

# Cape Town City Ballet entertains with Ballet Beautiful

 By [Debbie Hathway](#)

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One of the fascinating and most important aspects in a dance production is the casting. Unexpected partnerships can shine a light on a dancer who may have been overlooked previously, while new choreographic commissions create opportunities for company members to strut their stuff artistically and theatrically.



Mariette Opperman and Marc Goldberg

Cape Town City Ballet's recent production of Ballet Beautiful featured some interesting highs and unusual lows - an opening night with some dancers not quite up to their usual standard warranting a look at a different cast a week later.

Zama Dance School from Gugulethu opened the programme with one of Adele Blank's reworked pieces. Founded in 1984 by Arlene Westergaard, the school celebrates three decades in existence during Cape Town City Ballet's 80th birthday year. What a wonderful opportunity for budding dancers to appear on a professional stage; they clearly relished every minute.

In Yarisha Singh's Serendipity, newly promoted senior principals Laura Bösenberg and Thomas Thorne produced strong technical performances as the protagonists. However, a little more emotional engagement with each other could have escalated their performance to a higher level. The matinee's third-cast pairing of senior soloist Xola Putye with senior artist Mariette Opperman was more engaging. Putye's partnering is always confident and solid, and his acting in this piece was much improved.

## A little disconnected



Kim Vieira and Revel Yon

While the opening night version seemed a little disconnected, particularly in the second half of the piece, Serendipity's matinee cast enacted a more cohesive tale. The vignettes provided clear focus on the action and senior artist Craig Pedro, and soloist Jesse Milligan, impressed with their respective characterisations of their Young Love and Hotel Worker castings. Several dancers still fall back on their classical repertoire for expression and interaction, which can appear staid in a narrative contemporary piece.

Robin van Wyk's The Fragile Balance became a challenging piece of choreography for which Tracy Li's former partner Daniel Rajna was lured out of a seven-year retirement to perform with her, with Bösenberg and Thorne in the alternate matinee cast. Both couples enjoyed appreciative applause from the audience.

## Presented with requisite aplomb

Paquita was the second-half classical feature, which the company presented with requisite aplomb. Recently promoted senior principal Kim Vieira was paired with newly appointed senior soloist Daniel Szybkowski on opening night, with soloist Mami Fujii and artist Conrad Nusser taking the lead for the matinee. For me, the latter combination was the most compelling overall. Nusser has a wonderfully proud bearing on stage, and he seems to fare better when he's on his own or in a duet, while Fujii's confident athleticism astonishes audiences every time. She's so quick and on balance in her fouettés and pirouettes that it's impossible to keep count.

Paquita's pas de six grouping of newly promoted soloists Rosamund Ford and Elizabeth Nienaber with Angela Hansford,

now principal dancer, soloists Kirstel Jensen and Frieda Mennen, as well as Opperman performed on opening night while the alternate cast of soloist Jane Fidler, senior artist Claire Spector, and artists Caitlin Smith, Meghan Henegan, Cleo Ames and Nicola Volker appeared for the matinee.



Mama Fujii and Conrad Nusser

Kirsten Isenberg's neoclassical *Of Gods and Men* turned out to be a programme favourite for many. Bösenberg, Fujii, Nienaber, Jensen and Hansford (having an unusually off night) appeared opposite Thorne, Milligan, Szybkowski, Pedro and artist Revil Yon at the opening. Vieira, Volker, Smith, Spector and artist Sarah-Lee Chapman performed with Putye, Milligan, Nusser, Yon and soloist Marc Goldberg at the matinee. Bradley van Heerden, who has also been promoted to senior artist, was in another alternate

casting for this piece. Isenberg's work was beautifully choreographed, danced, costumed and lit, accompanied by a lyrical musical score.

Box office takings were good, despite accommodating Geneva Ballet's performances in the middle of the run, which shows that there is room for mixed bills that showcase an "often more interesting and wider selection of works for audiences to appreciate".

*Photography by Pat Bromilow-Downing*

## ABOUT DEBBIE HATHWAY

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