



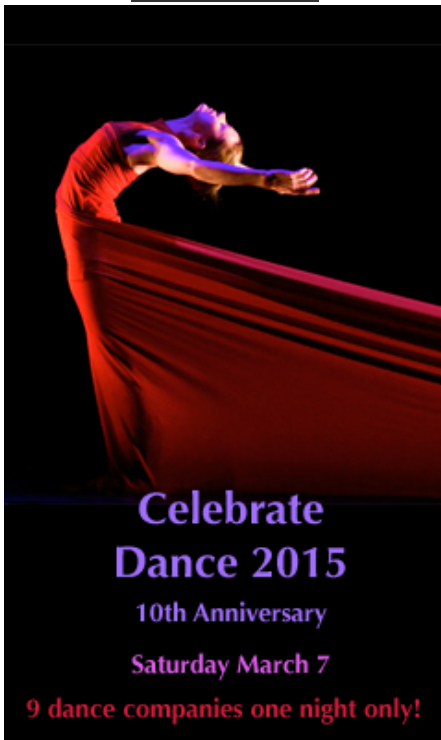
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BalletBoyz captivate in Dance Celebration series opener

by **Lewis J Whittington**
October 23, 2014

Annenberg Center for the Performing Arts
3680 Walnut Street
Philadelphia, PA 19104
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Randy Swartz, artistic director of the dynamic Dance Celebration series at the Annenberg Center in Philadelphia had to wait until late May to announce their 2014-15 programming. Fortunately everything was in place for them to commence a 32nd season late October. As per usual and the curtain went up with a serene bang on the BalletBoyz's concert show *The TALENT* which entranced the not quite capacity, but buzzing, house.

Swartz first presented BalletBoyz when they were the fledging pick-up company created by Royal Ballet principal dancers William Trevitt and Michael Nunn. Now a troupe of ten men under co-artistic directors Trevitt and Nunn, they are a hit around the globe and a bit of a media sensation with their videos chronicling the lives of the company's dancers, a highlight of their shows. The company has garnered several awards of late including a 2013 United Kingdom Critics Circle National Dance Award as Best Independent Company.

Their ensemble tightness brings to mind the storied aesthetic of American dancer Ted Shawn and his troupe of men who cloistered themselves in the 20s and explored the energy and artistry of men dancing leaping away from their usual roles as muscled propp for ballerinas in classical ballet.

Similarly, the BalletBoyz have an exploratory edge that dissolves any preconceived notions of how men relate on the dance stage. Their theatricality, technical precision, movement vocabulary and distinct personalities all result in arresting ensemble work.

The TALENT opened with choreographer Liam Scarlett's "Serpent". The dancers were supine on the stage with their

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arms up moving in a serpentine pattern. Scored to a counterpoint string electronica by Max Richter, "Serpent" then unfurled a series of episodes with the dancers' body articulations a study in steeled fluidity.

The dancers paired off and faced each other and you didn't know if this was a pugilistic scenario or a lovers scene. Who cares? The dancers then went through a series of regimented arm moves; a secret code perhaps. Crucially, all of the dancers were technically on par. So with those skills locked in their individual artistry became even more visible.

One repeated phrase of the men in slo-motion headbutting rippled-down through their bodies. Almost standard mainstream choreographic fare, Scarlett combined such popular movement hooks with electrifyingly sensual and propulsive choreography. The lift sequences kept evolving and the refinement of each phrase was hypnotic particularly in the adagio segments. Scarlett leans a bit too heavily on Matrix-like slo-motion body drops, but the effect nicely shows off the dancers' unusually lithe back flexibility and supple carriage.

You didn't know what the audience's reaction to the ballet was until the end. Because even with dancers exiting, there was not a peep from the them. The lusty applause that quickly followed answered that question.

"Fallen," choreographed by Russell Maliphant was wisely in a completely different choreographic key with the dancers dressed in earthy fatigues and mud T's. The men were first crouched in a wide circle and moving counterclockwise to a dynamic score by French-Moroccan composer Armand Amar replete with vaulting percussive layers underneath its cinematic surfaces.

They started to vault, tumble and scale one another. One dancer stood on the back of another, they switched off holding each other through various lifts, standing on the backs of a crouched man, timbering down into the arms of another. Maliphant also choreographed uniquely patterned lifts that could have suggested sexual intimacy or perhaps the camaraderie of a military unit.

The choreography transcended the need to build a concrete story. Some of the gestures and body positions seemed to hint at a passage of some sort of body, mind or soul. As with the Scarlett ballet, there was some static showiness in some of the repeated sequences and the fireworks finale of jumps was anti-climactic. Still, whatever the choreographic content the BalletBoyz "TALENT" was out in full force.

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BalletBoyz in Liam Scarlett's 'Serpent'

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