

Smooth as 'Silk'

Artistic Director Toni Pimble premieres her new works "Silk and Steel" and "First Meeting," while reviving a fan favorite, "The Skinwalkers."



Dance

By Jack Clifford
Oregon Daily Emerald

Although "Skinwalkers" received top billing for the Eugene Ballet's season-opening performances this weekend, the premiere of Artistic Director Toni Pimble's work "Silk and Steel" might just steal the show.

The dance company opens its 1999-2000 schedule Saturday night at the Hult Center for the Performing Arts and then returns for a Sunday matinee.

"Skinwalkers" is a powerful dance piece, drawing its inspiration from a book of paintings by Southwest artist Helen Hardin, a Santa Clara Indian. Hardin's work combined traditional art themes of the Southwest with cubism and expressionism. Each of the seven dances in "Skinwalkers" are named after Hardin paintings.

Pimble premiered this ballet in Eugene five years ago, however, and the re-staging process included reviewing videotapes of those 1995 shows. Dancer Jennifer McNamara, who originally helped the director choreograph "Skinwalkers," also contributed to the comeback effort.

Pimble said she did a little bit of re-choreographing and tightening up of certain dance phrases to satisfy those ballet patrons who might feel too familiar with "Skinwalkers."

"It's always interesting to revisit a piece," Pimble said. "It was nice to have five years in between so I could look at it with fresh eyes."

According to legend, skinwalkers are a secret society and their

actual existence is in question. Of the seven dance segments, Pimble admitted to a preference for one titled "Changing Woman."

That dance incorporates a fertility theme, with a solo female dancer — representing Kokopelli in insect form — taking center stage, until other female dancers join the scene. The group then invites the male dancers to join the ritual.

The stage setting for "The Skinwalkers" captures Hardin's imagery, thanks to costume and set designers Lynn Bowers and Marty Nelson. Lloyd Sobel handled the lighting effects.

Bowers created 13 suspended panels, which are back-painted with Southwest-style art images of birds, and Sobel's lighting process causes an illusion of the birds appearing and disappearing throughout the dances.

After an intermission, the "Silk and Steel" presentation will literally stampede onto the stage, Pimble said.

The first section of the dance is called "Istanpitta," a Spanish term for stampede. Pimble said the festive banners, resembling color crayons, are carried onstage in a progression from primary to secondary colors.

The overall piece relies heavily on a free-association style of dancing, she said.

"What comes out is what comes out," she said. "People watching the show will read their own ideas into the dancing."



"The Skinwalkers" is just one of three dance pieces scheduled for the Eugene Ballet's opening night.

All photos for "The Skinwalkers" courtesy of Kent Peterson

"Silk and Steel" is separated into five sections, she said. It harkens back to an Elizabethan feel, even though there is no direct reference. For one aspect of "Silk and Steel," the director called upon some recent reading she did related to a Renaissance festival. Dancers carrying huge umbrellas, would dance along 15-foot high castle walls, then jump off and float down with help from the umbrellas.

Pimble's dancers will also carry umbrellas — made of aluminum, about three feet in diameter and weighing around 30-35 pounds. Don't expect to see the same end result as the festival, though.

"It would have been really fun to have the dancers jump off the walls," Pimble said, with a laugh. "But I didn't want to end up with any injured dancers."

Local artist Steven Oshatz collaborated with Pimble on the umbrellas' construction, adding his screenprinted silk to the metal structures. His work relationship with Pimble spans 20 years, but he said this particular project added some new twists.

"When we first started talking, Toni would come to my studio and she'd give me ideas that she was working on, but nothing existed really, just a concept," he said. "We went through a process of scaling it down to what was doable and when she finally came with what she wanted, she said 'Go wild.'"

Those initial meetings began about a year-and-a-half ago, and Oshatz just finished his work last Thursday. He said he has not yet seen the completed product.

"It was exciting for me because I

had the opportunity to really play with the silk and dyes the way I wanted to," he said. "Toni just wanted to create exciting objects for the dancers to play with."

Pimble admitted to a longtime desire to work with steel and she sees parallels between her concept for "Silk and Steel" and the dancers who perform the piece.

"You can draw parallels to the dancers being very graceful, but very strong," she said.

The third ballet performance is a piece titled "First Meeting." The title explains the section, as it revolves around dancers meeting choreographer, the public meeting the dancers, and the dancers first meeting on stage.

"The Skinwalkers" runs Oct. 23 at 8 p.m. and Oct. 24 at 2:30 p.m. Tickets are \$12-\$55. Call 682-5000 for more information.

Find Love



FREE Personals

Check out collegestudent.com's online personals

collegestudent.com

Welcome Students!

Ask for your student discount card!

9-5 Mon-Sat

1471 Railroad Blvd. • 338-7654

Tools, Equipment,
Supplies, Books, Clay,
Stone Sculpture,
Enameling, Mosaics,
Glass, Candles and more!

Georgies

CERAMIC AND CLAY CO.

Come eat with the Blue Hen today.

She'll give you a warm fuzzy feeling and some good eats.



Open for Breakfast 7a.m.

A lotta food for a little money.

1769 Franklin Blvd. • 284-2583 • Eugene & Florence
BREAKFAST • LUNCH • DINNER