

## Tasty Bolero served three ways

The north-south alliance between the WA Academy of Performing Arts and Fremantle Arts Centre takes a new direction with the east-west dance work Shanghai Bolero by visiting French choreographer Didier Theron.

Beforehand, though, LINK artistic director Michael Whaites serves up 59009 Tonight, a contrasting light-hearted appetiser which pairs the smooth vocals of Michael Buble with some fancy old-school moves.

The brightly dressed, smiling dancers of WAAPA's graduate dance company LINK form a lively tableau against the colourfully illuminated ivy wall behind.

What is it about Ravel's Bolero that sees the French composer's Spanish-flavoured work on high rotation in Perth at the moment? Without any anniversary to note, it's no doubt a coincidence that Bolero underscores Theron's work as well as Raewyn Hill's Carnivale for Co3 Contemporary Dance Company's debut next week and a concert by the WA Symphony Orchestra next month.

Theron's work takes its name from the city where it had its world premiere in the French pavilion at the Shanghai World Expo in 2010.

So insistent and mesmerising are Ravel's rhythms that Theron has the eight LINK dancers, supplemented by five guests including Claudia Alessi, Laura Boynes and Sue Peacock, perform to Bolero not once but three times.

Each iteration of the triptych varies the choreography and the number of black-clad dancers, expanding Theron's recurrent approach of working over an idea with subtle variation each time.

In the first, ten women in black shorts, tops and stilettos march and slink in catwalk style, forming single-file grid patterns across the floor and looking all the world to these ageing eyes like they have been transplanted from a 1980s Robert Palmer music video.

The play on sexuality and gender roles is strong, particularly when they pull their tops over their heads to reveal black bras and conceal their faces. The repetitive, parade-ground movement, broken by momentary duets, trios and grasping groups, builds the drama and a sense of, as one audience member remarked, the "poetic ambiguity" of the work.

The second version is performed by three men (Dean Lincoln, Alexander Perrozi and Robert Tinning), bare-chested and prancing, rocking side to side like sparring boxers, or swinging their feet and hips in metronomic unison. As the score moves to a crescendo, the physical intensity also builds to gestures of almost religious passion.

Part III sees the entire ensemble of 13 enter the stage, women and men variously semi-nude to form fixed, stationary poses for several bars like heroic tableaux from Greek friezes or communist propaganda posters.

These compositions of light on sculpted formations alter angles every so often until a sole dancer breaks free and they give way to full movement in waves and clusters as entropy appears to take over from the ordered precision.

Though the repeated listening of Bolero might be a stretch for some, this is an intriguing exploration of the mechanics and impulses of desire and ritual as dancers are pushed to their physical and technical limits. In most cases on opening night, they rose to the challenge, although there were a few wobbles in balance towards the end.

As an evening out, watching dance under the stars and plane trees of the centre's intimate limestone-walled front garden is a delightful experience akin to a boutique Ballet at the Quarry. More, please.

Shanghai Bolero, part of the Fremantle Festival, runs until Saturday.

Stephen Bevis



LINK dancers perform Shanghai Bolero at Fremantle Arts Centre. Picture by Jon Green.