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Ballet premieres focus on different connections

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For The Register-Guard

APRIL 11, 2016

83

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Eugene Ballet Company presented twin dance premieres this past weekend at the Hult Center to an enthusiastic crowd.

The first piece by longtime EBC dancer Suzanne Haag was an abstract study for five men and five women in a dance called “Look.” To music by Edvard Grieg, one woman implores nine blindfolded figures to look beyond themselves to see her and each other.

In this digital age, “Look” is a warning to return to making eye contact, a basic form of human interaction. The choreography distorted balletic movements to suggest using digital devices, obsession with self, and a lack of connection.

Kaori Fukui was given the task of opening the “eyes” of the other dancers. Haag’s choreography allowed strength, focus and passion to evolve through her movements.

Opening with a semi-circle of nine dancers with their backs to the audience, Fukui was on the floor, twisted in her own backward semi-circle. One by one the dancers moved, at first slowly, and then gaining momentum, they leapt, jumped, turned and partnered each other.

Antonio Anacan, Cory Betts, Hirofumi Kitazume, Yamil Maldonado and Jun Tanabe were shown with Haag's steps as the extremely strong male dancers they are. Their great spinning jumps were electrifying and the distinctive lifts were astonishing.

Yuki Beppu, Sonja DeSario, Yoshie Oshima and Sara Stockwell also shone with their strength and fluidity.

During intermission, I did not see many mobile devices being used. Hopefully, Haag's message came through. This is a piece that needs to stay in the repertory.

"Let me tell you about the very rich. They are different from you and me," wrote F. Scott Fitzgerald nearly a century ago. Toni Pimble's newest ballet, "The Great Gatsby," is Fitzgerald's magnum opus. It explores the decadence and excess of these very rich in a portrait of the Roaring '20s.

"Gatsby" follows a cast of characters living in a fictional town on prosperous Long Island in 1922. The young and mysterious millionaire, Jay Gatsby (superbly danced by Mark Tucker), is obsessed with beautiful Daisy Buchanan (gracefully danced by Victoria Harvey). She is married to Tom Buchanan. Issac Jones acts and dances Tom to perfection. Tom's lover is Myrtle Wilson, danced by Danielle Tolmie with flagrant sexuality. Of course, Myrtle is married to George Wilson, who owns a garage. Fitzgerald has set up a tale that leads to death and destruction.

Brian McWhorter and Orchestra Next brilliantly played jazz selections composed by Wynton Marsalis. McWhorter's trumpet solos gave me goosebumps, they were so good! What a gift is Orchestra Next!

Pimble took on a major challenge translating "Gatsby" into a ballet. Her choreography was exciting and the dancers stunning. Costumes, sets and the 1929 Mercedes Benz kit car were all amazing. However, poor light cues, some rough transitions and a blackout ending disappointed. Although not perfect, "Gatsby" was still extremely entertaining.