

## Ballet Review

## Quite simply, sublime

Boston Ballet opens 2012 with a captivating program featuring works by three different choreographers

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STAFF WRITERS

Curious and curiouser ...

Opening this season at the Boston Ballet is *Simply Sublime*, an ensemble of three short and sweet ballets. The three ballets are distinct, but complement each other nicely to create a surreal and otherworldly sense.

The first act is Michel Fokine's *Les Sylphides*, a traditional romantic ballet that is historically important because it was the first ballet without a narrative (unlike *Swan Lake*, *The Nutcracker*, and other famous ballets). For this ballet, the curtains rise to reveal a young male poet surrounded by a constellation of sylphs, with a ruined building and a dark forest in the background. Each dancer, an ethereal spirit of the air, wears petite wings attached to the small of her back, and is dressed in a puff of chiffon and a white leotard.

To the glorious music of Chopin, three

of the ghostly sylphs dance solo. Many of their moves are almost painfully beautiful, as one leg transitions on and off pointe, and the other leg poises gracefully in the air. The other sixteen sylphs dance in clusters while the enchanted poet wanders through a maze of their fluffy skirts and graceful, swirling arms. Exquisite as porcelain dolls, they dance with a gracious stiffness or hold poses with statuesque stillness.

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As the curtains lower, they close on this enchanting dollhouse world, with its strange and alluring fairies. In stark contrast, when they rise again, they expose four couples, whose shadows extend over a

solid white backdrop.

Christopher Wheeldon's *Polyphonia* is a series of duets performed under dramatic lighting and to the rhythmic, sharp music of György Ligeti. The dancers wear simple royal-purple leotards, which emphasize their athleticism and bring to mind the studio where they spend long, hard hours practicing.

The dancing style is a transfixing combination of gymnastics and modern ballet. The dancers seem neither male nor female, but somehow almost insect- or robotlike. In a powerful display of their physical prowess, they spend much of the time contorted around one another, in the air or on the floor.

The third and final act, George Balanchine's *Symphony in Three Movements*, brings the evening to its climax. Stravinsky's music plays triumphantly as the troupe of dancers prance and twirl energetically in a diagonal across the stage. The deep azure backlighting, which colors the white leotards powder blue, and the men wear-

**Simply Sublime**

**Boston Ballet Company**

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ing tight T-shirts and pants, are reminiscent of a beach scene from the 1920s. There is a playful, whimsical atmosphere, which is reinforced by the women skipping, jumping, and sporting girlish ponytails.

Whilst each ballet is emotionally moving and thought-provoking on its own, the combination of the three takes the audience on an exciting and bewitching journey. The pieces balance and enhance one another, and maintain a carefully calculated tension throughout. Their order and execution deftly achieve the transition from the haunting and classical to the captivating and modern.

*Simply Sublime* is, quite simply, sublime.



Balanchine's energetic *Symphony in Three Movements* rounds off Boston Ballet's *Simply Sublime*. The whimsical piece brought the ballet to a sweet conclusion.

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