



# Dance review: Ballet Austin's "Belle Redux: A Tale of Beauty and the Beast"

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Updated February 18, 2015 | Filed in [arts](#), [dance](#), [music](#), [reviews](#), [theater](#).



With considerable panache, Ballet Austin premiered "Belle Redux: A Tale of Beauty and the Beast" its latest new production at the Long Center on Valentine's weekend.

Supported by a commission from the 3M corporation, "Belle Redux" marks one the most ambitious new productions Ballet Austin has realized since 2008's much-lauded "Cult of Color: Call to Color."

And indeed on opening night the anticipation of "Belle Redux" was palpable, the enthusiastic capacity crowd at the Long Center eagerly applauding at every moment the movement paused.

A certainly not-so-Disney reimagining of the romantic tale, "Belle Redux" reunited Stephen Mills with one of his surest regular collaborators, composer Graham Reynolds. And it redoubled Mills' collaboration with set and costume designer Michael Raiford.

Mills distilled the "Beauty and the Beast" fable down to its barest essence, abstracting the narrative. He gave Beauty and Beast doppelgängers. He introduced a prologue/backstory distilled from the original 1740 novel version "La Belle et la Bête." And if the 90-minute two-act ballet ended with the anticipated romantic resolution, it did so under a haze of psychological ambiguity, less "happily ever after" than a couple unleashing themselves from twisted constraints.

This was, after all, a very adult "Beauty and the Beast," with turgid undertones, a stark set more urban ruin than fairy tale forest and a score echoing with haunting distortion.

Mills movement vocabulary merged the classical with the new-found. Edgy and abrupt shifts of silhouette altered with moments of formal grace. Small, almost quotidian gestures by one dancer came in between sweeping dramatic movements by a group.

Reynolds' captivating score — a multi-layered edgy gem of pre-recorded finesse — contrasted electronically ethereal sounds with blasting moments of percussive earthiness. A poignant romantic melody laced throughout, emerging with particularly heartfelnness in a string quartet midway through.

Nicely complemented by Tony Tucci's very dimensional lighting, Raiford's three-walled set mixed roughed-up texture with mirrored affects (including actual funhouse mirrors), an adroit combination. Likewise the costumes, which combined dark elegance with ragged luxury; some characters accented with masks or hoods, a sharp red line marking the bare face and torso of the Beast.



Yet for all the enthusiasm that clearly fed such an ambitious creative collaboration, the zeal resulted in a bit of an artistic frenzy with much — at moments too much — happening all at once.

Moving set elements competed for attention with video projections. Choreography often didn't differentiate much between different characters. Overly acrobatic group lifts sometimes weighed down the ballet's momentum. And added characters and scenes left the plot more muddle than originatively reimagined.

And yet, the final pas de deux of Belle (danced by Michelle Thompson who shared the role with Aare Krumpke) and Beast (Edward Carr who shared the role with Paul Michael Bloodgood), brought a refined elegance and emotional impact to the ending, made all the more visually stunning as the duo wrapped themselves in red fabric that covered the floor, drawing the cloth up with their feet.

Thompson and Carr were at the most nuanced here too, their partnering dramatically seamless and heartfelt.

That Belle and Beast had emerged transformed in the end was unmistakable. The journey behind that transformation however remained a little less clear.

[www.balletaustin.org](http://www.balletaustin.org)



*Michelle Thompson and Edward Carr in "Belle Redux"*



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