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The performance is part of 4x4: The Ballet Project, a special program put together by White Bird, in honor of the local dance presentation company's 10th anniversary.

In addition to OBT, White Bird is bringing three other West Coast ballet companies to the stage for those two evenings: Eugene Ballet Company, Pacific Northwest Ballet and San Francisco Ballet.

"I feel really confident and good about us being up against these other companies, both with White Bird and at the Kennedy Center, with this work," says Stowell.

The Programming Puzzle

Although both the Kennedy Center and White Bird events are exciting ones, it was challenging for Stowell to add the extra performances into OBT's schedule. The company's budget, after all, is finite.

"It all happened after I had our season planned, so we've had to scramble for time and money," says Stowell.

But planning and budgetary issues like these are anything but new for Stowell. As artistic director, his job is to balance a dizzying array of factors including financial considerations, artistic integrity, the dancers' needs and audience members' interests.

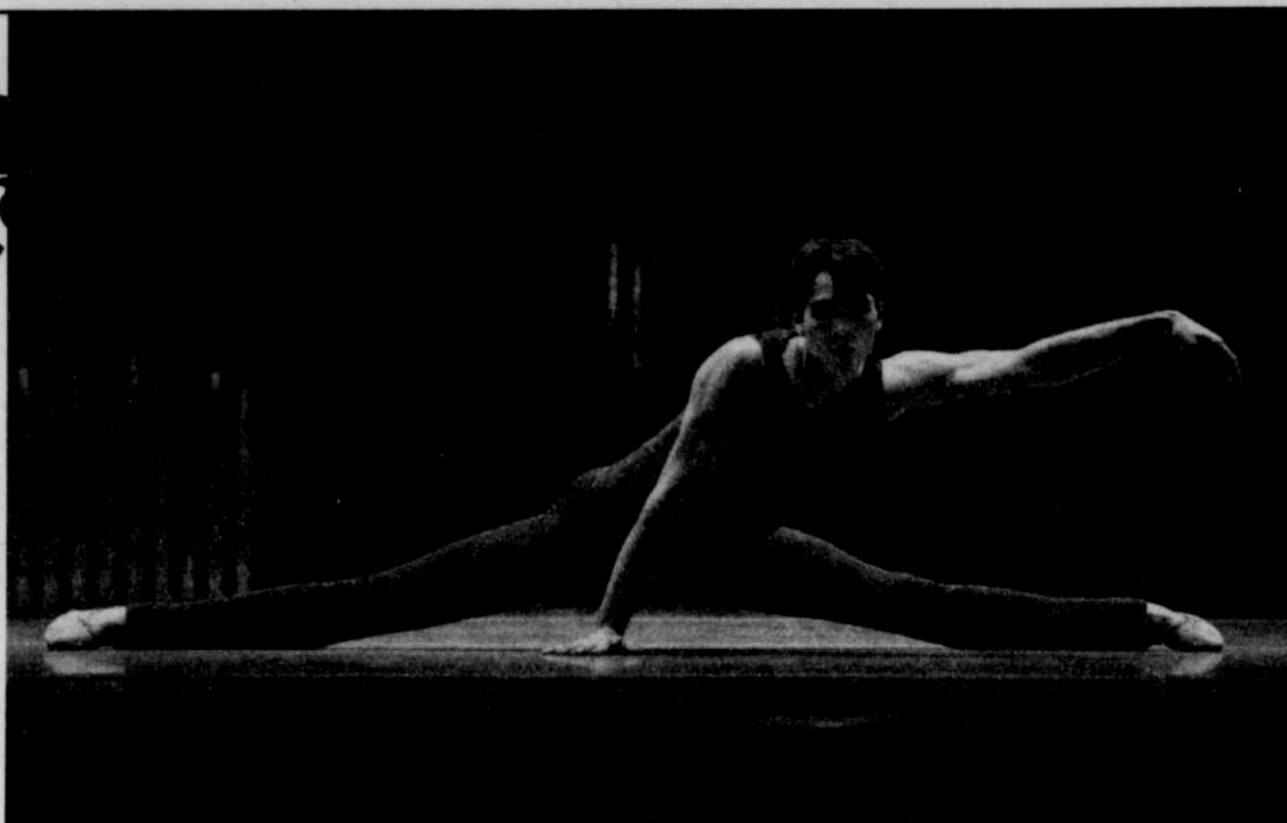
This juggling act comes into play in terms of live music at performances, to which Stowell is absolutely committed.

Stowell maintains that dancers just don't dance the same way to recorded music. They know exactly what is coming, so they don't have to stay as alert, as present in the moment.

"When the musician in the pit is finding new shades and colors, the dancer on stage has to respond to that," explains Stowell. "I think that makes it so much more interesting for the dancer and for the audience."

That said, there's a reason that fewer dance companies are using live music these days: It's not cheap. In 2004, *The Oregonian* reported that OBT's *White Nights* program, with a full-scale orchestra, rang up at least \$85,000 in musicians' wages.

"We're really pushing for something that other companies our size have given up on because it's



OBT dancer Artur Sultanov performs Nicolo Fonte's "Bolero."

BLAINE TRUITT COVER

so expensive," says Stowell.

To get around the prohibitive costs of live music, Stowell is doing some creative programming to ensure that every OBT performance has some element of live music. Not every program can feature the whole orchestra, but including a dance in which one or two musicians perform the music is more manageable.

Even Stowell's own choreography helps balance the budget. If, for example, he wants to bring in a more expensive guest choreographer for one program, Stowell might make a dance for another program and move the money saved by doing that into the budget for the guest choreographer.

Although Stowell is enjoying his role as dance-maker more than he expected—he much prefers making work for his own dancers over coming in to a company as an independent choreographer—he doesn't want OBT's repertoire to turn into a vehicle for his choreography.

What Stowell does want to do is to create opportunity for other artists and to support the development of the art form by bringing in top-notch choreographers to generate significant new work.

"As soon as he took over, he brought in works of the highest quality and brought in choreographers of the highest quality to work with us in making new creations," says Mueller.

One such choreographer is Trey McIntyre, who was OBT's resident choreographer during the 1998-99 season. When Stowell invited him to work with OBT again, the gay choreographer created "Just," which premiered in 2006 and was performed again in April.

While making "Just," McIntyre found that some of the company's best Canfield-era quali-

ties are being maintained under Stowell, namely, a strong work ethic and great discipline.

In addition, McIntyre says: "Coming back in this new era, the dancers have benefited from a greater variance of repertory. They were versatile in new ways that I thought were exciting."

Which is, in fact, a goal of Stowell's. He says: "I look for ballets that are going to entertain, train, excite and inspire the dancers. I feel like they've really taken to all the variety."

Meeting the Art Form on Its Own Ground

It isn't only the dancers who benefit from varied programming. The particular mix of dances that fill an evening's program needs to attract audience members to the theater.

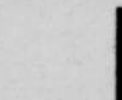
"It takes a special kind of chemistry to put together something that's satisfying to an entire audience but also uses the company well through the whole spectrum...it's a great jigsaw puzzle of programming," says Besant, a lesbian and self-described balletomane (ballet fanatic) who has been involved with OBT since 1997.

Of course, Stowell wants to see the theater full for OBT performances. But he doesn't intend to sell out to make it happen. "What is important to me is never to change the art form for the audience but to get the audience to understand the art form," he says.

To that end, Stowell is gradually putting together a mix of works that he hopes will lead audiences to reconsider their preconceptions about ballet, so that "if they think they know what ballet is, they're wrong, because it can be a whole bunch of stuff."



Stowell rehearses with William Forsythe in 1989 for "In the Middle, Somewhat Elevated."


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