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Brad S. Ross

Azalea by the New Chamber Ballet Saturday, November 22, 2025 By Brad S. Ross

The New Chamber Ballet returned for another enchanting performance at the Mark Morris Dance Center on Saturday, November 22, with a collection of five dances choreographed by artistic director Miro Magloire and set to compositions for violin and piano. All of the featured pieces were written on a commission from the NCB within the last five years, including one that was receiving its world premiere. The music was performed by violinist Madeline Hocking and pianist Melody Fader, who were amusingly barefoot for the entire duration (a fantasy I've often had performing many concerts of my own). The costumes, which changed every set, were designed by Sarah Thea.



"Undercurrent" photo by Steven Pisano.

The evening began with the world premiere of Undercurrent by Didi Gu, for which dancers Megan Foley, Nicole McGinnis, Rachele Perla, and Kayla Schmitt were clad in herbaceous blue-green tunics. The choreography staged them mostly in pairs that occasionally traded partners before finally coming together, like the nyctinasty of a beautiful flower closing its petals. The music by Gu began on an affecting dissonant chord and meandered through a series of portentous modernist textures that would set the tone for the rest of the concert.

The next segment titled "Fog" featured the piece In Between by Hyesun Sun Lee. For this set,

Megan Foley departed and Anabel Alpert joined with the others, who were now clad in tan outfits. This ballet deliberately blurred the lines between musician and dancer and often featured long periods of silence from the instrumentalists, while the dancers filled the sonic vacuum with clicking noises, stomping their feet, and whispering phrases to each other, like “‘Who’s there?’ ‘Me?’ ‘You!’” Likewise, violinist Madeline Hocking slowly circled the performance space, stopping at two music stands positioned flanking the piano, before being picked up and carried by Kayla Schmitt as she played the violin from her back. The music featured noteworthy use of prepared piano and other extended instrumental technique before ending with twinkling high piano and pizzicato violin.

Next up was an excerpt from *Vox* by Elizabeth Gartman, which featured about ten minutes of its whopping fifty-five minute duration. Kayla Schmitt departed and the other dancers were joined by Foley again and Amber Neff, who by now all wore purple tunics. The choreography emphasized motion and a mixing of bodies, where the dancers seemed to almost fold into each other. At one point, three of the dancers exited the stage, leaving just two to close out the work as they took turns performing solo. Gartman’s music was notably more tonal and sonorous than the surrounding works and featured some interesting repetitive musical structures.

The penultimate work of the night was *The Distance Between Bones* by Ya-Lan Chan. This performance featured only Amber Neff and Kayla Schmitt, who had switched to striking black costumes. For this segment, the dancers took turns carrying each other on their backs, looking not unlike an elegant ostrich or some other fantastic, multi-limbed flightless bird. After the relative tonality of *Vox*, Chan’s music was a return to a more introspective and modernist sound that was laced with eerie double-stop glissandi and inquisitive piano lines.

The evening closed with the performance *Azalea* by Wong Foo Jeng, for which the concert was titled. Neff and Schmitt were joined again by Anabel Alpert, Megan Foley, and Nicole McGinnis as they donned pink tunics for this final ballet. The choreography alternated between meditative and upbeat and the dancers looked appropriately floral as they sculpted their bodies like the image of a blooming flower. Jeng’s score continued the music’s modernist themes and featured some plucked piano strings and haunting moments of silence, including a soporifically tranquil midsection. In the end, one by one the dancers all slowly collapsed to the floor, leaving an elegant mass of limbs as the night drew to a close.

Altogether, it was another engrossing performance by the New Chamber Ballet, which has rightly built a reputation of excellence in the world of chamber ballet. They will return to the Mark Morris Dance Center on February 6-7 with *Stargazing*—a ballet by Magloire set to music by Christian-Frédéric Bloquet—and again on March 20 with dance performances set to the music of J. S. Bach, Edvard Grieg, and more.



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