

Queensland
Ballet

ARTISTIC DIRECTOR LI CUNXIN



GLASS HEART

Production Notes for the Classroom

Contextual Information

OVERVIEW

Amy Hollingsworth's *Glass Heart* was choreographed in 2017 as part of Queensland Ballet's *Bespoke*, the first of an annual series of mixed bills. Queensland Ballet's 2017 *Bespoke* featured new repertoire created through collaborative creative partnerships and innovative practice.

As part of this season, three new pieces *Glass Heart*, *Rationale/Animal* and *Chameleon* were commissioned, which provided the respective artists, Amy Hollingsworth, Jack Lister and Stephanie Lake, the opportunity to explore boundaries of dance. By incorporating the use of digital media and working within a genre of dance that sits outside Queensland Ballet's familiar space, *Bespoke* challenged traditions.

Supported by Arts Queensland's Queensland Arts Showcase Program, Queensland Ballet's 2017 *Bespoke* aimed to contribute to the capacity and vibrancy of the Queensland arts and cultural sector by engaging new audiences and showcasing and professionally developing artists. By offering an opportunity to develop new works of significance through cross-arts practice and experimentation a multi-sensory experience of ideas emerged.



DANCE PIECES

Bespoke consisted of three new contemporary dance works:

GLASS HEART

Choreographer Amy Hollingsworth
Creative Consultant/Composer/Vocalist Katie Noonan
Music Producer/Composer cIn (Callan Alexander)
Lighting Designer Cameron Goerg
Costume Concept Amy Hollingsworth
Costume Design Coordinator Noelene Hill
Dancers Queensland Ballet Jette Parker Young Artists

RATIONALE / ANIMAL

Choreographer Jack Lister
Music Fearful Symmetries
Composer John Adams
Lighting Designer Cameron Goerg
Costume Concept Jack Lister
Costume Design Coordinator Noelene Hill
Dancers Queensland Ballet dancers

CHAMELEON

Choreographer Stephanie Lake
Composer Robin Fox
Lighting Designer Cameron Goerg
Costume Concept Stephanie Lake
Costume Design Coordinator Noelene Hill
Dancers Queensland Ballet dancers

Contextual Information

AMY HOLLINGSWORTH

Born and raised in Australia and classically trained at The Australian Ballet School, Hollingsworth danced as a leading dancer in companies such as Rambert Dance Company, Royal New Zealand Ballet, Peter Schaufuss Balletten, Bonachela Dance Company, Michael Clark Company, Hofesh Shechter Company, George Piper Dances and Sydney Dance Company. With an international performance and creative career spanning large-scale classical ballet to independent contemporary dance, film and pop music, Hollingsworth is a highly versatile director of dance with a strong, passionate, musical and emotionally resonant creative voice.

In 2016, Hollingsworth joined Queensland Ballet as Ballet Mistress and Creative Associate. Hollingsworth also directs, mentors and coaches through her own company Bespoke Movement, specialising in performance excellence, optimal physicality and the cultivation of creative genius.

As a choreographer, Hollingsworth draws on her artistic experiences as a dancer, choreographer and rehearsal director, working across classical ballet and contemporary dance genres.

QUEENSLAND BALLET JETTE PARKER YOUNG ARTISTS

***Glass Heart* was performed by Queensland Ballet's**

Jette Parker Young Artists, offering them an exceptional opportunity for professional development.

The Queensland Ballet Jette Parker Young Artist apprenticeship program enables a small group of young dancers from around the world to join Queensland Ballet to refine their technique, access performance opportunities and enjoy elite mentoring.

These early-career dancers were intimately involved in the organic creative process of *Glass Heart*. They worked with a new score, performed live by Katie Noonan, who brought a level of excellence to the production which they had not previously experienced.

The Queensland Ballet Jette Parker Young Artist Program is named in honour of Jette Parker of Oak Foundation, whose visionary support has enabled this initiative.

THE PRODUCTION

Underpinning *Glass Heart* is the concept of how people cope within the world they live; how people may become urban warriors with an unrelenting desire to be everything, do everything and achieve everything. With this idea of urban warriors, the artistic team decided to create an urban landscape (cityscape), an emotional heart that the piece could be set in. The movements, music, set, lighting and costumes all draw from this central theme and associated aesthetic of the slightly ugly, gritty and industrial side of humanity.



Synopsis

In a world that is hyper-connected, we as humans have somehow become more disconnected than ever. We may be engaged with the world at an intellectual level, but emotionally we seem more distant.

Exploring the intensely close relationship between the beauty and ugliness of human nature, we look to the world where so many people have become urban warriors who must be everything and do everything, where we have come to protect ourselves, to disassociate from the harsh realities we sometimes need to face. Then there are those few who do feel it all so keenly — the empaths, the fragile hearts.

How do we as humans inhabit that space in the middle, that allows us to feel and engage without being crushed by the weight of it all?

To an incredible new commission with live vocal and music production, *Glass Heart* illustrates the very human struggle to know how to 'be' in the world and the challenges we may need to confront.



The Production

MOVEMENT

Hollingsworth's diverse artistic and choreographic experiences across dance genres can be seen in *Glass Heart* where she combines aspects of contemporary dance and classical ballet.

Her choreographic approach and concept are consistent with that of contemporary dance. However, the movement vocabulary is drawn from the Queensland Ballet Jette Parker Young Artists' classical ballet technique, featuring lengthened extensions and balances. Hollingsworth has also pushed these young dancers past their artistic boundaries by including freer use of their arms and torso, movements usually found in contemporary dance.

MUSIC

The music consists of three components layered upon each other.

Forming the base of the music is cIn's (electronic producer and DJ) 'bed', a score consisting of an electronic soundscape which anchors the dancers and choreography. He also performs live a layer of sounds and embellishments onstage with the dancers. The third layer consists of Noonan's vocals performed live. Noonan also has onstage access to two apparatuses which she uses to distort her vocal sound, morphing the tambour (tone colour) and pitch.

The combination of these three layers creates a juxtaposition between the beautiful, pure and angelic characteristics of Noonan's voice and the throbbing, unrelenting, gritty and urban aesthetic of the electronic soundscape.

SET AND LIGHTING

***Glass Heart* was performed in the Powerhouse theatre.**

The industrial aesthetic of the theatre influenced decisions made regarding the set and reinforces images of an urban landscape. The theatre space is stripped back without wings or a backdrop, exposing the rough surfaced brick walls, a piece of art itself. Graffiti can be seen on the side walls and steel pylons rise upward, supporting the gantry and audience balcony.

Dividing the space laterally and vertically are a series of platforms and steps which Noonan sings from throughout the piece, as well as single unit of silver scaffolding situated upstage left. CIn performs from the top of the scaffolding, indicating his significance to the work. The use of vertical lines and various textures hints at a rooftop parkour setting, where the skyline of surrounding buildings are visible.

The lighting enhances the set, reinforcing a streetscape-like feel. At times lights shine in patches like streetlights in a neighbourhood. At other times, warm shafts of lights come from different directions like glows emanating outward from windows. Lights are also streamed upward and vertically on the backwall, creating an image of light coming from a street below which bleeds into the space the dancers inhabit.

There's one section (labelled the photocopier) where the lighting takes precedence. While the music travels around the space, from near to far and washing over the audience, the lighting motions correlate; a series of short lighting cues which are shone from a single (and different) source each time, move and sweep over the audience like a photocopier scanner. This section breaks the fourth wall and includes audiences in the work who, along with the dancers, are being scanned by the lights. This may reflect ways that 'technology happens to people'.

COSTUMES

Reflecting the theme of urban warriors, the costumes consist of a variety of black outfits; each dancer wearing different designs (such as sleeves or no sleeves) made from different fabrics (such as wool, leather, silk and satin) with different qualities (such as sheer and shiny). The costumes are utilitarian, enabling the dancers to access their full range of movements.

Despite the variety of fabrics and designs which reinforce the individual and unique identities of the dancers, they are all dressed in black, a method which Hollingsworth uses to create uniformity. This contrast between diversity and uniformity offers a sense that they are all individuals but part of a collective trying to function together.

Additionally, the dancers commence the piece wearing clothing items that might be worn by city dwellers, for example jackets, hoodies and coats. As the piece progresses, these are shed and their individuality is further revealed to the audience.

Q & A with Amy Hollingsworth

BALLET MISTRESS AND CREATIVE ASSOCIATE

Your work at Queensland Ballet consists of a dual role of Ballet Mistress and Creative Associate. What was your role while working on *Bespoke*?

As a Ballet Mistress I work with the other artistic staff and the dancers throughout the year to stage works, teach technique classes, rehearse pieces, and develop the dancers' technique and artistry.

During *Bespoke*, I worked as a Creative Associate, collaborating with Li (Queensland Ballet Artistic Director) to curate the triple-bill. Essentially, I discussed new ideas with Li and developed the artistic vision of the production. I then had to ensure every element fed into what we wanted that program to look like and represent.

In this role I also assisted the other choreographers, Jack Lister and Stephanie Lake, with their own pieces. I acted as a sounding board for their ideas and as a provocateur to challenge them in a constructive way; helping them consider alternative approaches that would allow them to keep moving forward with their works. It was also Stephanie's first time working with ballet dancers so I assisted in helping the dancers relate to her contemporary dance vernacular and movement.

Simultaneously, I was working as a choreographer and creative director for my own piece *Glass Heart*.

What is the concept for your piece *Glass Heart* and how have you used the elements of dance to communicate this?

The concept of *Glass Heart* is multi layered. It first examines the intensely close relationship between the beauty and ugliness of human nature. Within this, I was specifically interested in how people are able to find a balance between the two spaces (the urban warrior and the fragile heart/empath); where they are able to feel and engage without being crushed by the weight of it all.

Regarding communication of intent, I try not to present the concept in a narrative or didactic way. Rather, I look at the emotional states that I feel represent these dichotomies — for example, the ugliness and beauty of human nature — and then I explore those emotional states through movement.

In one section of the piece, we explored the unrelenting nature of society, feelings of unrest, unease and agitation and yet the strong desire to constantly achieve more. I created a direct relationship between the music and movement which both build unrelentingly. As the music becomes more rhythmically and melodically complex, the number of dancers performing increased, the size (dimension) of their movements became larger and they travelled further through the space in more complex, intricate and agitated floor pathways. During this section, the relationship between the ten dancers was highlighted where they worked as one organism consisting of many parts which continually broke apart to then reform in different shapes. Here, short moments of unison were used to offer audiences a moment of peace before building again. These elements worked together to disturb the eye and create an unrelenting pace which built over the course of the section.

In contrast, another section of the piece explored a sense of heaviness that we can feel when we ache for quiet. During this section, nine dancers softly manipulated the movements of the tenth dancer, whose own gentle movement qualities and heavy weight created a sense of surrender — the empty space we enter once anxiety is exhausted.

GLASS HEART

Q & A with Amy Hollingsworth

BALLET MISTRESS AND CREATIVE ASSOCIATE

Describe your process of collaborating with Katie Noonan and cIn.

Glass Heart was created through a three-way collaboration between myself as choreographer; Katie Noonan as singer, musician and composer; and cIn (Callan Alexander) as DJ and electronic producer.

Firstly, we met to discuss and explore a range of different concepts that could become the central themes of *Glass Heart*. We selected those we were most passionate about. For me, making art is my way of addressing issues and coping with the world.

Once we decided on the concept of *Glass Heart*, I created a storyboard which detailed the emotional journey of the piece so that Callan had a framework for how long each section would be. Simultaneously, Katie and Callan were having more technical conversations. Callan would send music that he had been working on to Katie and myself and we would listen and provide feedback, which would then inform further development of the storyboard.

Once the electronic music was created, Katie and I decided which sections of the score would include vocals. The vocals continued to develop even during the recording process where Katie recorded multiple layers to harmonise with herself.

Once the score was complete, I began listening to it repeatedly, imagining the piece's physical and visual details.

What was your choreographic process for *Glass Heart*?

The emotional storyboard I developed very early acted like the broad brushstrokes of the work, providing me with a structure (number of sections and the way they were ordered). Each section of the piece was to explore a different 'world' (a concept absorbing the dancer entirely).

I then taught the dancers movement that I also encouraged them to explore through choreographic tasks. Based on what they produced, I drew on the dancers' natural instincts and considered ways that I could push them beyond their familiar.

As we accumulated more movement material for each of the different 'worlds' I commenced a directorial process, both shaping and refining the movement and making structural decisions of where the material was placed in the piece.

I continued to listen to the music throughout the entire process and by doing so, strong cinematic images leapt to my mind's eye, like glimpses of brief moments of the finished work (for example, the flow of movement or a particular lighting effect). These mental images almost always became cornerstone moments of the work.



Queensland Ballet

For more information about how Queensland Ballet supports students and teachers, or to discuss ways to get involved with us, please contact:

Jacob Williams

Education Executive

jwilliams@queenslandballet.com.au

Felicity Mandile

Education and Engagement Director

fmandile@queenslandballet.com.au

queenslandballet.com.au

Sign up to *Repertoire*, whether dance is your profession, your passion — or both

