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Dance review: Les Ballets de Monte-Carlo's 'Cinderella' in O.C.

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Jean-Christophe Maillot’s three-act “Cinderella” for Les Ballets de Monte-Carlo, seen Thursday at the Segerstrom Center for the Arts, just might be the best ballet of Charles Perrault’s fairy tale with a barefoot heroine.

Who needs a glass slipper when you’ve got lovely high arches that sparkle like gold, as did the evening’s gracious and warm Cinderella, Anja Behrman. She has no use for a fireplace or ashes, either (though he makes fun of all that in a ballet-within-the-ballet). While other “Cinderellas” exist as an excuse for a trapdoor and rev up the theatrical machinery, Maillot focuses on underlying allegories. Take notice of the Sisters’ rotted black toes.

This is not a children’s ballet, though the little princesses seated near me grinned contentedly. Maillot crafts steps with cold precision, using a classical dance language of whip-fast classicism, scooped torsos, oversized gestures and exaggerated pantomime. He saves the flowing, exultant pas de deux for Cinderella and her quite charming Prince, Asier Uriagereka, for the ball, in the night’s most rewarding apotheosis.

PHOTOS: "Cinderella" in O.C.

Though Maillot fiddles with the order of Sergei Prokofiev’s dark score, he stays absolutely in sync with the characters’ themes and the music’s high drama. Incidental music from Prokofiev’s “Lieutenant Kijé” was added without jarring effect. (The ballet was performed to recorded music.)

Ultimately, the transforming power of love does win out, and despite Maillot’s new take, the audience is delivered to the poignant, old-fashioned conclusion. The handsome 27-year-old troupe of 48 dancers from 25 countries is making its West Coast debut in Costa Mesa (through Sunday). Maillot has been in O.C. since 1992, and the dancing was marked by an energetic crispness.

Maillot’s “Cinderella” (1999) shifts the focus from the title character to the fairy godmother -- here simply called Fairy (Mimoza Koike) -- who :

dead mother. In a prologue, we see her and Father (Chris Roelandt) in an ecstatic, whirling duet of free form, joyous abandon. She clutches her l expires, ushering in the familiar troubles. The ballet is about her return: to help her daughter find love and to comfort her grieving husband one a pro-female perspective that is as refreshing as it is unusual.

There is, however, a hard edge as well, a dystopian style. Bald "pleasure Superintendents" (Gaëtan Morlotti and Jérôme Marchand) provide son and there is heightened sexuality for the Stepmother (Carolyn Rose) and her violent daughters (Gaelle Riou and Noelani Pantastico).

French street artist and scenic designer Ernest Pignon-Ernest has imagined a white landscape with white bulbous moving screens, a buckling sta distorted mirror. Jérôme Kaplan's simple but fanciful costumes heighten artificiality for everyone but Cinderella, who is the only female to wear uncovered and loose.

Koike's Fairy was a jittery creature, a female wizard whose undulating arm orchestrated magical events. It is regretful that Behrend had fewer o unleash her lush style. Uriagereka, on the other hand, made a welcome early entrance. He was a persuasive wastrel whose total turnaround was

Finally, Roelandt sympathetically straddled that difficult divide for the Father, part-weakling, part-bereft widower. Despite dual duets for Koike Roelandt, and Behrend and Uriagereka, Father does end up alone. But as he gazes at his sparkling daughter and her prince, there is reason to bel happily ever after.

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-- Laura Bleiberg

"Cinderella," Les Ballets de Monte-Carlo, Segerstrom Center for the Arts, 600 Town Center Drive, Costa Mesa. 7:30 p.m. Friday, 2 and 7:30 p.m. Sunday. \$13.60-\$92. Contact: (714) 556-2787 or www.scfta.org. Running time: 2 hours.

Photo: Anja Behrend is the barefoot Cinderella. Credit: Allen J. Schaben / Los Angeles Times

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