

# Opening night success for Cape Town City Ballet's *Amaranth*

 By [Debbie Hathway](#)

25 Jun 2019

Neutrality. That's the position a reviewer should hold when putting what can only be very subjective opinions out in a public forum. I choose the word "neutrality" above objectivity as the arts in all its forms affect people differently. How can you be objective about something that moves you emotionally?

Because I don't see the point in writing about something without passion and honesty, it was with equal parts excitement and trepidation that I prepared for the much-anticipated opening night of *Amaranth*, the first triple bill presented by Cape Town City Ballet under new CEO Debbie Turner.



Choreographer Christopher L Huggins chats new ballet *Amaranth*

Debbie Hathway 20 Jun 2019



## Perfectly groomed dancers

Would a very young company (based on membership not years of establishment) rise to the occasion, winning back fans who might have become lacklustre in their support, converting new ones, reaffirming the decisions of existing sponsors and convincing would-be backers that their funds are going to the right organisation, and making it count at the box office?

At curtain up, I had the answer. George Balanchine's *Serenade* is a lyrical patterning of perfectly groomed dancers in silvery blue and the visual impact takes your breath away. Don't look for a story. There isn't one. According to Balanchine, "the only story is the music's story, a serenade, a dance, if you like, in the 'light of the moon'."



George Balanchine's *Serenade*, choreography by George Balanchine. ©The George Balanchine Trust - © Pat Brorilow-Downing

Repetiteur for the George Balanchine Foundation Rebecca Metzger did a wonderful job translating this work for a cast eager to learn something new (albeit from the former CAPAB repertory) and perform it to Pyotr Ilyich Tchaikovsky's score for *Serenade for Strings*, to the accompaniment of the Cape Philharmonic Orchestra under the baton of Brandon Phillips if you're clever with your booking selection. It is arguably the highlight of the evening.

## Well-honed partnering skills

Frank Staff's *Transfigured Night* was next up – produced by his fourth wife Veronica Paeper, a prolific choreographer in her own right who has a long history with the company from a performance and administrative perspective. She also helped transform CAPAB Ballet into Cape Town City Ballet. Staff was born in Kimberley but moved to Cape Town and then London as a teenager who showed early potential as a dancer. He went on to join Rambert's Ballet Club, perform for the Vic-Wells company, and freelance internationally.

His story is absolutely fascinating – I encourage you to buy a programme when you attend a performance to absorb it all fully. *Transfigured Night* was inspired by the music of Arnold Schoenberg's *Verklärte Nacht* (*Transfigured Night*), which fitted perfectly a story he'd heard about two sisters and a brother who were confined in a mental institution.



Chante Daniels and Mbulelo Jonas in *Transfigured Night* - © Pat Bromilow-Downing

Casts differ but opening night saw the budding partnership of Mbulelo Jonas (the lover) and Chante Daniels (younger sister) with Craig Pedro (the brother) and Leane Theunissen (older sister). Daniels and Jonas are impeccably trained with solid technique – Jonas has the experience and well-honed partnering skills to really let Daniels shine. Time and trust will bring her the confidence and dramatic input she needs to fully immerse herself in a part like this one.

## The busyness of it all

Christopher L Huggins' *Enemy Behind the Gates* is a familiar piece for dance patrons who have seen it previously on Cape Dance Company programmes. This time they saw it with a cast of 62, the largest ever. It makes a statement,

certainly, but not the one I had hoped for. For it to work, lines have to be absolutely clean, timing perfect and lighting spot on. The feature solos and partner work were overshadowed by the busyness of it all. That was a shame because even with a smaller cast the audience was often challenged by not knowing where to look as a result of the high octane action of the choreography. Usually, I feel absolutely exhausted and elated by the end of this piece. This time it felt like it ended too soon. I appear to be in the minority though, judging by the audience response and general comments after the performance. That's good – fresh eyes and attitudes from the uninitiated and it's only my opinion.



Enemy Behind the Gates - © Helena Fagan

Kudos to the City of Cape Town, Western Cape Government, the Toby Fine Ballet Fund and Food Lover's Market for their contributions to this season's staging. The opening night audience loved it and that's all that counts. Now let them spread the word and get more tickets sold. Cape Town City Ballet really deserves the support.

*Amaranth will be performed at the Artscape Opera House from 22 June until 7 July. The programme includes George Balanchine's Serenade and Frank Staff's Transfigured Night. Set and costume design for Transfigured Night is by Peter Cazalet while lighting design for the production is by award-winning designer Wilhelm Disbergen.*

*Tickets range from R150 to R495 with concessions for pensioners, scholars and block bookings of 10 or more. The Cape Town Philharmonic Orchestra will accompany selected performances. Book through Computicket on 0861 915 8000 at [www.computicket.com](http://www.computicket.com) or at any Shoprite Checkers outlet.*

## ABOUT DEBBIE HATHWAY

Debbie Hathway is an award-winning writer, with a special interest in luxury lifestyle (watches, jewellery, travel, property investment) and the arts.

- REVIEW: Beachcomber Resorts & Hotels elevates the art of living beyond luxury getaways - 19 Feb 2024
- Growing a sustainable paradise: Salt of Palmar's herb garden blooms with local flavour - 20 Dec 2023
- *Set in Motion* shines a light on living with purpose - 10 Jul 2023
- Jonathan Roxmouth's "Key Change - My Favourite Pianists" is not to be missed - 22 Mar 2023
- Johaar Mbsaval honoured at Artscape Opera - 8 Mar 2023

[View my profile and articles...](#)

For more, visit: <https://www.bizcommunity.com>