

Interview with Emily Molnar

BY PIA LO

— Ballet BC is a contemporary ballet company. What makes it 'contemporary' and what, in your view, does it mean to be 'contemporary'?

To me, as an artist and the company's Artistic Director, contemporary means something that is of relevance today and that responds to the current state of society. By asking questions, as living artists, about how we practice, who our audiences are here and around the world, the kind of work we are making, and by creating work today—that, I believe, makes us contemporary.

— How are these ideas demonstrated in the ways that the dancers work?

We take a lot of time working on building voice in the creative process so that we have dancers who feel like they can communicate their ideas and observations within a rehearsal. We're trying to facilitate an environment where people can find both a collective and individual presence. Because we are primarily a creation based company, dancers work with an enormous amount of agency and are invited to participate a great deal in the creative process. In another example, we removed the traditional hierarchy in dancers' pay. Our dancers are paid not on how much they perform or their gender, but based on their years of experience; it's very transparent. I think these approaches reflect contemporary trends in the world.

— What themes of contemporary society are addressed by the works on Program 2?

Many of the choreographers that we have been working with choose, I believe, to make a universal comment about humanity.

In Adi's new creation for Program 2, I see her exploring a sensory expression of the body that draws on the individuality of her own voice. She's

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speaking to the conflict of contrasting tones between the industrial world where we are having to produce and produce - with the primal world that's reflective of our instinctive nature. Although Adi is not attaching a specific label to her work, it doesn't mean she's not making a comment about the world.

In *1st Flash*, Jorma is challenging the boundaries of classicism and making a delightfully distinct examination into the virtuosity of contemporary ballet. There is a contemporary approach in the way the choreography relates to the use of space, music, lighting and set design.

In *Solo Echo*, Crystal is reflecting on both the collective and individual voice in an exploration of living. The first movement investigates a sense of abandonment and risk related to the early stage of one's life, of throwing ourselves into the world. The second movement is about acceptance and loss, how we come together to deal with our mortality. Crystal refers to the poem, *Lines For Winter*, by Mark Strand, and I see in this piece an expression of hope that somewhere in this journey of living on Earth, we will be able to look at ourselves in the mirror and not only accept who we are, but possibly smile.

— How can dance be used to explore our contemporary society?

I feel what we, as a company, are researching is the potential of the mind and body connection—the depths that the body can go in helping us explore our humanity and society.

Dance is built upon a logic that is unique from other art forms, and we need to use that logic to give us a different point of view on things. If we use dance only to perform a literal depiction, we do a disservice to what dance can give us in working out the complicated emotional questions that we ask as human beings.

Advances in technology has automated so much of what used to be physical labour and has allowed us to communicate with one another without physical presence. Dance is an important counterpoint to the reduced usage of the body in our everyday lives. I believe one of the reasons dance is becoming more mainstream is because people are looking for ways to connect with the physical body. It is essential to our development as human beings that we keep the expression of the body alive.

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