

Art Musings

art is everything & everything is art

Palate cleanser



Ballet Arizona performs "Serenade." Choreography by George Balanchine. Photo: Rosalie O'Connor Photography. Courtesy of: The George Balanchine Trust.

It's best, I'm told, to cleanse one's palate between each course of a fine meal. Palate cleansers, like sorbet, return the taste buds to a sort of tabula rasa — a blank slate free of prior tastes and ready for new ones.

In the world of ballet, [Balanchine](#) is the best palate cleanser bar none. Seeing Balanchine's work well performed is a perfectly refreshing experience, more now than ever before, given all the bells and whistles served up on stage these days.

A lush curtain of dark ocean blue greeted those who gathered at Symphony Hall in Phoenix Thursday for opening night of [Ballet Arizona's](#) "All Balanchine," staged by Balanchine-trained dancer and choreographer Ib Andersen, the company's artistic director.

It's raised slowly for the opening of "[Serenade](#)," revealing a stunning palette of soft blues and creamy whites that causes the audience to softly gasp. The backdrop, also blue, assumes subtle variations over time — leaving the eyes to focus on what really matters here. The dance.

Valley audiences have several opportunities each season to experience diverse works of contemporary ballet, but works of classical ballet are harder to come by. They're like the palate cleansers missing from so many meals today.

Whatever your own tastes in dance, you'd be wise to choose "[All Balanchine](#)" from this weekend's menu. It's being performed through Sunday, May 5 — with live music by the Phoenix Symphony. "Serenade" is set to music by Tchaikovsky.

Despite a few bobbles, Thursday's performance of "Serenade" was quite beautiful. It's the best match of music to movement you're likely to encounter, accompanied by elegant costumes and lighting design that doesn't fight for your attention.

"Serenade" costumes by [Karinska](#) conjure images of jewelry box ballerinas that slowly spin each time a curious child peeks inside. Original lighting, designed by Ronald Bates and recreated by Michael Korsch, compliments the work's feel of clouds dancing through a pristine sky.

Digital projections may be all the rage, but "All Balanchine" is blissfully free of such things. In a world that seems to value style over substance, Andersen reminds us that substance still stands on its own two feet.

"All Balanchine" also features "[Monumentum Pro Gesualdo](#)," plus "[Movements for Piano and Orchestra](#)" — both short works set to Stravinsky. The latter features piano soloist Lawrence Loeber, and breathtaking dance by Natalia Magnicaballi.

The two-and-a-half hour program ends with "[The Four Temperaments](#)" featuring music by Paul Hindemith — with a special guest artist, pianist [William Wolfram](#).

It's got the evening's best performances by the men of Ballet Arizona. Shea Johnson's "Phlegmatic" performance was particularly strong, but the always expressive Astrit Zejnati felt flamboyant.

Myles Lavallee, who joined the company in 2011 after training with [The School of Ballet Arizona](#) and [The School of American Ballet](#), delivered one of the evening's best blends of technical and artistic excellence. His "Theme 2" was truly captivating.

Watching Thursday's performance reminded me at times of finding a few small dings in a newly-polished luxury car. Other times it mirrored the moment an eye doctor flips just the right lens, bringing everything into perfect focus.

By the end of the evening, my palate was perfectly cleansed.

— Lynn Trimble, Arts Writer