

Dallas, TX

ASPEN SANTA FE BALLET

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Piano Movement

Aspen Santa Fe Ballet makes a triumphant return to Dallas, courtesy of TITAS, including a performance with pianist Joyce Yang.

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Photo: Michele Cardamone

Aspen Santa Fe Ballet with Joyce Yang

Dallas — The welcome return of more live music to dance continues with **Aspen Santa Fe Ballet's** stop at the Moody Performance Hall in Dallas, presented by TITAS. The bill reads An Evening with Pianist Joyce Yang, highlighting the musician's integral role in the aesthetic, rather than simply a bolstering point. She's as much a performer as the athletes on stage, even changing costumes between pieces. As the 2005 silver medalist of the 12th Van Cliburn International Piano Competition held in Fort Worth, the Seoul native was also the youngest competitor that year, at 19.

The repetitive and oft-used Philip Glass music takes on new life under her thoughtful touch for the first work, *Where We Left Off* by Nicolo Fonte. Using "Mad Rush" and "Metamorphosis 2," Fonte uses compelling, suspended shapes with controlled turns and delicate *arabesques* accentuated with deliberate flicks of the wrist. The white-clad dancers execute powerful yet airy jumps ending with featherlight landings and effortless lifts.

Simple side lighting, a gentle cyc color, and an unusually glossy floor enhance the elegance of this somber work. Duets prove quite touching, with an especially exquisite segment by Pete Leo Walker and Jenny Winton, the latter of which stopped in Dallas in 2015 as Penny in the touring musical *Dirty Dancing*.

After an intermission, a most unexpected thing happened. *Dream Play* (choreographed by Fernando Melo, whose compelling *Re:Play* appeared last time the company was here) uses a Busby Berkeley-style camera perspective for its story and visual effect, but the audience gets to be privy to both the process and the product. With the video screen lowered and Yang in the upstage right corner, the lights brighten on a chair sideways on the floor, with Anthony Tiedeman “sitting” in it, laying on his side to do so. The video screen simply shows a man sitting in a chair.

The challenges of simulating a walk while on the floor create a humorous effect on screen, setting up this dance to be funny as well as unconventional. Any time a dancer “walks” on screen, they appear like broken dolls. Objects rolled on the floor or lowered to the dancer seem to float on screen, and multiple configurations of dancers and objects depict the journey of a man who finds a dream woman and seeks to discover her again.

Yang delivers the delicate, wistful scores of Erik Satie and Frederic Chopin with charm and grace. The laughter that drifts from the house mixes with other audible reactions to the story, proving that Melo made a good choice to show all aspects of the visual effect. The coordination among the dancers to simulate people floating and falling is quite stunning.

A second intermission is obviously needed to change out the setting but makes the evening drag on. The final work, *Half/Cut/Split* by Jorma Elo, is a whirlwind but wearing journey. The rising curtain reveals a lighter floor, Yang and the piano in upstage center, and a bright yellow cyc with a large black backdrop cutting the background in half diagonally. Dark metallic costumes for the dancers and Yang's shimmering silver dress add an intense elegance to Elo's expansive, angular aesthetic. Lively and virtuosic, it also includes quirky, humorous moments that display more of the performers' humanity.

Unexpected arm and leg pathways culminate in unpredictable endings, while the unique elements blending with classical lean more towards Twyla-esque than Balanchine-style. Yang also includes a few movements of her own, not related to her playing, and a beautiful moment occurs when all six dancers sit on the floor in stillness, facing her, captivated by the music.

It's incredibly musical, gorgeously articulate, heavily athletic, and also the longest work on the program, which overall lasts a little over two hours. The end of the tiresome ride has a glorious finish with metallic gold confetti drifting from the rafters towards the stage floor. The performers' final movement of slumping to the ground while Yang collapses backward sums up what just about every single person in the theater—from the crew members changing the setting, to the dancers, Yang, and the audience—were feeling. What a rich and satisfying finish! **TJ**