

Audiovisual magic - celebrating cross-cultural collaboration

 By [Debbie Hathway](#) 12 Apr 2016

The second phase of a cultural exchange project between South Korea and Switzerland has ended with a sold-out dance season in Basel during the 15th anniversary year of Richard Wherlock's leadership of Ballett Theater Basel.



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The artistic directors of Ballett Theater Basel and Seoul Ballet Theatre were on a creative high after the Swiss premiere on 2 April of their season, *Moves*, the result of a cultural exchange project that took four years to reach fruition.

Mutual praise

Richard Wherlock and James Jeon shared high praise for each other's input to the process, the value their dancers have drawn from the project and the long-term benefits of building bridges between countries, artists and audiences by harnessing the undisputed power of the arts to communicate beyond the spoken language. The response was clear. Box-office success and tumultuous standing ovations from fans in both countries. "It was overwhelming," says Jeon, "to see the reaction from the public and the artists here in Basel. Finally everybody involved in the project was invited on stage, and we were doing an impromptu improvisation. We were all celebrating."

The Swiss premiere was also marked by the 15-year anniversary of Wherlock's leadership of Ballett Theater Basel, a feat duly honoured with a full house of appreciative patrons. "The ambassadorial support we've enjoyed for this project – both in Korea and Switzerland – is a very good signal for dance companies around the world. Cross-cultural collaborations are a win-win. We've planted the seed for a brighter future, which hopefully will bear fruit later on," says Wherlock. "And it's proving to be very fruitful at the moment. Our dancers have learnt so much through this experience and from each other."

Each choreographer worked with six dancers, during a creative process that began in August 2014 and continued into 2015, leading up to the first performances that celebrated the 20th birthday of Seoul Ballet

Theatre at the Gwacheon Citizen's Hall Theater (Gyeonggi-do province) and at the National Theater of Korea in Seoul that year.



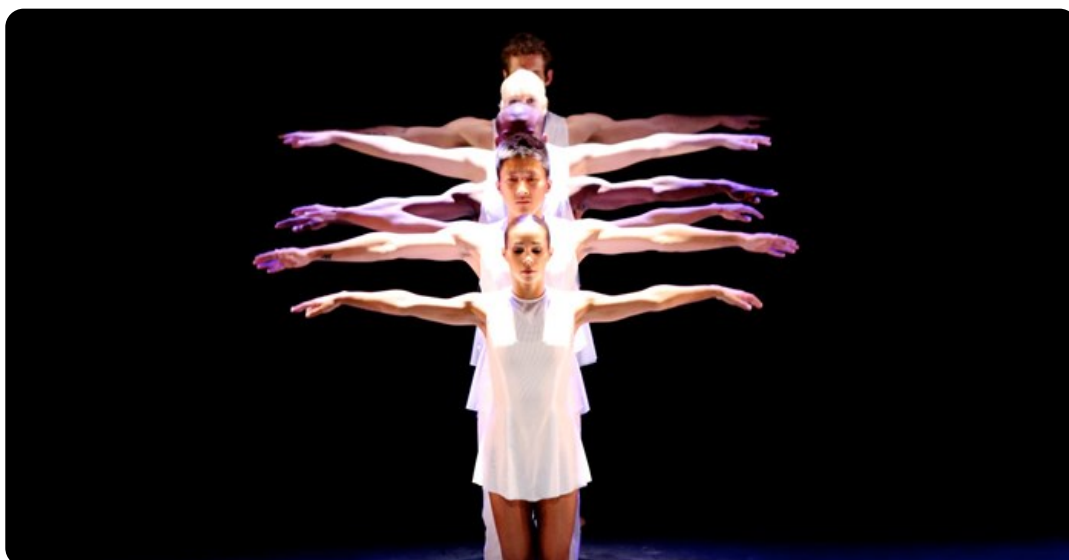
Richard Wherlock and James Jeon

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Dance is about heart

Jeon, who formed Seoul Ballet Theatre with his wife Inhee Kim in 1995, says he's envious of Ballet Theater Basel's ability to work with many different choreographers. These possibilities, which are limited in Korea, are compounded by lack of finance. "This has been a special experience, watching the dancers from both companies learn and grow together. Dancing is about heart; it's about human beings; and in Ballet Theater Basel it's even more about personality, relationship and movement. I try to keep it the same way in Korea," says Jeon.

There is no hierarchy in either company, bringing a community spirit to the mix that is very gratifying, explains Wherlock. "The dancers are more inclined to help each other than compete for lead positions, which would be the case in a classical dance company. When I cast dancers in my work, I look for those who will inspire an emotive response from the audience."



©Kyung Tae Jang

It's one of the qualities that ensured a sell-out season of Moves in Switzerland, following a similar response

to the Korean premiere last year. “Seoul Ballet Theatre is the only ballet company in Korea that performs modern work,” says Jeon. “The Korean audiences loved Richard’s Snip Shot, which he choreographed for our dancers, as well as how the Ballet Theater Basel company dancers responded to my choreography in Voice in the Wind. I wanted to give them something different, which in the end was inspired by the original music I asked the composer to create.”

Musical inspiration



©Charles Ian Chun

Jeon put together a series of “refined yet dynamic movements set to the exhilarating Korean beats”, incorporating the traditional Korean fan as a prop. Wherlock meanwhile took inspiration from Johan Sebastian Bach’s treatment of time to produce his work, Snip Shot. “Like a dancer’s movement, his passages follow a vertical, harmonious accord while simultaneously allowing a horizontal, linear, melodic individuality to dance across them... The music invites us to paraphrase, accompany, add countermelodies to take the counterpoint, dissect it, hold it, and let it go: Snip Shot.”

Wherlock and Jeon are looking forward to steering their passion for their craft into new and exciting projects. Jeon will be choreographing new work for SBT while Wherlock has a new film in the works. His most recent accolade in this genre is his acceptance of the Prix Italia for the award-winning film Passengers.

For more information, visit the [Moves Facebook page](#).

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