

Velocity



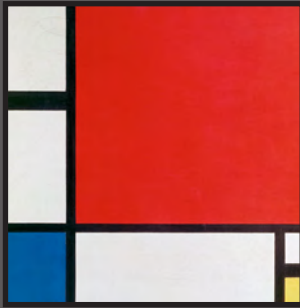
WHAT YOU'RE WATCHING

A thrilling departure from traditional ballet norms, *Velocity* is a high-speed exploration of classical technique. Created by Welch for The Australian Ballet in 2003, *Velocity* garnered critical acclaim for its explosive twists and virtuosic dance. Welch, reflecting on the piece, noted, “*Velocity* is true classical dance at its most agile and exciting. I’m playing with the speed and agility of classical ballet. This work tests the limits and talents of the dancers, because they’re going as fast as they can, pushing their technique and bravado.”

WHAT YOU'RE LISTENING TO

Velocity is set to two short orchestral works by the American composer Michael Torke: *Ash* (1988) and *Green* (1986), part of Torke’s series of “color pieces” inspired by his synesthesia. In both works, Torke takes a single musical idea and plays with tension and release, cause and effect; although harmonies might “sound” tonal, they eschew traditional harmonic development in celebration of a single, vibrant sonority. *Ash* is insistent and driving; listen for echoes of Beethoven. *Green*, by contrast, has a shimmering pulse reminiscent of the American minimalist tradition, a major influence on Torke.

MONDRIAN MUSE



Composition II in Red, Blue, and Yellow, 1930, Kunsthaus Zürich

Backing *Velocity*'s high-speed moves is set design by Kandis Cook, inspired by the illustrious Dutch painter Piet Mondrian.

Renowned for his role in the development of abstract art, Mondrian is known for his distinctive style that emphasizes geometric forms, primary colors - red, blue, yellow - and a grid of black lines. His approach, known as Neoplasticism, reflects his interest in achieving a balance between order and dynamism, influencing modern art and design significantly.

"As a painter, his work is characterized by meticulous organization, line, shape, and symmetry -- elements that resonate deeply with the world of dance," says Stanton Welch. "When choreographing, it often feels like creating lines and shapes, and as a dancer, you focus on these elements in your own movements. My reaction to his paintings wasn't about him as a person but about how their structured organization and symmetry mirrored my appreciation for these qualities."



EN POINTE

The Art of Precision

Stanton Welch AM talks *Velocity*'s creation, its connection to his other works, and what first-time ballet viewers should watch for.

***Velocity* was created in 2003 for The Australian Ballet – the same year, you were appointed Houston Ballet Artistic Director. Can you walk me through what you remember of the creation process?**

Stanton Welch AM: I moved to America in 2000, so *Velocity* was my first work with The Australian Ballet after leaving the company. The original cast of *Velocity* were up and coming dancers. Only one or two of them were principals, but nearly all of them became principals later, so I had a really strong cast. Having been in America for a while, I brought a little more American influence to this piece than what The Australian Ballet had experienced from me before. The first movement features predominantly female dancers, while the second movement focuses on the male dancers. Despite their roles or where they are on stage, all the dancers were expected to perform with the intensity and skill of top-tier ballerinas or their male counterparts. This was a challenge, but the cast really rose to it; each dancer brought their A-game. *Velocity* became a showcase for a group of hungry, highly talented young dancers pushing themselves to out-dance, out-turn, and out-jump one another.

Watching *Velocity*, it's reminiscent of *Divergence* in a way – do you see any similarities in the two?

SW: Definitely. *Divergence*, *Velocity*, *Tu Tu* – they're all a part of the same concept

of looking at dance as a dancer, and then the characters in the ballet become the emotions of dancers. In *Velocity* and *Divergence*, I explored different facets of classical dance. *Divergence* journeys through each type of classical dance, which is why each movement is different, whereas *Velocity* is just one concept. Unlike *Tu Tu*, which reflected on the moods of a dancer and what it felt like to be in a tutu, *Velocity* is about the accuracy and the speed and the dynamic of people who really love virtuoso dancing. The entire ensemble embodies this energetic, high-level approach to dance.

To someone who might be watching *Velocity* and seeing ballet for the first time, what should they be looking for when it comes to classical technique?

SW: I'd encourage the general public to think of the Olympics, particularly events like diving, gymnastics, or synchronized swimming, where precision is key. Even if you can't pinpoint every technical detail, you can still appreciate the overall excellence of the performance. That's what you should be looking for in *Velocity*; these excellent technicians all doing extremely intricate, fast-paced movements. And the real thrill is seeing all the dancers performing at their peak at exactly the same time. There's something so extraordinary about this synchronized perfection; that's what gives you goosebumps. ●