


The Beginning, and the End

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— September 2, 2010

August 30th, 2010

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This show is hard. And it is wicked to start the week back from holidays with eight shows in five days (kicking off with a two-show day), plus a put-in rehearsal. That's nine shows, basically. My voice kacked. And my left shoulder (that's the good shoulder) went into complete spasm (and is now the bad shoulder). Fearing I would not make it through Sunday's two shows, I booked out on Saturday afternoon to give my voice some rest, and my shoulder some physio-therapy. I hate to choose the importance of one show over another, but Sunday was an extremely important day to me, to the Company, and to two brave and talented young men.

The matinee saw the Broadway debut, in the role of Billy Elliot, of the young, tiny, blue-eyed wonder, Peter Mazurowski. Peter is magnificent: quiet, focussed, serious, and a little timid at first. He's small, and thin, and his skin is whiter than white... like a good kid from the Northeast who's never seen the sun. And when he looks at you with those baby-blues... he looks right into your soul, and what I see... is Billy.

It's this stage of our relationship - the relationship between Peter and Kate - that is so much like the beginning of the play and the relationship between Billy and Mrs. Wilks. I don't really know this kid yet, but I can sense his deep magic, his will, his courage... and that is what draws me in. That is why I want him to come back again and again. I want to touch that magic. To know that courage. To lock horns with that will.

Peter was shaking in his boots during warm-up. Poor creature. I cannot imagine the pressure. Even so, he got out there and was a lesson in presence. One step at a time, he nailed one moment, and then the next, and then the next! At the curtain call we were united as a Company in our ecstasy at his accomplishment. I ran into him in the staircase at the end of the show... he planned on a good sleep, and looked forward to his next kick at the can! After only one performance, those shaky boots were now still and sure-footed. Good on ya, Peter!

And that was only the matinee!

After a little sushi, and a little nap, the next event began to unfold: the final performance of Liam Redhead in the role of Billy Elliot. (Good Lord! Can the old heart stand this much emotion in one day!?) I watched Liam do his onstage warm-up and saw the young man that has emerged from the boy I watched over a year ago in a class at the National Ballet School of Canada. The growth in his confidence, his desire, his professionalism... all these adult terms that can now be applied as he climbs elegantly into his mid-teens. (How many teenagers do you know that can actually be called elegant?!)

I thought I would be a mess for this one, but the theatre gods can play some strange tricks on you, and I felt off my pins through most of the show. The line between the play and the reality was blurring in the most unpredictable ways, and I was not sure from one moment to the next how I would be affected.

So that even when I stepped on the stage for our final scene I didn't know whether tears would come or not. Mid-scene. "Well... bye, bye miss". Both of us. Calm. Clear. He walks to the door to leave: we are Billy and Mrs. Wilks: confused, emotionally stuck, struggling. He turns, "I'll miss you, Miss". It all rushes up... from the floor, through my body to my heart, my throat, my eyes. "No you won't Billy". And the play works itself out perfectly: we are both crying, and smiling, and loving each other... and my young friend Liam is sent off into his future.

What I see Liam take with him in his suitcase, back to the National Ballet School, is passion. He has learned (and I have had the thrill to witness this learning!) that dance... that acting, singing, performing... comes from a far deeper place than the concepts of the mind or the skills of the body. That when we connect with... whatever you want to call it... guts, soul, fire, ground, God... when we connect with that deeper place... a place outside intellect or experience... we transcend performance and touch art.

Take that art, Liam. Take it wherever your life leads you. And spend it generously.