

On one hand, the art form encompasses classic story ballets like "Swan Lake," which Stowell choreographed for OBT in 2006. It also includes works like James Kudelka's "Almost Mozart," which Besant describes as "absolutely now."

Often, both ends of the spectrum are represented in one evening's program. That means that ballet fans who are drawn to the theater to see the great classics might leave inspired by works they had never heard of.

The reverse can also happen. Dancegoers who profess to like only "edgy" work—the ones who might be put off by the sight of a tutu—can watch a classic ballet on the program and see the foundation from which those new movements evolved.

Stowell also helps audiences' love for ballet grow by supporting opportunities for them to learn more about the unique, complex art form. The opening of each program is preceded by "Dance Talks" in which he helps audiences contextualize the work in the upcoming program. Stowell also moderates question-and-answer sessions after certain performances. In addition, Besant offers "Performance Perspectives" one hour before each performance.

Stowell is pleased that audience members are both becoming more loyal, as evidenced by in-

creases in season subscriptions, and taking advantage of learning opportunities.

He says: "They're attending more things associated with the performances to increase the experience that they have. I think those are all really good signs of people getting on board with what our values are, what our personality is."

More Than a Job

The company's values and personality are largely influenced by Stowell's own beliefs.

"Companies take on a culture, and it needs to be established by the leaders," he says. "I feel now like some principles that I apply in the studio, people apply just generally around here."

It's not always a pretty picture when entire organizations adopt the standards of their leaders. But in this case, it appears to be a good thing. Besant describes Stowell as a respectful person and says he always has the dancers' best interests at heart.

Choreographer McIntyre agrees. "He obviously cares a lot about the dancers he works with and genuinely likes them."

Stowell is funny and friendly and not at all overbearing. He is good at acting as a public rep-

resentative of OBT, as Besant points out.

That said, there have been times that the position felt a little too public for Stowell's taste.

For his first few years as artistic director, Stowell tried to separate his work life and his personal life. He was fine with representing OBT when he was on the clock, so to speak. But when he was out socializing on his own time, he didn't want to be recognized as "the guy from the ballet."

But Portland is a small city, and people often know who he is. After a while, Stowell stopped trying to divide his life. Now, when he meets people outside work, he says he's more likely to proactively acknowledge the fact that he's a public figure, if it comes up. "Hi, I am the director of the ballet, and it's nice to meet you," he might say.

Stowell also encourages intermingling between his nonwork friends and the OBT clan. He invites his nonwork friends to join him when OBT folks go out for drinks after work. And when he cooks nice dinners at home for friends, his guests often include his executive assistant, Rebecca Roberts.

Although Stowell has gotten better at finding balance, he still feels like there's room for improvement. He'd

like to be in a serious relationship, for instance.

"Then there's another person who needs some attention, and you actually say, 'You know, I can't go to that meeting tonight or have dinner with a board member, because my boyfriend is going to freak out,'" he says.

But he has yet to make the right connection at the right time. So for now, Stowell is devoted to the love of his life: ballet.

"I can't imagine doing this if it felt at all like a job," he says. "I like dedicating myself to something. There's a bit of faith involved." 10

OREGON BALLET THEATRE spotlights Russia in its last program of the season June 6 to 8 at Keller Auditorium, 222 S.W. Clay St. Tickets are \$14-\$120 from 503-790-2787 or www.obt.org.

REBECCA RAGAIN writes regularly for Just Out and has contributed to Dance Magazine. Contact her via www.rebeccaragain.com.



Walter Jaffe (left) and Paul King celebrate with their beloved mascot, Barney.

A Decade of Dance

White Bird shatters records with 10th season

by Rebecca Ragain

In a time when independent dance presenters are becoming an endangered species, Portland's own White Bird is closing its 10th season without a feather out of place.

The nonprofit dance presentation organization has sold a record number of subscriptions this year—more than double what was sold during its first subscription season.

Audience members have been known to leave the theater in tears, so strongly affected are they by the dance performance that has just ended. They make a point of seeking out and thanking White Bird co-founders Paul King and Walter Jaffe for making the experience possible.

By the end of this season, White Bird will have brought 78 different contemporary dance companies to Portland stages for a total of 236 performances. This season alone included 10 U.S. companies, plus companies from Canada, Argentina, Senegal, Australia and the Netherlands.

Naturally, these performances by world-class dance companies get the spotlight. However, other facets of White Bird's mission are equally, if not more, important to its founders. For example, White Bird supports the development of new dances. Its 23 commissions include work by Portland dance makers such as Josie Moseley and Minh Tran.

White Bird's educational programs have also blossomed. For eight years, it has brought dance into Portland Public Schools through a month-long curriculum and a performance by one of its visiting dance companies.

White Bird spearheads other dance-related outreach programs, as well. Last season, when choreographer Le Vu Long's company of deaf and hearing-impaired performers came to Portland, White Bird helped the group connect with Washington School of the Deaf in Vancouver and the local Vietnamese community.

Jaffe says: "Outreach has become an integral part of what we do.... It's not enough simply to put [the dance companies] onstage and have one, two or three performances and then leave. They need to connect with the community."

King and Jaffe were not always consumed

with the task of promoting contemporary dance. When the couple moved to Portland in 1996, they thought they'd go into a food-related business. (King was a pastry chef in his previous career.) They considered buying a chocolate truffle factory.

Instead, the opportunity arose for them to present Paul Taylor Dance Company in the fall of 1997. When 1,400 Portlanders turned out for the occasion, the seed was planted.

Today, White Bird is the sole dance-only presentation company west of the Rocky Mountains. Its co-founders continue to encourage Portland to grow into a city of dance aficionados where touring companies look forward to performing.

There were probably moments during the past 10 years when King and Jaffe wished that they had stuck with a traditional business model instead of forming an experimental arts organization. Finding funding for the arts is no small feat in this country, in these times. King and Jaffe work weekends and evenings, and neither founder takes a salary.

But if either King or Jaffe has any regrets, those thoughts are outweighed by a shared sense of purpose.

King says: "It's become our life's work; it's not about glamour or making money. We love Portland, the community here, and we want to try to make a difference. That's what is important to us." 10

WHITE BIRD closes its 10th season with 4x4: The Ballet Project, a special performance of contemporary ballet works by four West Coast companies, including Oregon Ballet Theatre, 7:30 p.m. May 8 and 9 at Arlene Schnitzer Concert Hall, 1037 S.W. Broadway. Tickets are \$20-\$62 from 503-790-2787 or www.whitebird.org.

CALL • CRUISE CONNECT

SO MANY GUYS - Listen & Reply to Ads FREE!

Portland
503.299.9911
971.404.2544
Vancouver, WA
360.433.6100

For other cities call
(888) MegaMates

Visit Us Online
GAYMATES .COM

FREE
CODE
4661



MEGA
phone

24/7 Friendly Customer Care 1(888)MegaMates 18+ ©2008 PC LLC

TALK IS CHEAP, ACTION TALKS!



UNLIMITED AND FREE
LIVECHAT™ WITH VIPS!

Portland: 503-222-6USA
Vancouver: 360-696-5254
Seattle: 206-753-2429
Everett: 425-405-2429
Tacoma 253-359-2429

LIVELINE
CHAT, PERSONALS, FORUMS

FIND YOUR FLAME!
www.livematch.com

Unlimited VIP Subscription AS LOW AS \$1.77 per day! (8 weeks package \$99.00)