

Spellbinding David Bowie-Inspired Ballet Makes NYC Debut

1/26/2017 by [Joe Lynch](#)

Wednesday (Jan. 25) night in New York City, I learned you haven't truly lived until you've watched a shirtless ballet dancer lip sync [David Bowie](#) while strutting 30-plus-feet across stage **on his tip toes**, defiantly staring down the audience from beneath the iconic *Aladdin Sane* makeup.

As anyone who's seen concert footage of Bowie during his *Ziggy Stardust* era can attest, there's something physical about Bowie's glam period you don't quite understand until you see it performed on stage. There's a lithe,

prowling-animal sensuality to early career Bowie -- he oozed sex without necessarily being sexy; he exuded confidence without any bravado. So to that end, *Star Dust* -- a modern ballet making its New York premiere this week (following a [Detroit debut last year](#)) at the Joyce Theater performed by [Complexions Contemporary Ballet](#) -- makes more sense in terms of honoring the late icon than watching contemporary artists cover Bowie songs in concert. You're never gonna one-up Bowie with a live cover, but by playing the familiar studio recordings and pairing them with modern dance, you're reminded of the bewitching sensuality stuffed into the vast majority of Bowie's early songs. While the sexuality in "Space Oddity" or even "Rock N' Roll Suicide" might be easily forgotten, when you watch a professional dancer performing to those tracks, that sexuality is suddenly front and center.



Moira Geist, Star Dust performed at Joyce

Of course, *Star Dust* wouldn't work if the choreography were slapdash. But this ballet -- which began taking shape far before his death -- isn't a cheap capitalization, but a thoughtful exploration by choreographer Dwight Rhoden of the way movement reveals additional layers of Bowie's music (something Bowie himself did onstage, mimicking everything from Pierrot the Clown to kabuki over the course of his career).

Opening with strains of "Warszawa" before moving into *Blackstar*'s "Lazarus," the musical program includes "Changes," "Life On Mars," "Space Oddity," "1984," a Peter Gabriel cover of "Heroes," "Modern Love," "Rock N' Roll Suicide," "Young Americans" and an encore to "Let's Dance." Sure, it's always going to be fun to hear Bowie songs blasted over a great soundsystem like the one at the Joyce Theater, but more importantly, the dancers in the Complexions Company are utterly transfixing during the *Star Dust* program.



Even when his music veered into straightforward rock territory, Bowie himself rarely gave into cock rock posturing, so watching a troupe of 15 or so dancers cop a cat-ate-the-canary cabaret attitude while bending and twisting with balletic grace to "classic rock" songs not only made sense, but was an enrapturing delight. I looked around a few times and can honestly say I've never seen more people smiling (or fighting the urge to break into dance) at a ballet.



While "Rock N' Roll Suicide" was an emotional highlight (I saw legit tears in the audience after a lovely, mostly solo dance), the elegiac staging of "Lazarus" was almost as affecting as that song's memorable music video. On the lighter side, "Modern Dance" was pure ecstasy, with the dancers cheekily wiggling jazz hands during the "never wave bye-bye" line, and "Young Americans" was similarly joyous. Even "1984," not a particularly beloved Bowie song, was impossible to look away from thanks to a funky, frenetic performance.

When it ended, the audience was practically ravenous for more. There have been no shortage of Bowie tributes following his death more than a year ago, but if you're in New York City and a Bowie fan, *Star Dust* is a must -- whether you think you enjoy the ballet or not. And considering how inventive, emotionally satisfying and just plain joyful the it was, I'm hoping it lives beyond its scheduled run through Feb. 5, 2017.

Check out dates and times for *Star Dust*, which is preceded by a more abstract but also beguiling ballet called *Gutter Glitter* set to an enveloping sonic collage, at [the Joyce Theater's website](#).

