

## dance

## Men in Tutus

Spend Valentine's Day with the Trocks

by Rebecca Ragain

When dancer Tory Dobrin signed up with Les Ballets Trockadero de Monte Carlo in 1980, his colleagues warned him that joining the all-male comedy ballet company would ruin his career.

Oh, how times have changed.

Now, Dobrin is artistic director of the all-gay company, affectionately known as the Trocks, which is warmly received all over the world, from stages in Tokyo to Athens, from Buenos Aires to London.

During a recent two-week run at the Joyce Theater in New York City, Dobrin noticed children in the audience: "In 27 years, [the Trocks went from] career wrecker to something suitable for children. The company has not changed its outlook; society has."

A Trocks performance today promises much the same thing that it promised when the group was founded in 1974: men in tutus, dramatic makeup and toe shoes, dancing a repertoire of classical ballet and modern dance works with inimitable style, a combination of tribute and parody.

The Trocks' dancers are technically proficient



The all-gay Les Ballets Trockadero de Monte Carlo combines tribute and parody in its performances of classical ballet and modern dance works.

professionals. Many have trained at and performed with well-respected institutions such as the Merce Cunningham Repertory Group and Martha Graham School.

Dobrin explains: "We don't get people who just want to do the drag aspect, because they work too hard. You really have to love ballet."

In one review of a Trocks performance, *New York Times* dance critic Jennifer Dunning complimented dancer Robert Carter's fouetté turns, writing that the turns would be impressive for "an actual female ballerina trained from childhood to dance on point."

Actually, it was "ballerina Olga Supphozova" whom Dunning complimented on those turns, because all the Trock dancers go by stage names, many of them Russian-esque.

Every dancer has a male and female stage persona, each with a separate backstory. For instance, Olga Supphozova "made her first public appearance in a KGB lineup under dubious circumstances." Carter's male persona, Yuri Smirnov, "joined the Kirov Opera because he thought Borodin was a prescription barbiturate."

When a new dancer joins the Trocks, Dobrin

pulls out his "library of names" and matches a name to the dancer. The library is always growing. One name was suggested by a critic in London; another came from a radio interview in which the Trocks asked for suggestions from the listeners.

The dancers, who are usually natural comedians as well as skilled dancers, are encouraged to develop their own stage personas. Dobrin likens it to the television show *Saturday Night Live*, on which the actors repeatedly play a particular character, making it their own.

The Trocks style of comedy is a blend of camp and subtle humor. The choreography utilizes planned collisions and other "accidents"; the dancers rely on facial expressions to convey absurdity, while still dancing superbly.

Dobrin explains how the dancers balance proper technique with comedic intent: "All good actors use their faces, so these guys are actors. All good dancers exaggerate movement, so they have put those two elements together. That's the hard part."

As for the choreography, the Trocks perform some modern works, such as a suite of waltzes originally choreographed by Isadora Duncan and a

satire on Paul Taylor's style, but they shine brightest when dancing classical ballet.

The Trocks have even revived a number of historical pieces that more traditional ballet companies have let slide from their repertoires.

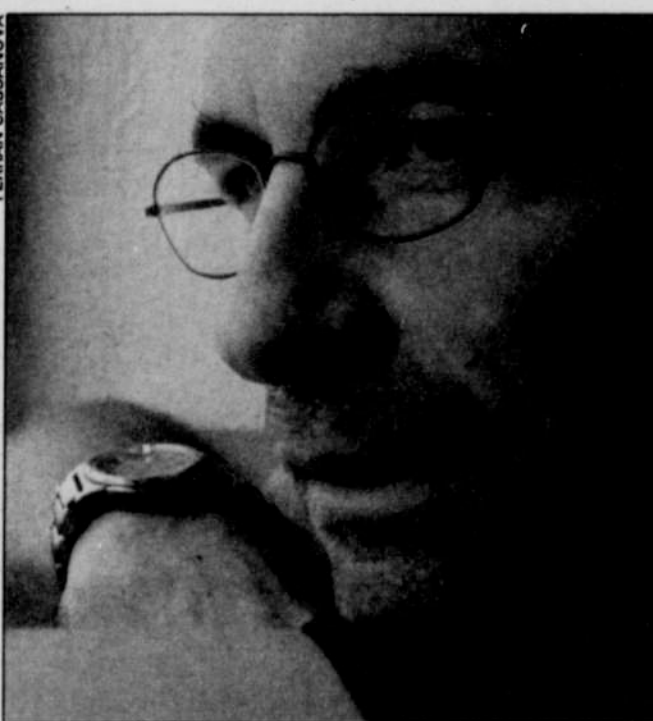
"We love these older works," says Dobrin. "They're fun to parody."

Because modern works are more often performed in tights and leotards than in tutus, it's possible that the Trocks dancers could be mistaken for muscular women—which just takes the fun out of it. As Dobrin puts it, "We want the audience to know we're men, and that is best accomplished if you put someone in a tutu."

And if the costume shows a little of the ballerina's chest hair, so much the better. 10

White Bird presents LES BALLETS TROCKADERO DE MONTE CARLO 7:30 p.m. Feb. 14 at Arlene Schnitzer Concert Hall, 1037 S.W. Broadway. Tickets are \$19-\$43 from 503-790-2787.

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Artistic director Tory Dobrin encourages the dancers to develop their own stage personas.



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