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Photo: Vikki Sloviter

A Midsummer Night's Fantasy: BalletX's Summer Series 2024

by Ziying Cui

In July, BalletX offers a vibrant program featuring three world-premiere contemporary ballet pieces. The innovative choreography places classical ballet vocabulary in conversation with diverse contemporary ethos, ranging from Balanchine-styled symphonic ballet to Pina Bausch's dance theatre, and a celebration of queerness through the 18th-century British [macaroni](#) figure. Through their virtuoso technique, emotional narration, and seamless collaboration, the elegant and sinewy dancers of BalletX bring a combination of classical and contemporary styles to life.

[Amy Hall Garner's](#) "Suite No. 46, OP.1" employs a live symphonic quintet playing the compositions of Vivaldi and Bach. Six male dancers enthusiastically open the stage clad in different colored long-sleeve chiffon tops and matching shorts. While dancing in silence, the synchronic sounds made by their hands flapping on their bodies and feet sweeping on the floor highlight their unified and clean technique. The female dancers' flying entrance echoes the delightful first notes of the strings, further illuminating the stage. Wearing the matching colors with the male dancers, the female dancers' flowy dresses in emerald, sapphire, ruby, amber, and coral colors remind me of the dazzling display of [Jewels](#) (1967) by George Balanchine. Balanchine's abstraction and music-driven choreography undoubtedly motivated Garner's neoclassical style. The dancers' fast-paced footwork mirrors the poetic dynamic of Vivaldi's allegro concerto, while their skillful lifts in romantic duets respond to the lullaby-like largo. Accompanied by Bach's rich baroque Brandenburg Concerto, the appearance of all the dancers in colorful costumes presents a spectrum of neoclassical flavor to the audience.

In contrast to the abstraction of Garner's symphonic ballet, the second piece choreographed by Belgian artist [Stina Quagebeur](#), experiments with narrative and set elements in her "Everything InBetween." Under a chill spotlight on stage, the vanilla loveseat itself evokes various stories between couples. Sitting and haunting around the loveseat, the principal duet performed by [Francesca Forcella](#) and [Jerard Palazo](#) communicates through cautious touches, soft hugs, and deep eye contact. While minimizing their range and frequency of motions, the couple's facial expressions alongside their occasional shoulder shrugs or subtle sighs translate desire, doubt,

forgiveness, and love. As Quagebeur states in the introductory video, the pedestrian movements she employs attempt to provide audiences with a vision as if dancers were improvising on stage, allowing audiences to see themselves through the dancers' emotional narrative.

Drawing on the repetition and recursion of movements and emotions from Pina Bausch's masterpiece "[Café Müller](#)" (1978), Quagebeur extends the stage's visual effects beyond dance theatre. The combination of fast light shifts and the swoosh sound effects creates a film-like scene that captivates the audience. The five couples dancing behind or alongside the main characters appear as recollected or imagined landscapes that enrich the storyline.

Concluding the evening, the New Zealand-based choreographer [Loughlan Prior](#) presents a magnificent piece, "*Macaroni*." Adopting the well-known melody and verse about Macaroni from the American patriotic song "Yankee Doodle Dandy," Prior transforms the historically sarcastic effeminate figure into a neutral-gendered character whose flamboyant physicality celebrates queerness and surrealism. Emma Kingsbury's bold costume design articulated extravagant 18th-century fashion for the dance ensemble. The curled neon green wigs, matching-colored unitards with painted macaroni figures, and tight embroidered tailcoats resembled the deconstruction and storytelling characteristics of [John Galliano's](#) haute couture fashion designs.

Complementing the tremendous costumes, the dancers wear powdered-whited faces, rouged lips, and pox patches that revive French baroque beauty. They prance across the stage, exaggerate the angle of their smiles, and lip-sync the lines in Claire Cowan's music. The dramatic gossip trio at the afternoon tea party, the narcissist catching shuttlecocks from the badminton feeding machine, and the group waving and showing off their feathers augment the flamboyant humor of the choreography.

On this midsummer night, BalletX's performance culminates in the dazzling "*Macaroni*." As the final bow of the company's residence at the Wilma Theater, the three innovative ballets in the summer series paved a shining way for BalletX's new season.

[Summer Series 2024, BalletX, The Wilma Theater, July 10 to 21, 2024.](#)

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