

Dancing is superb Boston Ballet's dramatic 'Romeo & Juliet'

By Keith Powers/For The Patriot Ledger

Posted Mar 18, 2018 at 12:13 PM

We all know the story. It doesn't end well.

Shakespeare's "Romeo and Juliet" has been recast in music, in film, on Broadway and in just about every other performance art-form possible. As a dance, choreographer John Cranko told the tale of the tragic love story, and the Boston Ballet has made his version part of its recurring repertory.

The troupe brought back Cranko's 1962 choreography Thursday evening in the Boston Opera House, reviving a staging of the classic story ballet done previously in 2008 and 2011. Misa Kuranaga and Paulo Arrais danced the title roles.

Cranko's version snips out parts of the story, but more significantly adds elements of visual comedy to the clash between the Capulets and Montagues. That humorous treatment sometimes became the dance's undoing in this opening night performance.

A sword fight becomes a food fight too. Cranko interjects classical ballet with vernacular gestures — head wiggles, arm flaps, loopy skipping-across-the-stage transitions. Even Tybalt's death at the hands of Romeo — the action that drives the lovers to their doom — gets upstaged by Mercutio's own operatic, mock-heroic death throes.

An uncharacteristic lack of attention marred the opening night, something that should be rectified as the run progresses. Costume and prop failures — a scarf that swishes in front of Romeo's face, fruit rolling around, a wine jug that crashes to the floor—are small things that detract from the professionalism. When Juliet's wedding party finds her dead in the bedroom, but fails to notice the poison vial on the floor, the viewer's energy gets focused on the oversight, not on their misery. Clunky blocking of the crypt scene had the nearly dead lovers doing too much movement.

The dancing was superb. Kuranaga brings Juliet to life, never letting us forget she is a young woman just coming of age, but reminding us as well that she will make her own choices. Light en pointe, elegantly drawing out extended body lines, she owned the audience's attention when she was onstage.

Arrais danced a profound Romeo. His acting was flawless. Lifts, touches and partnering all felt organic. His initial meeting with Juliet, a pas-de-deux at the Capulet's ball, swept across the stage.

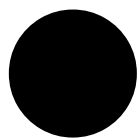
The malevolent Tybalt dominates the action when he's onstage, and the tall, stately Eris Nezha danced the role with evil intelligence. The gypsies — Hannah Bettes, Ji Young Chae and Dalay Parrondo — made the crowd scenes, especially the carnival, engaging and fun. The sword fights were especially realistic, supremely physical.

Cranko's choreography uses classical geometries, avoids virtuosic display, and focuses on the narrative. This is not one of those story ballets that is hard to follow. He does blend the classicism with his own movement language, idiosyncratic and accessible. His physical comedy, especially the otherworldly gymnastics achieved by Carnival King Lawrence Rines, drew gasps.

The multiple sets captured the essence of Shakespeare's Verona, from city plaza to pastoral escape to well-appointed ballroom, right up to the famous balcony. The visual display, which rotated frequently for the many scene changes, was accurate but hardly breathtaking.

Costuming likewise was muted. Montague's wore red, Capulet's wore green, although their brocaded ballroom outfits were considerably more upscale.

Prokofiev's intensely beautiful score is almost too programmatic, if that is possible. Every narrative detail has a corresponding and appropriate musical gesture. Tenor saxophone (Kenneth Radnofsky) adds an unusual color to the extensive forces in the pit. The playing on this night was hardly perfect: frequent exposed solos in the strings, and the horns, scuffled to achieve good intonation. It's a demanding score, and needs closer attention.



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Entertainment & Life

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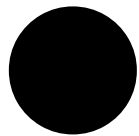
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