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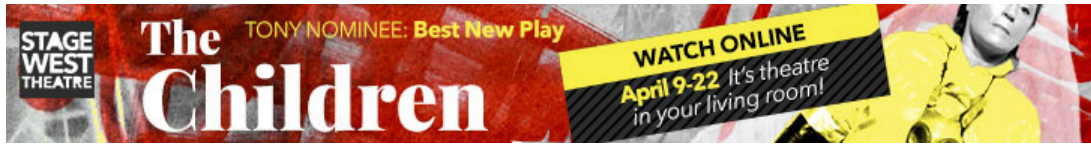
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Choice Ballet

Ballet Frontier of Texas, with guests Avant Chamber Ballet and Ballet North Texas, offered a lovely performance with Director's Choice.

by [Emily Sese](#)

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Photo: Enrica Tseng

Ballet Frontier presents Director's Choice 2020



Fort Worth — In a time of uncertainty, one can always count on **Ballet Frontier of Texas** for a display of youthful energy, precise technique, and an overall joyous interpretation of classical and contemporary ballet. A spring staple, the company's **Director's Choice** production stays fresh each year with the inclusion of local guest companies. This year's edition, on Feb . 22, featured an all-ballet theme thanks to **Avant Chamber Ballet** and **Ballet North Texas** — revealing that with help from talented dancers and innovative choreographers, even an "antique" movement form like ballet can still be reinvented to fit the current times.

Ballet Frontier Artistic Director Chung-Lin Tseng and Artistic Advisor Enrica Guana Tseng frequently recall choreography from their former mentor Roy



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Tobais, whose influence is evident in most of the company's repertory. In a resetting of his work *Mozart K379*, the dancers were brilliant in their accuracy in rather challenging technical partnering. For a special treat, violinist Swang Lin and pianist Shields-Collins Bray played Mozart's romantic accompaniment while pairs of dancers swirled in perfect unison. Main couple Marlin Alimanov and Elizabeth Villarreal impressed as usual — exuding elegance in their elongated reaches and quick waltz steps. A contemporary ballet blanc, *Motzart K379* acted as a cheery welcome.

Serving as a timely reminder during this election year, *19th Amendment* showcased Katie Puder's ability to reveal the strength and empowerment found in the art of ballet. Puder is no stranger to incorporating elements of girl-power in her work. Avant Chamber Ballet's (ACB) Women's Choreographer Project is in its seventh year, offering a platform for female artists to take center stage. True to ACB style, ballerinas partnered with live musicians from MAKE, enacting their sharp accents through harsh stops and diagonal formations. From a low lunge, dancers contracted into tight balls; balancing on their toes precariously. Moments like this demonstrated the urgency behind their phrasework while also embodying the emotional fight for women's equality. Even their uplifted releases carried a heavy quality, exposing a resilient perseverance in both movement ideas and conceptual themes.



Photo: Enrica Tseng

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Ballet North Texas made their post-intermission debut with Nicolina Lawson's *Tchaikovsky's Trio in A Minor*, a lovely return to the more classical side of ballet. In white romantic tutus with velvety emerald bodices, the dancers fluttered in and out of stop-and-go poses. Soloist Anna Sessions carried the performance due to her captivating stage presence and exciting expressions. While delightful in appearance, the work could benefit from a more cohesive relationships amongst the dancers along with a bit more fluidity in upper body *port de bras*.

Before closing the show with a world premiere, a violinist returned to the stage to explain the premise of the story: based on He Zhanhao and Chen Gang's musical composition, *Butterfly Lovers* follows a classic Chinese folktale of two lovers doomed by the social restrictions of ancient Chinese culture. Chung-Lin Tseng's luscious choreography played out in dreamy sequences — often blurring the lines between past, present, and future with the use of multiple main couples — bringing a beautiful visual complexity to the timeless tale. As Liang Shanbo, Alimanov captured the hearts of performers and viewers alike with his astounding tour sequences and electric turns in second. Another stand-out performance emerged in Nerea Barrondo and Kaito Yamamoto's duets as the "ideal love couple." Since seeing Barrondo's first performance with the company last fall, I'll admit to having a bit of a ballet crush on the brilliant young artist. Her gooey extensions, soft arm stretches, and balance between fluidity and power match the maturity of professional dancers. As lovely as these soloists were, the entire company also showed commendable commitment to Tseng's complicated formations and frequent visual shifts. Overall, *Butterfly Lovers* unveiled an exciting new space of growth for the company — choreographically, technically, and in regard to performance quality.



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CORRECTION: The original review stated that the dancers in Ballet Frontier's *Mozart K379* are pre-professional, which is incorrect; Ballet Frontier offers 30-week contracts for 10 dancers, one of the few ballet companies in DFW to manage this. **TJ**

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