

Stylish and vital finale

DANCE

Something Silver
Academy of Performing Arts
Review: David Hough

The academy's final dance program for the year was notable for the overall quality of ensemble performance, the style and vitality of its classical work — and the ordinariness of some of its contemporary choreography.

The arrival of Margaret Illmann to head the classical section was evident in the restaging of a pas de deux from Kazimir's Colours, a Mauro Bigonzetti work created in 1997, and the coaching she offered in Mark Brinkley's beautifully costumed staging of Act 3 from Coppelia.

Kazimir's Colours exquisitely blends Bigonzetti's choreography with Shostakovich's Piano Concerto No. 1.

Illmann, who premiered the partnership with Robert Tewsley in Stuttgart, has elicited two wonderful performances from Lauren Murray and David Lloyd. One could feel the pair listening to both the music and each other in this tender, 10-minute gem.

Tracie Mitchell is a choreographer who also listens to her music, unacknowledged in That's Not What I Meant, and allows her composition to grow from it.

The idea she explored was the emergence of an individual's creativity by contrasting images

of light and dark that were both beautiful and dramatically effective.

A mimed conversation and storytelling by five dancers on a bench was a witty and amusing introduction. The company was dressed in black, except for bare arms, and this added to the visual impact. The final lighting effect of a bird's, or moth's, wing was an imaginative conclusion to a most satisfying ensemble presentation.

The first two items of the evening ran for 30 minutes each and this was too long by half.

Annabelle Bonnery and Francois Deneulin conceived the idea of taking fragments from their other productions and came up with a work called To Meet You. It had a disco setting and a

recurrent voiceover of "drugs taking their life away".

It was boring for the performers and audience but notable for the eye-catching edginess of Gillian Sarangapani's contribution.

Claudia Alessi's Above and Beyond challenged her dancers in the air as well as on the floor, though the connection between the two was not readily apparent.

Lapses in inspiration resulted too often in dancers running the perimeter of the stage, or purposefully walking from one side to the other, as she sought to explore the place our dreams and aspirations reside.

Coppelia was a technical challenge but a treat to the eye and the joy and enthusiasm of the company were uplifting.



Grace and agility: Academy performers show dancing isn't all gls.



Gold fever: Matteo Bruno as the 23-year-old Herbert Hoover.

The Hoover connection

RON BANKS

In the history of WA gold mining there is no bigger name than Herbert Hoover, who went on to become president of the United States.

Hoover came to the gold mining region around Kalgoorlie and Leonora in 1897, fresh out of Stanford University where he had studied engineering.

He was working for the British mining company Bewick Moreing, which saw in the brash, aggressive 23-year-old American graduate the kind of person who could find and operate mines on the recently developed goldfields of remote Western Australia. His role was to act as a "mine scout" — finding and developing underground gold mines using the most efficient business practices of the times.

Hoover's biggest success was with the Sons of Gwalia mine at Leonora, which was already in operation. His company bought the mine and installed Hoover as its manager, beginning a brief but turbulent period in this famous mine's long history.

Hoover was confronted with a unionised workforce of miners, a situation which he considered was not advantageous to the mine's profitability or efficiency.

With his belief in the American ethos of individualism, Hoover began to employ Italian immigrants as contract workers, precipitating what was to become long-term conflict with the union movement that would extend well into the 1930s and the Depression era.

In their about-to-be-released documentary film, Hoover's Gold, writer and historian Barry Strickland and director Franco di Chiera argue that Hoover was largely responsible for introducing the Italian workforce to the Goldfields, and that his management practice of preferring contract labour would lead 30 years later to the Goldfields race riots of 1934.

Whether Hoover's brief tenure of about three years at Sons of Gwalia can be held responsible for events so far down the track is a moot point but Hoover's Gold mounts its case in a sober, non-sensational yet extremely informative way.

The documentary is based on a play about the life of Hoover originally

written by Strickland for the Cue Festival held in the Murchison gold mining region.

In reshaping the play into a carefully researched documentary film, Strickland and di Chiera have turned not only to other historians but to the descendants of the original Italian workers brought out by Hoover. Their first-hand accounts of being small children in Leonora bring a lively, family history dimension to the crisp, tightly edited accounts by the talking heads who flesh out the story between brief re-enactments of Hoover's life.

Hoover's Gold offers fascinating insights into the development of the Goldfields and the significant role played by Hoover — despite his brief time there. It reveals that Hoover was eventually moved on to investigate mining opportunities in China after personal conflict with his much older boss, Ernest Williams.

He did return on "whistlestop" visits to inspect mining operations in 1903, 1905 and 1907 after becoming head of Bewick Moreing's international operations.

His career would reach its peak in 1928 when he was elected president of the United States. However, the personal philosophy that rugged individualism could create wealth — which he had practised so successfully in WA — did not work for his presidency as the US slid into Depression.

He lost the 1932 election in a landslide to Franklin D. Roosevelt. He died in 1964 but what he did in the latter part of his career is not mentioned in the documentary.

It is apparent from Hoover's Gold that this one-term president was a precocious and determined young man whose early career in WA helped shape his philosophies and gave him the scope to develop his leadership talents.

Strickland and di Chiera's documentary is also an intriguing account of life on the Goldfields for those immigrant families who pioneered one of the State's most important sources of wealth.

Hoover's Gold will screen at Cinema Paradiso on Saturday, Sunday and December 3 and 4 at 5pm. The filmmakers will hold a Q&A session on opening night on Saturday.