

THE GLOBE AND MAIL

Ballroom gets scorching hot



Paula Citron

Burn the Floor is ballroom-dance nirvana. Fans of *So You Think You Can Dance* and *Dancing with the Stars* will swoon at this live show – which is non-stop, flat-out Terpsichorean fireworks.

This 2009 version is very different from the *Burn the Floor* that first came to town in 2001. The mandate of the earlier incarnation was to present ballroom dance in lavish production numbers. There were 44 dancers and all manner of scenery and costumes to provide context for each dance style.

This time around, *Burn the Floor* is a lean machine: 21 dancers, no scenery, and simple costuming. On stage are two live percussionists (Joseph Malone and Giorgio Rojas) with enough hardware to fill a music store. There are also two live vocalists (Mig Ayesa and Rebecca Tapia), who add their energy to the mix.

In other words, Australian director/choreographer Jason Gilkison has crafted a show that is pure dance. The rationale could be that the *SYTYCD* and *DWTS* phenomena have educated the audience to the point where they don't need context, where ballroom dance can stand alone.

The 10 standard “international style” ballroom dances (waltz, Viennese waltz, foxtrot, tango, Charleston/quickstep, cha cha, samba, rumba, jive and *paso doble*) have been woven together in four extended sections – *Inspirations* and *Things That Swing* (first act) and *The Latin Quarter* and *CODA – The Last Part* (second act). The program gives the breakdown of the dances in each section and the names of the songs that are their soundtracks.

An example of the tapestry that the show weaves together are the four numbers that make up the end of *Inspirations*: A single woman and six men perform a rumba, followed by four women and one man in a jive/cha-cha sequence, that leads into a Viennese waltz, that segues into a waltz for the grand finale.

Another Gilkison signature is dramatic endings. Each sequence concludes with flashy partnering where the woman is held in a devilishly difficult lift that places her upside down, sideways, overhead and the like. The cacophony of screams from the appreciative audience is the de rigueur response.

Couples do get brief solos, but the bulk of the show is made up of group dances. The impact of these ensemble numbers, accompanied by powerful drumming that seeps into the psyche of the audience, is almost overkill.

Many numbers call for bare chests for the men, or open shirts, which is almost sexier. And the women are all sirens of swivel.

The talented, multinational cast hails from six different countries and all the dancers are ballroom champions of some sort. Of the three featured couples, four individuals made it to the finals of *SYTYCD*.

The show is an impressive display of the flash and fire of ballroom dance.