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## DANCE REVIEW

# The sculpting of a story ballet

### Rodin/Claudel

Choreographed by Peter Quanz  
Les Grands Ballets Canadiens  
At Place des Arts  
In Montreal on Thursday

REVIEWED BY  
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**T**he ever-fascinating era of *fin-de-siècle* France, two famed artists, a tumultuous, tragic love affair – Canadian choreographer Peter Quanz's story ballet *Rodin/Claudel* has a lot going for it, but it hasn't quite emerged yet as the fully formed work it needs to be.

Quanz has been given a huge opportunity – the chance to create a new, full-length ballet – by Gradimir Pankov, artistic director of Les Grands Ballets Canadiens, a major company in Quanz's own country. Until now, Quanz has been creating short works all around the world.

Auguste Rodin (Marcin Kaczorowski) and Camille Claudel (Émilie Durville) were both famous 19th-century French sculptors. Claudel began her career as an artisan in Rodin's studio. They were also lovers, despite an age difference of 24 years. The tale of their work together and their love affair make up most of the first act.

Their relationship ended when Rodin would not choose Claudel. He remained committed to his long-time mistress, the seamstress Rose Beuret (Marie-Eve Lapointe), whom Quanz portrays as a shadowy background figure. The second act follows Claudel's descent into madness. She spent the last 30 years of her life in an asylum.

Quanz has also created a large role for Camille's younger brother, Paul Claudel (Hervé Courtain). The author/diplomat is pictured as a ruthless social climber, using his sister's connections to rise to the top.

The heart of the ballet is the 12-member ensemble, the six men and six women, whom Quanz calls Sculptures. Wearing flesh-coloured bodysuits, they are onstage for most of the ballet, creating the shapes that emanate from the minds of the artists and acting as a sort of Greek chorus in movement.

Designer Michael Gianfrancesco provides a simple, tiled wall that

changes colour to reflect the moods, and a large, rolling platform, a stage within a stage. His costumes evoke the 19th century without getting in the way of the dancing.

The Sculptures are a very clever idea. At times they pose to evoke artworks such as Rodin's *The Thinker* and *The Kiss*. At other moments, they are abstract shapes in space, an ensemble weaving together and then unfolding like a living kaleidoscope.

Quanz's second act is strong. It begins with Claudel's abortion, and then segues into the mad destruction of her art pieces and her final breakdown. The ballet ends with Rodin, in the famous *Thinker* pose, with the ever-faithful Beuret by his side.

There could be more clarity in the story, though. The abortion doctor (Jean-Sébastien Couture) is inexplicably given a virtuoso solo, when it is Claudel who should be the focus at this point. And the narrative's pacing is problematic. The first act tends to be dreamy in tone and static in its mood. Some variety occurs with the introduction of Rodin's artisans and models, but the act is dominated by Rodin and Claudel. Unfortunately, their *pas de deux* lacks passion, and the confrontation that ends the act between Rodin, Claudel and Beuret is not dramatic enough.

Quanz has created some lovely lifts for the love duets, and Rodin and Claudel mirror the Sculptures in the gentle ebb and flow of their physicality. Over all, however, the performances of Durville and Kaczorowski suffer from being too restrained.

For his score, Quanz has chosen a pastiche of French composers – Berlioz, Debussy, Poulenc, Ravel, Roussel and Satie. Modernist Russian composer Alfred Schnittke is there for darkness. Conductor Allan Lewis ensures the diverse music blends smoothly.

Quanz has gone a long way toward proving himself a choreographic storyteller with an ambitious subject. As his ballet has its world premiere, its parts are still greater than its whole. But *Rodin/Claudel* could become a jewel in the crown of Les Grands Ballets.

*Rodin/Claudel* continues in Montreal until Oct. 29.