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Dance Notebook: Gabrielle Lamb's Glas a shimmering study in watercolours



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SECTIONS



A watery world danced by members of the Dance Masters residency at the Banff Centre in Gabrielle Lamb's beautiful new work titled Glas.. *RITA TAYLOR*

As reported in the [previous posting](http://calgaryherald.com/entertainment/music/dance-masters-brings-binets-brilliant-orpheus-becomes-eurydice-to-life) (<http://calgaryherald.com/entertainment/music/dance-masters-brings-binets-brilliant-orpheus-becomes-eurydice-to-life>), Dance Masters offered two new choreographies this year at The Banff Centre, opening Thursday night with three performances at the Margaret Greenham Theatre from two of Canada's finest up-and-coming choreographers, Gabrielle Lamb and Robert Binet.

My focus here is on Gabrielle Lamb's Glas. Ms. Lamb is multiple-award winning choreographer, including The Banff Centre's prestigious Clifford E. Lee award. She also carries considerable expertise with her dance on screen work too, an impressive and important credential to be acknowledged in the world of contemporary dance.

Her most recent opus, Glas, is set for five dancers to predominantly soft acoustic guitar and string music by the fine singer-songwriter Andrew Bird, with mixed

costume-ensembles resembling beach-wear for the women and casual t's and pants for the men, by Jorge Sandoval. The costume motif served as inspirational springboard to multiple tropes on colourized movements. In turn, the colour-movement co-ordinated well to the music, selected primarily as mood enhancement, such as in the opening counterpoint set for strings and guitar making seemingly independent dancers in set of twos and threes come into beautiful focal interaction, only to dispel again.

Overall there are a lot of cluster formations with tremendous kinetic detail in hands, arms, legs, feet, everything in a kind of summation of body and joint work that contributes to the overall interpretation. Ms. Lamb shows a tremendous preference for upper body kinesthetics with complex combinations that underscore the subtleties of what amount to being costume studies, predominantly on the themes of green and blue, perhaps inspired by rivers and water flow. When I returned to see the work a second time on opening night I was at last able to read the program notes and a quick check confirmed much of this to be true. There was a special emphasis throughout for depicting river-flow out of relentless athletic movement that struck home particularly well.

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My favourite was the large second panel featuring complex cluster work often cast in duos featuring the finest pair work, musically set to a minimalist textured plucked 8-count ostinato, subdivided in duple time (Andrew Bird's hypnotic You Woke Me Up!). The music gently impelled a lovely symmetry that resembled the lightness and capricious quickness of waters at play, but also of some of the non-symmetrical swirls that arbitrarily gather and disperse with transient fluidity. The dancers represented the movement of watery shallows well using hand clasps and arms

placed on one another, frequently combined in different ways with different partners, thereby giving the effect of new lines that come and go and are born and die as quickly as a stream's movement. The transient constructions conveyed something akin to clusters of fish or birds collecting and dispersing in a kind of co-ordinated gentle beauty, manifesting as a natural unconscious flow. It was lovely.

However, the work's final panel, seemingly depicting a watery lovers' duo navigating their space together as though learning to trust one another cautiously in movement, placement, gesture, and intricate combinations, struck as fresh and sweetly evocative. I wanted more.

The dance vocabulary throughout all of its vignettes was vibrant, coherent, abstract, and satisfyingly I found, also disinterested in telling an identifiable narrative arc for its own sake. Instead the work staked out a territory that converted ornate, detailed movement into natural phenomena, seeking new body combinations, lifts and holds ensconced in a rich unceasing outpouring of fresh language that was likely informed and synthesized via many sources.

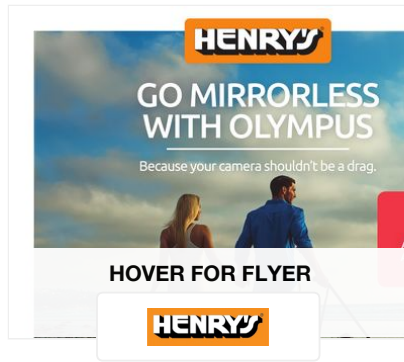
Glas is my kind of choreography, one that deluges its audience with abundant information which, when added together, gives a satisfyingly wholistic montage constructed out of many tiny puzzle pieces.

But I wouldn't want to convey the idea that calculating cleverness is all that is behind Ms. Lamb's new ballet – it is not mere watercolour work-study. Far from it – the results were emotionally satisfying too and often engaging, particularly when the five dancers stood at stage centre thrust, and their faces seemed to pop in and out of place, moving like fish in an aquarium, or when they would assemble and re-assemble into differing units and groupings, each conveying its own pastel palette of subtly coloured, nuanced feeling. The work was never just about beauty. It was about balance and integrity of the art form too.

The result is that Ms. Lamb's Glas is always full, easily standing on its own admirably as a treatment of kinematic beauty using an expansive dance vocabulary that others can emulate. We need more of these works, developed into longer pieces, with still richer movement detail and I suspect that Ms. Lamb will deliver great choreographies like these combined with new ideas she is eminently skilled at integrating into her creative gift, in the decades to come.

Residency Dancers in the Dance Masters Program included: Valentin Chou, Mark Dennis, Brighton Collins, Julie Pham, Saeka Shirai, Yue Shi, Kurt Werner, Desiree Bortolussi, Sarah Koekkoek, Heather Thomson

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