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Borrowed Light | Dance Reviews

Written by **Roberta Allen** Latest Australian dance reviews - ballet, contemporary and more!
Sunday, 02 March 2008

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Borrowed Light by Tero Saarinen Company. Photo (left) - Laurent Philippe. Photo (cover) - Dee Conway

Borrowed Light is one of the most beautiful and touching contemporary pieces of dance I've ever seen. A few years ago, I had the opportunity to applaud the German choreographer Pina Bausch and a few of her splendid works - one of them was "Carnation" - with the Tanztheater Wuppertal. This is the only reason I couldn't say **Borrowed Light** is the most beautiful piece I've ever seen. Nothing is better than Pina Bauch. However, with his **Borrowed Light**, the Finnish dancer-coreographer **Tero Saarinen** almost got there.

Showing as part of the Perth International Arts Festival, **Borrowed Light** was created using as an inspiration the Shakers. **Saarinen** used in his work, as he says in the program, "the strong communal values and strikingly beautiful, functionalist aesthetics of this radical religious movement of the 18th and 19th centuries". The result, after 18 months of work, couldn't be more spectacular and at the same time austere; more enjoyable and at the same time disturbing, more joyful and at the same time sad. **Borrowed Light** is like life itself.

Saarinen's new work was born in collaboration between his own company, founded in 1996, and the **Boston Camerata**. During the piece, the American vocal group, directed by **Joel Cohen** since 1968, is on stage interpreting a selection of traditional Shaker songs, but this is not the only soundtrack. In the opening act, the stage bears only one of the eight dancers. Her solo dance follows nothing but the sound of her shoes, tap-dancing on the floorboards, and of her hands clapping frenetically. As the piece continues, the soundtrack made by the dancers' moving bodies and the exquisite singing of the **Boston Camerata** appear alternatively, making it impossible to say which moment is more touching. I cried twice, or three times, and my tears reflected the light of astonishingly beautiful



expressions that came from both dancers and singers.

The eight dancers (**Henrikki Heikkila**, **Carl Knif**, **Ninu Lindfors**, **Sini Lansivuiri**, **Natasa Novotna**, **Maria Nurmela**, **Heikki Vienola** and **Saarinen**) and eight singers (**Anne Azéma**, **Lydia Brotherton**, **Carolann Buff**, **Margaret Frazier**, **Tomothy Leigh Evans**, **Daniel Hershey**, **Nicholas isherwood** and **Donald Wilkinson**) work in perfect connection, and it's almost unbelievable that the entire team did not meet until a week before the premiere, in France, in 2004.

The lighting designed by **Mikki Kunttu** is like another dancer or singer onstage. **Kunttu** took his ideas from the concept of "borrowed light", an expression of the Shaker's architectural practice of building windows to improve daylight and productivity, and from **Saarinen** the idea of light as "a religious metaphor", but went much beyond. Like the music, the light work takes the audience to unthinkable places. It gives us ideas of early mornings, dark nights, happy wedding parties, sad funerals and, over and over again, life.

After one hour, when **Borrowed Light** unfortunately come to an end I could still find myself in that magic place **Saarinen**, his company and the **Boston Camerata** had built in my mind. It could be a sanctuary, like the Shaker's churches. Alternatively, it could have been any other people's sacred place, as the choreographer himself says. To me, it was like being at an even more overwhelming place, so amazing as to become breathless.

Tero Saarinen Company & The Boston Camerata

Borrowed Light

Venue: His Majesty's Theatre
Dates: 27 February – 1 March 2008 @ 7.30pm
Duration: 1hr 10min with no interval
Bookings: perthfestival.com.au or (08) 9484 1133

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