

## A daring fusion of genres that pays off

Le Droit

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The Royal Winnipeg Ballet brilliantly blends French cancan and classical ballet.  
SIMON SÉGUIN-BERTRAND, *Le Droit*

It took some daring to put La Goulue in pointe shoes and a tutu. Back in Ottawa, the Royal Winnipeg Ballet revives the most fabled cabaret in Paris as the setting of its latest ballet, *Moulin Rouge*, which also celebrates the RWB's 70<sup>th</sup> anniversary in a free and festive atmosphere. Creative, original and a tad provocative, the ballet twinkles under the Eiffel tower of a picture-postcard Paris of la Belle Époque, Toulouse-Lautrec and voluptuous women. A sure-fire formula for seduction!

The red windmill bathes the stage in a pervasive passion that is painted on the dancers' lips, accentuated by their enticing petticoats, confirmed in the hearts of the young lovers, and finally gushes, blood red, in a burst of rage and jealousy. The slim storyline is just enough to keep the plot, and the windmill, turning. The tortured loves of Matthew and Nathalie follow a highly predictable path that is strewn with pitfalls for the laundress, who dreams of glory in this extravagant, colourful world festooned with frills, ruffled underskirts, jewels and other baubles. The costumes dazzle under the capable hands of Anne Armit and Shannon Lovelace.

With a surprising tenderness and suppleness, Vanessa Lawson brings a primness to her character that clashes distinctly with the surrounding debauchery. The coming together of classical dance (which she represents) and the French cancan is not entirely seamless; the jump splits and fouetté turns must pose an enormous challenge for character and dancer alike. Nathalie quickly gets the hang of things, and is swept into the arms of her suitors with disconcerting ease until she falls

into the clutches of sleazy night club owner Zidler, danced very convincingly by Eric Nipp. The notes of the accordion accompany the transformation of the cabaret into a shadowy Dantesque nightmare...

In Act Two, the baguette and beret clichés of the opening scenes remain, thankfully, in the wings. The conflicts finally come to a head and the performance takes a surprising dramatic turn. Debussy, Strauss, Offenbach and Massenet give way to the equally up-tempo, but more contained and sensual, music of the tango. Passionate duets replace the burlesque dance hall atmosphere; only the red windmill and the Eiffel tower remain at the back of the set designed by Andrew Beck as permanent witnesses to a life where the wheel of fortune turns as innocently as the petticoats of the licentious dancers.

The melding of styles in this kaleidoscopic show is bang on: integrating French cancan steps into classical ballet is the right choice as the sets are peeled away, revealing the backstage world of the cabaret behind the swirling screen of booze and smoke; a loose and seedy existence very distant from classical ballet... In a time when everything is possible, dance is first and foremost an expression of *joie de vivre*, and the Royal Winnipeg Ballet does a marvellous job at capturing this essence. A popular success that artistic director André Lewis has dedicated to the memory of his predecessor Arnold Spohr, who passed away on April 12. I am willing to bet that this show, which played to sold-out houses in Ottawa, will continue to wow audiences wherever it tours.

<http://www.cyberpresse.ca/le-droit/arts/201004/16/01-4271393-melange-des-genres-ose-pari-gagne.php>