



March 10, 2008

Mix program perfect matches

By John Coulbourn, Sun Media

It will tickle your funny bone with the power of its sheer inventiveness, rock you in a blast of high test nostalgia and break your heart, even while it is making your spirits soar.

Which, all in all, probably seemed like a pretty fair payoff for the legions that braved Saturday night's blast of winter weather to attend the opening performance of the National Ballet of Canada's latest evening of mixed programming at the Four Seasons Centre.

Weather notwithstanding, artistic director Karen Kain wasted little time in gently warming an audience that had just stumbled out of the Arctic front parked resolutely at the corner of Queen and University.

In fact, sluggish blood was almost immediately brought to a rolling boil when the curtain went up on the company premier of Marie Chouinard's idiosyncratic 24 Preludes by Chopin, a work featuring a company of 18 splendid young dancers in barely-there costumes by Vandal, sensuously and darkly lit by Axel Morgenthaler.

With pianist Jean-François Latour doing a superb job of rendering the 24 preludes of title, the dancers used Chouinard's inventive, often bird-like choreography to transform the music into a kaleidoscope of emotion and whimsy as the iconic Canadian choreographer seemingly spontaneously reinvents various body parts and incorporates them into her extraordinary vision. And while one was left with the distinct feeling that, in the final analysis, 18 preludes might have proved to be considerably more than the 24 on offer, it provided a breathtaking showcase for dancers like Tanya Howard, Sonia Rodriguez, a returning Matjash Mrozewski and a host of others.