Written by Thom White
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What first struck me during February 18's performance of Ballet Quad Cities' *Love Stories: Love on the Run* was the venue, as Augustana College's Wallenberg Hall provided exactly the spatial experience I wanted for this series of balletic vignettes. There's a grandness to the architecture, particularly the Tuscan pillars, that lends itself to the high-art air of ballet, but there's also an intimacy there that allowed the audience to be close to the dancers, who performed on a raised platform. I often lost myself in the beauty, passion, and emotion of the choreographed works because I was so near to the action, and not separated by a sea of seats in a formal theatrical setting.

Love on the Run combined short pieces by several choreographers, with its vignettes featuring as few as two dancers and as many as nine. The show started with "Demi Red," choreographed by Lynn Andrews to music by the Tosca Tango Orchestra. In it, dancers Kelsee Green, Emily Kate Long, and Jill Schwartz appeared dressed in bright red, each in a bodice and calf-length skirt, with their hair pulled back into tight buns with red flowers. And from the first note of music, there wasn't a moment in which the trio stopped moving in this piece (which seemed a sort of balletic tango minus a male partner), and a combined sense of self-assured independence and almost haughty condescension emanated from the women as they moved in not-quite-perfect synchronicity.

A more traditional offering, "Black Swan Pas de Deux," followed. Adapted from Tchaikovsky's full-length ballet *Swan Lake*, and staged here by Rebekah von Rathonyi, the number featured dancers Margaret Huling and Jason Gomez in a sort of romantic battle of wills, as he extended his affections to her, and she – while playfully accepting his embrace – pushed away his kisses. The piece's storyline was utterly clear, thanks to the performers' subtle expressions during their back-and-forth relationship.

The evening's third piece, "Prelude to Eternity," delivered a stunning series of choreographed feats of strength, as Jacob Lyon performed lift after lift, raising Long into the air as though she weighed nothing at all. (His musculature was impressively evident, and punctuated by his lack of clothing; Lyon wore nothing but calf-length tights.) With Courtney Lyon adapting Johanne Jakhelln's original choreography to Beethoven music, I was in awe of the physicality and

beautiful lines created by the dancers, with Long's leg and Lyon's arm oftentimes held parallel to one another. Yet while the dancing inspired amazement, the piece, as a whole, could've used more chemistry; I didn't feel much connection between the performers, partly because Lyon's face registered as blank even while using his body so expressively.

One of *Love on the Run*'s most interesting segments, however, came with the Act I finale "NEWSFLASH," which was choreographed by Deanna Carter and featured the full ballet company. This jazzy number incorporated original music, props – with the dancers reading newspapers (the *River Cities' Reader*, no less) and playfully plucking them from each other's hands – and classic commercials for such products as Muriel cigarettes, Mr. Clean, and Brylcreem.

The evening's second half began with another jaunty piece,
"Blooming in Winter," featuring Huling, Gomez, Jacob Lyon, Nancy Cole, Jackie Jensen, and Calvin Rowe. Choreographed by Lynn Andrews to music by Bela Bartok, the vignette was a distinct blend of traditional ballet moves and more modern steps, and guest dancers von Rathonyi and Joshua Gullett proved excellent storytellers in the subsequent "Balcony Pas de Deux" from Prokofiev's *Romeo & Juliet.* Von Rathonyi, who also staged the work, was especially expressive, and made it easy to follow Juliet's interest in, uncertainty of, and submission to Gullett's Romeo. (While several of Ballet Quad Cities' dancers employ appropriate facial expressions to punctuate the meaning of their movements, all could learn from von Rathonyi's ability to make her character's thoughts and feelings clear.)

For *Love on the Run*'s finale, the full company returned for "Steppin' in Love," choreographed by Green, and featuring snippets from Aretha Franklin's "Chain of Fools" and Ray Charles' "Hit the Road, Jack" and "I've Got a Woman." A fun piece of work, with the women boasting their independence while the men vied for their love, it also showcased what, for me, were the evening's most stirring moments, when Jacob Lyon performed a brief solo with notable heart and passion. Lyon's movements were intentionally imprecise – rather than following his arm movements through with control, he allowed them to be carried through by sheer momentum – and the force of those movements, and apparent rush of emotion through his limbs, had me mesmerized. Unfortunately, "Steppin' in Love" ended with the company dancing with a seeming lack of direction and cohesiveness reminiscent of a high-school dance, but that only somewhat tainted an otherwise beautiful, interesting number in a varied, provocative evening of ballet.

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