Classy production of ballet classic

***Don Quixote* by The Dancers Company**
Canberra Theatre. August 16-17
Reviewer: **Michelle Potter**

The Dancers Company's *Don Quixote*, featuring graduating students from the Australian Ballet School, was a triumph for all concerned.

Canberra audiences get few opportunities to see ballet of a professional standard on the stage of the Canberra Theatre. A trip to Sydney or Melbourne is usually the only way to go. So it was a real pleasure to see the Dancers Company, the regional touring arm of the Australian Ballet, appear here in a production of a 19th century classic, *Don Quixote*. This was not the version more commonly performed in Australia, choreographed by Rudolf Nureyev, but a sparkling production looking back to the original choreographer, Marius Petipa, with additional choreography by Ai-Gul Gaisina.

The Dancers Company consists largely of graduating students from the Australian Ballet School, dancers on the cusp of professional careers. Two female dancers who captured my attention were Hannah O'Neill and Benedicte Bemet. Both have huge charisma on stage. Both also have long, expressive limbs and beautifully proportioned bodies. They each use these qualities to full advantage. They often danced together, and did so brilliantly, as fiery Spanish friends of Kitri, the leading lady. But they both also had major roles in the scene in which Don Quixote dreams of his ideal love, Dulcinea. O'Neill danced the role of the Queen of the Dryads and Bemet that of Cupid. These roles require a strong and secure classical technique and both dancers more than rose to the occasion.

But there was scarcely a dancer on stage who did not perform in an exceptional way. I especially admired the Fandango in the last act. It was executed with such care and attention to detail, and with real understanding of style and how to carry a costume. Like the rest of the production, it had been beautifully rehearsed.

The two romantic leads, Basilio the barber and Kitri, the love of his life, were danced by guest artists from the Australian Ballet, Andrew Wright and Ako Kondo. Kondo gave a stellar performance, commanding the stage with her movements and drawing the audience along with her as she acted out her role. Wright showed promise of a very bright future. He, too, had a strong stage presence and showed himself to be a generous partner, always dancing with Kondo rather than simply beside her.

Guest artists took on many of the other principal roles. Simon Dow was a thoughtful Don Quixote, Francis Croese was an assiduous Lorenzo, father of Kitri, and Matthew Donnelly was the somewhat dissipated suitor to Kitri, Gamache. Full of spirited yet disciplined dancing and with the dancers carrying the storyline along easily and clearly, this was a classy production.

CINEMA & VIDEO
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