

Reviving 'Coppelia'

Eugene Ballet Company's co-founder Riley Grannan pops into the role of Dr. Coppelius for this weekend's ballet performance, choreographed by Toni Pimble



Photos courtesy The Hult Center



By Sara Jarrett
Oregon Daily Emerald

The curtain opens. As the crowd hushes, Leo Delibes' music washes over the silence.

Thus, "Coppelia," Arthur Saint-Leon's classical comedic ballet, begins. The date and place is not May 25, 1870, Paris, however, but Feb. 26, 2000, Eugene. Instead of the Theatre Imperial de l'Opera, it's the Hult Center for the Performing Arts.

Though these scenarios are worlds apart, the content of the ballet is remarkably similar.

Toni Pimble, Eugene Ballet Company's artistic director and choreographer, said that she hasn't changed the story for Saturday's performance because the music was written specifically for this ballet.

Although many steps have been lost over the years and Pimble has had to re-choreograph a few sections, some of the original choreography has managed to weather the test of time.

"'Coppelia' is one of the most popular story ballets," she said. "Like the 'Nutcracker,' it has a charm all its own." It's one of the most accessible ballets, Pimble explains. Incidentally, E.T.A. Hoffman is the author of both "Der Sandman," the story of which this ballet is based on, and "The Nutcracker and the Mouse King," the story that inspired the "Nutcracker" ballet two years later in 1890.

"Coppelia" was also the first ballet to have a doll come to life. In addition, it was the first to introduce the czardas (Hungarian folk dance) as a

theater dance. Following "Coppelia," many choreographers began incorporating such folk dances into their ballet. "Swan Lake," "Sleeping Beauty" and "Nutcracker," are among the ballets that followed suit.

Because the story of "Coppelia" is easy to follow, it provides excellent family entertainment. In fact, the story was written for children.

The tale begins as Dr. Coppelius, a mysterious doll maker, creates Coppelia, a beautiful new doll whom he strategically places in his upstairs window to fool passersby into thinking she is his

character dances, Pimble said, because it's out of the ordinary. The most difficult aspects to carry out in a ballet like this one, she explains, are the character transformations.

This performance of "Coppelia" also features Riley Grannan, managing director of the Eugene Ballet, dancing the role of Dr. Coppelius. After a lengthy dancing career beginning at the age of 17 in Eugene, Grannan co-founded the Eugene Ballet Company with Pimble in 1978.

In between, he received a bachelor's in fine arts from the School of Performing Arts at the United States International University in San Diego, continued on to the Academie des Grand Ballets Canadiens in Montreal, then professionally toured Germany with various companies.

This show will mark Grannan's third occasion at personifying the wacky role of Dr. Coppelius, yet it's been a decade since his last endeavor. Coming back to the character after ten years has allowed him to see the depth and dimensions of this doll maker, he says.

Early in his career, Grannan played the role with an edge, according to Pimble. But now, Grannan is "playing him a little bit more lovable than he used to," she said. "He's softening with age."

"I now see the eccentricities this character can develop because I have some of them myself," Grannan said, chuckling.

"Dr. Coppelius is nearsighted on his life," Grannan said, who admits that he went through a similar stage, but he laughs and says he's pulling out of it.

Besides Grannan, "Coppelia" features Jennifer Martin as Coppelia, Sylvia Poolos as Swanilda and Maxim Tchernyshev as Franz. This ballet comedy will be performed at the Hult Center on Feb. 26 at 8 p.m. and Feb. 27 at 2:30 p.m. Ticket prices range between \$12 and \$55 and can be purchased by calling the Hult Center ticket office at 682-5000, ordered on-line at eugeneballet.org or bought at the EMU box office.



daughter. Franz, a local peasant boy, is instantly deceived.

When he falls in love with the doll, Franz's fiance Swanilda is justifiably jealous. Then when Swanilda sneaks into Dr. Coppelius' workshop, a story of mistaken identity and magic ensues as both Franz and Dr. Coppelius return. In the end, Franz realizes that the wax doll is inadequate, and his love for Swanilda is rekindled.

Last performed by the Eugene Ballet Company in 1991, this show marks the company's fourth presentation of "Coppelia." The first was during the company's first season in the Hult Center in 1983, Pimble said.

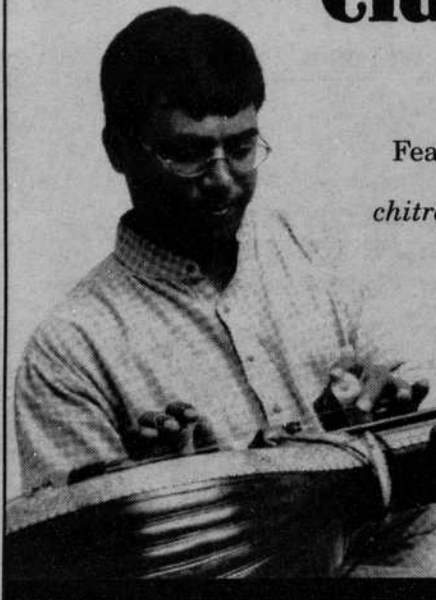
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