



Dance review

## Stunning Chroma brings down the house

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### **Chroma, Serenade, Emergence**

*Choreography by Wayne McGregor, George Balanchine and Crystal Pite*

*National Ballet of Canada*

*Four Seasons Centre in Toronto on Wednesday*

Canny artistic director Karen Kain has snagged a big one in *Chroma*. Superhot British choreographer Wayne McGregor created the piece for the Royal Ballet in 2006, and *Chroma* went on to win the three top London dance awards.

And there has never been, in recent memory, an ovation like the one given to *Chroma* at the National Ballet on Thursday. McGregor's mind-blowing choreography is so complex and daring that at times it seems like *trompe d'oeil*. Simply put, *Chroma* is a stunner, both in movement and the visual environment.

Architect John Pawson has designed towering white walls that surround the stage. There is a large opening in the back wall that allows dancers to both enter and exit, their bodies appearing and disappearing by degrees as they go up and down the hidden stairs.

*Chroma* means absence of white, and McGregor has determined that the only colour in the set is the skin tones of the dancers. Lucy Carter's clever lighting consists of shades of white, cream and beige so that nothing takes away from the glaring nakedness of the space.

The subtle hues of Moritz Junge's costumes (unisex sleeveless, loose tunic tops and brief shorts) range through pink, olive and taupe, and with the costume and skin bleeding into each other, the dancers' bodies are brought into stark relief.

This quintessence of environmental nothingness is the perfect backdrop for both illuminating the architecture of the body, and manipulating the body as a frequency of colour.

These abstract concepts are certainly intellectually interesting, but they pale in the face of the dance itself. McGregor's choreographic language shuts down the brain and rivets the eye. You don't have to know his point of departure to appreciate his gift as a dancesmith. In fact,

you just want to lose yourself inside the dance.

A woman raises her leg to her head to create the six o'clock position – and her partner bends the leg even further back to a quarter to six. Hips swivel right and left, but distort beyond what the socket should allow. Feet, knees, and ankles flex to unimaginable angles.

The six men (Aleksandar Antonijevic, Zdenek Konvalina, Noah Long, Robert Stephen, and, plucked from the corps de ballet, Brendan Saye and Dylan Tedaldi) and four women (Greta Hodgkinson, Tanya Howard, Tina Pereira and Bridgett Zehr) seem to make their bodies do the impossible, both alone and in partners.

Their elastic, supple bodies seem to have no bones. Not only that, different parts of the body are doing different things at the same time. The movement language is both ugly and beautiful, androgynous and sexy. The central male trio (Stephen, Saye and Tedaldi) with its complex, lightning fast, staccato manipulations, brought down the house.

Added to this delirious frenzy of movement is the fantastic score that includes three songs by the rock group White Stripes and four pieces composed by Joby Talbot, all arranged for a huge orchestra. Maestro David Briskin and his players had a field day letting it all hang out with the White Stripes, and pulling back for the more reflective Talbot.

*Chroma* is not to be missed, particularly since the other two works on this mixed program have their own claim to greatness. Gilding the lily are George Balanchine's poignant neoclassical *Serenade*, and Crystal Pite's *Emergence* with its magnificent insect imagery.

*The National Ballet mixed program continues at the Four Seasons Centre until Nov. 28.*