

VICTORIA WYATT

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The latest work from WA dance company LINK is structured around Ravel's Bolero.

*Photo by Tim Somerset*

Summer will soon be upon us, and the *al fresco* venues are opening their gates and brushing off their stages to welcome a new line up of shows. Western Australia has no shortage of outdoor venues, and one of the most spectacular, The Fremantle Arts Centre is kicking off their season with LINK Dance Company's, *Shanghai Bolero*. Apart from claiming infamy as Australia's most haunted building, Fremantle Arts Centre is a wonderful example of colonial Gothic architecture and provides a splendid backdrop for any performance.

LINK Dance Company is a company like no other. The company changes every year, as it comprises of graduates from the three year tertiary dance course offered at WAAPA (Western Australian Academy of Performing Arts), essentially providing a transition year between studenthood and the life of a professional dancer, whilst having access to the superb physical and faculty resources of a conservatory environment and earning further academic qualifications.

Established in 2002 by Chrissy Parrot as an innovative research project within the dance department, LINK has evolved into a simulated workplace with an ongoing commitment to the creation of new works, and tours locally, interstate and internationally annually. A central element of this production is of course Ravel's outstanding *Bolero*, one of the most recognised pieces of music on the planet. Originally commissioned by a Russian actress and dancer specifically to be used for a ballet, it is a perfect piece for Artistic Director and Choreographer Micheal Whaites and Choreographer Didier Théron to use as a base for exploration.

*Shanghai Bolero* splits the evening in two, with the lighthearted *59009 Tonight* kicking things off with an old school, almost contemporary 'lindy hop' showcase of four dances set to a Michael Bublé soundtrack, easing the audience into the somewhat intense Bolero series, three interpretations of the same piece of music.

*59009 Tonight* is an unexpected piece from a contemporary company, or any company come to think of it that is not based in a swing dancing hall, but if the idea was to inject some humour into the otherwise all consuming theme that took over once the Bolero section started then the proverbial nail was hit on the head. It is a colourful showcase that features the dancers in variations of pairs and small focus groups at any one time and highlights the skills of the seven females and three male, emerging professionals. Ravel would be proud of how LINK has used the iconic *Bolero*, especially as Ravel himself was obsessed with restyling and reinventing dance movements and built his music accordingly.

This second half is notably more intense, and everything from costumes, lighting and choreography heightens the subtleties of movement executed by the dancers. The first piece is females only, a kind of stylised catwalk show where the dancers' movements build to the soundtrack. Secondly come the males, who at first make the art of contemporary dance look almost easy, but as the music develops the audience is treated to the repertoire of finesse and quickness that separates dancers from we normal humans.

The third and final performance has the beauty of the addition of three professionals who have helped LINK throughout the years, an ex student, choreographer and teacher, who bring a mature air to a difficult but entrancing finale by visiting French choreographer Didier Théron.

What better way to spend a summer evening than supporting our bright young things?

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