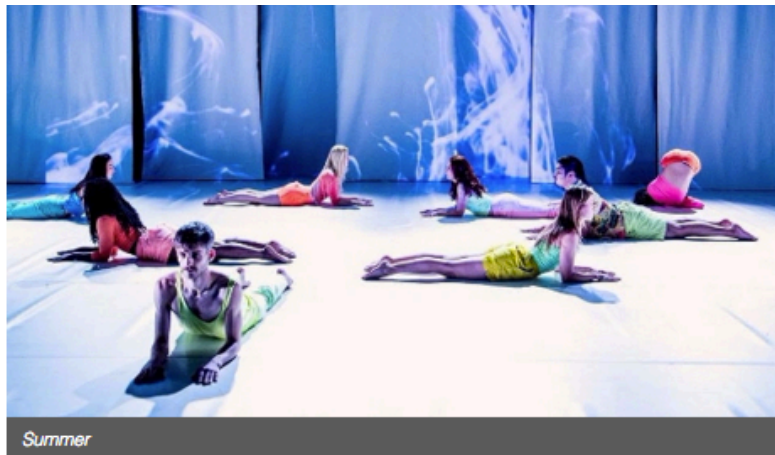


## "SE4SONS" for L.A. Contemporary Dance Company pairs new music and a quartet of new choreographers

★★★★☆ ?

By Steven Woodruff, 17 November 2015

It's generally assumed that music is a second tier partner when it comes to concert dance. But that proved not to be the case recently with local performances of Mariinsky Ballet where it was the orchestra and its imaginative playing that generally overwhelmed performances of both classic and contemporary masterworks. In performances last weekend by Los Angeles Contemporary Dance Company at the Atwater Village Theater complex it was the music again that often conveyed the more consistently imaginative part of the program.



Summer

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In the company's new evening length work "SE4SONS", musician and composer Eric Mason and his fellow instrumental collaborators offered an imaginative and amiable "remix" version of Vivaldi's concerti for *The Four Seasons* as a platform for four choreographers generally new to the company. The recorded music – piano, violin, cello, brass and sampled sound – felt at times like a live ensemble. Mason's music didn't always drill down into the concerto format or offer strikingly retooled expression as Arvo Pärt and others have done in their re-engineered music, but it did provide an inventive, remade suite, a kind of *tabula rasa* of the new as well as the familiar, offering a level playing field that didn't force the choreographers down any prescribed pathway. In the end, it left the choices for how the dancing might eventually look wide open.

It was a surprise then that so much of the actual dancing looked so similar in each of the four sections. Following in the traditional playing order spring through winter, each section had a brief prologue of projected images to set the scene. There were no wildly divergent statements here, and it was the company's own contemporary dance style, now set by 10 years of concert activity in Los Angeles, and not the choreographer's intentions that seemed to determine the basic common denominator for how the evening looked on stage.

Only "SUMMER" choreographed by Mecca Vazie Andrews ventured afield with something different, but her worn theater dance tropes – pop culture stereotypes, stagey comedy, and dancers in speaking roles kibitzing with the audience – proved as uninventive as the movement that followed. In general, the unexpected musical additions (for example a smoky muted trumpet, a Hammond organ, and drum kit backups) seemed not to push the movement in responsive directions. Costumes were similarly vague with few distinguishing designs that either unified or set apart the individual works.



The theater itself also came with limiting features. A small 99-seat space with no wings, the layout challenged choreographers to take dancers on and off the stage without awkward lapses. Large ensemble sections often felt crowded and restrained. Smaller ensembles generally looked better. In a couple of sequences dancers at the front of the stage obscured upstage action for the audience positioned lower in the theater's bank of seats.

There were, however, moments that shone brightly. The section of shared partnering in "FALL" saw the ensemble on stage manipulate their fellow dancers in unexpected, undulating aerial patterns. JM Rodriguez and Gakenia Muigai cut loose in Rosalynde LeBlanc's choreography for "WINTER", burning through their extended and intensely physical duo. It was the kind of stage-filling action that had been missing most of the evening. Watching their interplay, especially facial expressions, proved as powerful an indication of connection as the movement itself. And Genevieve Carson also shone here in her generous and explosive dancing. It was a pity that we had to wait until nearly the end to see it.