversity of their skills across a challenging program.

Opening night was a stellar affair, attended by BTQ Patron David McAllister (AM) and Queensland Ballet Artistic Director Li Cunxin (AO). The dancers rose to the occasion in an incredibly well-rehearsed production.

The opening scenes of Act II of *Swan Lake* showcased Graham Maclean's set design along with Glenn Hughes's lighting design to create the atmospheric lakeside setting. With strong performances by Jackson Best as Von Rothbart and Jenson Blight, Hugh Cowan and Cooper Tate as Siegfried's friends, it was delightful to see the strength of the promising young male dancers.

Other highlights were the mature, controlled and assured performance of Corina Poh as Princess Odette, ably supported by Tristan Fraser-Preston as Prince Siegfried. Amelia Kratz, Trinity Dean, Taya Barnard and Lucia Song captured the crisp and sharp dynamics required for the cygnets. The beautiful costumes, designed by Carmel Wenck, enhanced stunning scenes as 37 young swans filled the stage with ethereal beauty.

In contrast, *Graduation Ball* is a light-hearted celebration of dance, set in a Viennese finishing school. The costuming, again by Carmel Wenck, was a pastel delight and the change of pace was aptly navigated by the dancers. The delightful Strauss waltzes and stunning sets, complete with chandelier, completed the transformation.

Highlights included the character-filled performance of Erin Sheffield as Pigtails and Jenson Blight as the Drummer Boy. Guest artists Nathan Scicluna as the Colonel and Joseph Stewart as the Headmistress (both ex-Queensland Ballet dancers) added an extra level of comedy.

BTQ is a not-for-profit organisation that has been providing performance experiences for young dancers since 1937. Executive director Denise Richardson* says: "BTQ continues to punch above its weight, delivering a professional company experience, which challenges, inspires and develops young dancers, all on a very low budget".

Judging by the unison, precision and polish of current production, it appears that Morehen and Rehearsal Director Kym Stokes are setting the bar ever-higher in terms of their expectations of professionalism and commitment from the young dancers. The future is looking very bright for BTQ.

- Michelle Dursun