



# Fleet feats and wit

## BALLET

Ballet at the Quarry  
Quarry Amphitheatre  
Review: Maggi Philips

With compliant weather, the WA Ballet's season at the Quarry can always guarantee the scintillating presence of stars. These heavenly bodies tinkle above the champagne picnics to make theatre a special event, an occasion when dance and romanticism mix in a light-hearted whirl.

For the opening of the 2008 event, artistic director Ivan Cavallari outwitted the forces of the natural and the social environment by promoting his own stars and a new vision for the company.

At the end of the opening night performance, which drew a sustained standing ovation led by the arts' new most powerful friend, Premier Alan Carpenter, Cavallari announced a new structure that will provide a greater opportunity to recognise talented dancers and spotlight their achievements.

He appointed dancers Jayne Smeulders and Daryl Brandwood the WA Ballet's two Leading Artists and embraced recent WAAPA graduate Sarah Sutcliffe as a full company member.

Deliciously, all three are Western Australians who, amid the company's increasingly international and worthy cast, project their own unique physical radiance.

However, unless you are particularly focused on these three individuals, the night belonged to the ensemble who

traversed the amphitheatre space with fleet-footed verve and some moments when their skill and commitment began to outshine the awesome environment of the Quarry.

The opening works, reproduced from the Genesis season late last year by company choreographers and dancers Tim O'Donnell, Smeulders and Cass Mortimer Eipper, highlighted the dancers' wide-ranging visualisation of their respective musical frames, Arvo Part, Astor Piazzolla and Elliot Goldenthal.

Dancers rippled through these brief moments like electricity, catching fireworks and satirical movements in passing. Undulations and odd synchronisation of movement began, most impressively, but they disappeared into the night as unresolved possibilities.

The partnership between sound and movement initiated by these fragments pervaded the more substantial works of the program by guest choreographers Petr Zuska and Paul Lightfoot and Sol Leon, though sometimes with ironic intent.

Zuska's *Maria's Dream* is a case in point. Its bizarre premise mixes the historical duelling of the leading Romantic ballerina, Marie Taglioni with her rivals in the famous but choreographically inept *Pas de Quatre*, with Pavlova's *Dying Swan* and the cross-dressing, tutu clad *Trockadero*s of today.

Smeulders and her four male budding ballerinas carry off this cross-dressing fantasy with a wit matching its imaginative improbability. Whatever Smeulders and the men tumbling

over the park bench do is achieved to the poignant strains of Saint-Saens and the rather more dinky notes of Cesare Pugni's unremarkable score.

Knowing the relative artistic merits of the two notable moments in dance history is superfluous to the gags that the men in Romantic tulle enact.

*Lightfoot* and *Leon's Step Lightly* reaches another partnership with music. Inspired by, and evocative of, the overtone singing of *The Mysterious Voices of Bulgaria*, this work explores the emotional resonances of human sorrow and exhilaration. Dancers roll, skim the earth and tear at constraints and liberty in a green and ochre design. Voices of another place coincide with the swaying foliage and earthen rock of the Quarry. There is a foreignness that in its quiet way transcends the specificity of place.

Music thrusts forward in the finale as only Maurice Ravel's *Bolero* can do. The central figure, Sabry Ghalem-Cherif, again cross-dressing, constitutes an enigmatic figure with an oversized dice that changes from black to white in the gamble of positive-negative. Zuska's choreography has its impetus but Ravel's momentum wins out.

Stars happen and their illumination, thanks to the lighting of Jon Boswell, the dancers, choreographers of the WA Ballet and the sky, will pervade. Music is but that illumination made brighter.

**Ballet at the Quarry runs until March 1.**



Cross-dressers: Daryl Brandwood, Benjamin Marett, Sergey Pevnev and Tim O'Donnell in Petr Zuska's Maria's Dream



Step Lightly: Daryl Brandwood and Jayne Smeulders.