

Contemporary ballet at its best

 By [Riccardo Spagni](#)

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It was my first contemporary ballet. I had visions of freakish, leotard-clad dancers prancing around on stage, cueing my sudden departure as I realise I'm just not cut out for that sort of thing. To complicate matters further, I had brought a mixed bag of friends with me. One, a classically trained ballerina-turned-model, was there to give me technical advice. The next, a modern man who knows how to dress, carry himself, and embraces culture. The last, an impeccable British gentleman who had, through some twist of fate, never seen a ballet. It is to these three that I turned to for insight after the ballet.



Of course, it stands to reason that a contemporary ballet is nothing like a traditional ballet. You don't have the music lying around. You have no previous productions you can watch to perfect your movements or to inspire your costume and set design. You have no choreography. For *Romeo's Kiss*, Sean Bovim and his team had to create all of this from scratch. Musically, the show is inspired by The Beatles. That does not mean that they play Beatles numbers in succession. Rather, the performance is littered with regular Beatles recordings, covers, remixes, orchestral renditions, and mash-ups. It is an aural treat to anyone familiar with The Beatles.



A vastly more modern feel

The big clincher in a ballet is the choreography. As someone who loves the ballet, but who is not au fait with the technical aspects of it, I thoroughly enjoyed the choreography. Our resident technical expert on this trip confirmed that the choreography was both well designed and expertly executed. There is no doubt that, stylistically, it is vastly different from classical ballet. It has a vastly more modern feel to the movements, with parts that seem so loose and fluid that it is as though you are watching an expert team of dancers

improvising their every action. For the most part, though, you can see the amount of work and practice that has gone in to the exquisitely co-ordinated interplay between the dancers.

Set and costume design is another interesting area for a ballet, most especially a contemporary ballet that has no prior performances for comparison. *Romeo's Kiss* makes excellent use of contrasting colours, but focuses on a recurring theme throughout, which really binds the ballet. Set pieces are simple enough to enable rapid set changes, but large enough to change the feel of each scene and bring back recurring scenes. Since it is a contemporary ballet, it has a contemporary setting, and this is carried through in the costume design as well. A nice touch is the use of local designers, with the male costumes designed by Craig Port, and the female outfits styled and created by KLÛK & CGDT.



Emotionally charged

Certain dancers stood out in my mind, and in the mind of my friends, as having exceptional performances. Casey Swales, as Romeo, initially came across as a rather soft dancer. After the intermission, however, he was a different beast. The dances demanded an energy and vibrance from him, and he delivered. Kirsten Isenberg, playing Juliet, delivered an emotionally charged and athletic performance. Kerryn Howard, in the role of Juliet's best friend Nicki, shone like a star, at times making even Kirsten Isenberg

look like an understudy. Her technically flawless presentation had us oooh-ing and aaah-ing at every twist. Also thoroughly enjoyable was Marc Goldberg as Tybalt, who delivered his darker dances with flair.

No excuses



The real clincher for me, though, was hearing that all three of my guests enjoyed it. A contemporary ballet such as this is accessible to everyone, even first timers. Bovim Ballet has cleverly scheduled the performances around the World Cup, so those ready with their "but there's a game on" excuse will have to shelve it. The high-energy, exciting performances, coupled with familiar Beatles tunes, have broadened the appeal to include all sorts of audiences. My advice is simple: get out there and see this ballet before its run ends!

Romeo's Kiss runs at The Baxter Theatre in Cape Town for a strictly limited season till the 27th June 2010. Tickets are from R120 per person and can be booked through Computicket on 083 915 8000 or www.computicket.com

Photos by Pat Bromilow-Downing

ABOUT RICCARDO SPAGNI

After serving his time in Namibia, Riccardo got bored of Johannesburg and moved to Cape Town to become one with the mountain. He spends his days trawling biscuit factories hoping to discover the Next Big Cookie Flavour and writing reviews for the BizLounge that he traditionally delivers four or five days after deadline.

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