

Tulsa Ballet's 'Lady' worth waiting for

Tulsa World

By James D. Watts, Jr.

2/4/2013

Read full story [here](#)

It's been a decade since Tulsa Ballet last presented Val Caniparoli's "Lady of the Camellias." But the company's performances the past weekend at the Tulsa PAC were more than worth the wait.

"Lady of the Camellias" is a story ballet in the truest sense of the phrase. Every moment of this ballet is freighted with intricate incident and intense emotion, from the glitz and dazzle of the parties that open each act to its haunting and poignant final tableaux.

The ensemble scenes are so layered with action, and the characters presented with such individuality, that one can easily be caught up following the actions of those on the periphery of the main story.

It shows that Caniparoli has paid equal attention to details of theatre as well as dance - there are no anonymous performers in this story, no dance sequence that exists simply to fill space on the stage. Everything is there to tell a relatively simple, yet still very rich, story.

And this story - perhaps the most famous, and certainly the most adapted, romantic tale after "Romeo and Juliet" - was superbly told by Tulsa Ballet's dancers.

It is your basic romantic triangle: Marguerite, a courtesan whose beauty and exclusivity make her the toast of society, captures the eye and heart of a young man named Armand. It's a relationship that displeases a number of people, most grievously Marguerite's current escort, the Baron de Varville, and Armand's wealthy father, who would rather his son not consort with a woman of Marguerite's sort.

However, Armand is not simply the latest in a long line of men to Marguerite; yet, she agrees to give up the one man she truly loves - and a series of tragic events begin to unfold.

Sofia Menteguiaga and Ovidiu Iancu danced the roles of Marguerite and Armand Friday and Sunday afternoon (the company's newest dancers, Yoohee Son and Hyonjun Rhee, performed the roles Saturday).

This was the first time we've seen Menteguiaga and Iancu work together and they have the makings of an excellent partnership.

The long pas de deux that ends the first act was a marvelous display of technique, strength, flexibility and interaction that never obscured the purpose of the scene: a teasing seduction, as Marguerite continually if gently asserts herself as the dominant

partner, controlling Armand as she has others until her final, almost surprising acquiescence, as if Marguerite had, almost against her will, fallen in love.

Menteguiaga fully embodied this role, from the obvious self-confidence Marguerite shows in public, to the private anguish when she realizes her life and her dreams are slipping away. The vulnerability she showed in the last act was truly heartbreaking.

Armand may be a less complex character, but Iancu made his wide-eyed adoration, his naive joy and his unthinking, almost child-like anger at what he sees as a betrayal palpable. Alfonso Martin, who had this role the last time Tulsa Ballet performed the ballet, cut an aloof and somewhat menacing figure as the Baron, a fellow used to bending everyone to his will - a quality that permeated the brief, almost combative duet he performs with Menteguiaga.

Alexandra Bergman was Olympe, one of Marguerite's rivals for the attention of society, and she was stellar. Whether petulant or preening, joyous or jealous, Bergman made Olympe's mercurial mood changes crystal clear. And Bergman imbued every step with the exuberant energy she's always shown.

Joshua A. Stayton was more than credible as Armand's father, the stiffness of his posture and deliberateness of his movements reflecting the inflexibility of his character. Georgia Snoke brought a healthy dose of comedy to her role as Prudence, while Rodrigo Hermesmeyer, Jiyun Dai and Jonnathan Ramirez Meija were suitably vigorous men about town, happily indulging in drinks and good times wherever they may be.

Peter Stafford Wilson conducted the Tulsa Symphony in a score assembled from compositions by Frederic Chopin, but the true musical hero of the evening was pianist Yee Sik Wong, whose playing throughout the evening was well-nuanced not only to the needs of the dancers on stage but also to subtleties of Chopin.



Tulsa Ballet's Ovidiu Iancu (left), Sofia Menteguiaga and Alfonso Martin perform in the ballet "Lady of the Camellias." STEPHEN PINGRY / Tulsa World