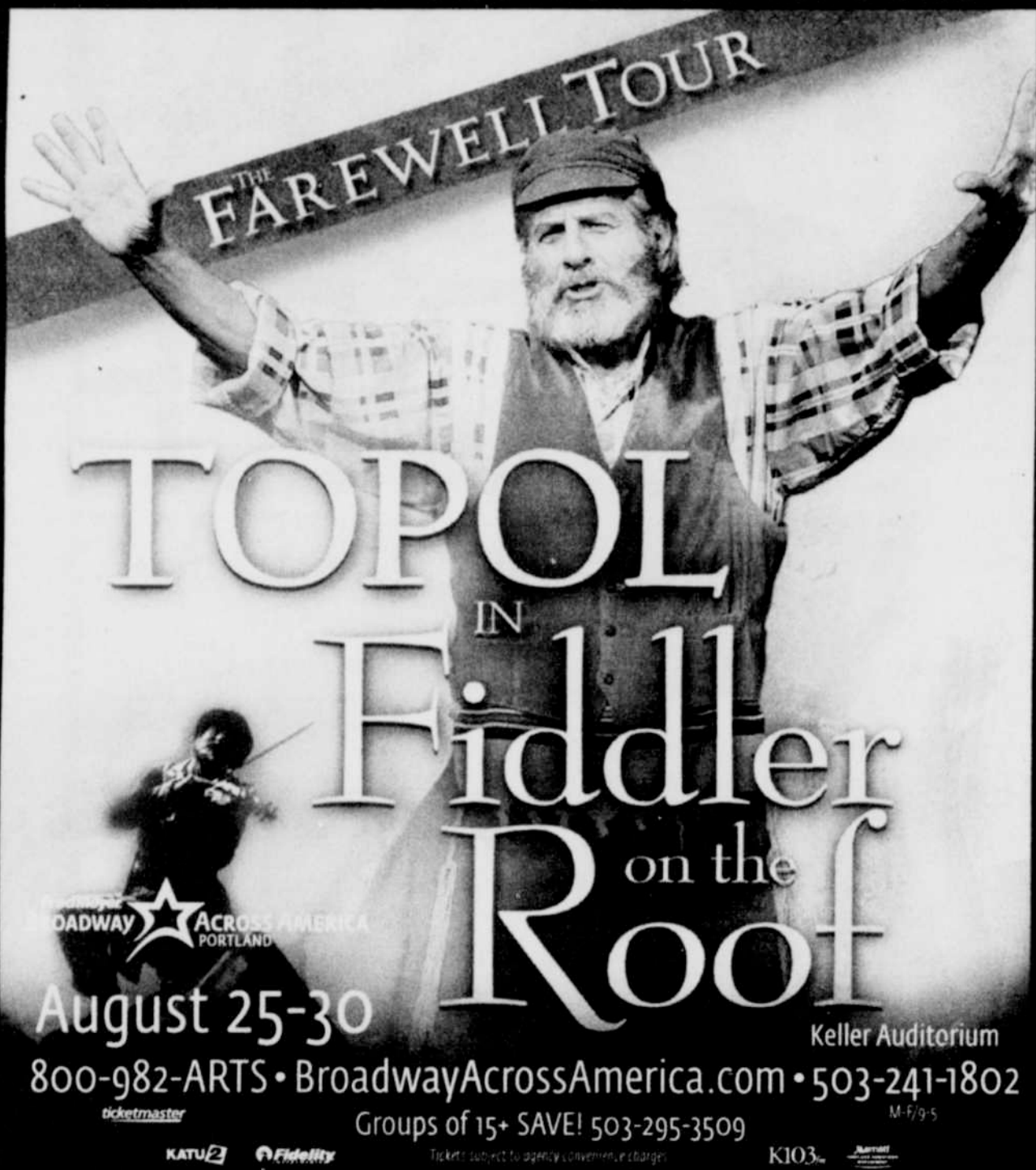


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DANCE

NWDP Celebrates New Home with Packed Schedule

By REBECCA RAGAIN

Slightly over a month after Oregon Ballet Theatre held an emergency fund-raising performance to keep its doors from closing, Northwest Dance Project opened the doors of its new home to the public.

NWDP, headed by Sarah Slipper and Scott Lewis, brings young professional dancers together with emerging and renowned choreographers. The result is a slew of new dances and a strengthened web of professional connections for all involved.

After five years spent shuttling between different rehearsal and performance spaces, NWDP leased a studio/performance space in the Mississippi Ballroom, on North Shaver Street. The first public performance there—a showing of work created by two choreographers during a six-day residency—took place July 18. It was an auspicious start: the event sold out and a second show was added.

Maurice Causey, ballet master for Netherlands Dance Theater, was one of the choreographers who created new work with the residency's group of nearly 30 dancers. "Collaborating with them was amazing, from the first day," says Causey.

Causey was also inspired by NWDP's no-holds-barred artistic atmosphere, which helped him to create 16 minutes of dance in a fraction of the time typical of such an endeavor. Causey says, "The ideas never stopped in my mind. That had a lot to do with the environment. The environment was very open."

After the residency, NWDP invited Causey to return later this summer, joining three other choreographers on the *Summer Premieres* program, being performed August 14-15.

The dance that Causey, who is gay, is creating for *Summer Premieres* explores the concept of predicament—especially gender predicaments. He's working with three couples: one made up of a male and female dancer, one of two women and another of two men.

At the time of this writing, Causey was in the midst of shaping the untitled work, but he did already know that it wouldn't be a pretty dance. "Obviously, predicaments are difficult situations," he points out. "The choreography is quite emotionally aggressive and the language is also quite aggressive."

Causey is impressed with the skill level of the dancers in NWDP's company. He was hoping to work with dancers who have good technique, but who aren't restricted to that. He got his wish; Causey says that NWDP's dancers "can really move, if you understand what I mean."

He continues: "They're familiar with their ability to move and are hungry enough to use that, and also to collaborate with me to create my work. That has attracted me to go further and deeper into my work at the moment."

Also making dances for *Summer Premieres* are James Canfield, former artistic director of Oregon Ballet Theatre and current artistic director of Nevada Ballet Theatre; Lucas Crandall, associate artistic director of Hubbard Street Dance Chicago; and Wen Wei Wang, artistic director of Wen Wei Dance.

After these choreographers finish their work, another four will begin in the NWDP studio in preparation of the *Fall Premieres* program, October 16-17. One of these is



NWDP company dancers Lex Dones (left) and Patrick Kilbane (center) with choreographer Maurice Causey.

Edgar Zendejas, artistic director of a Montreal-based company called ezdanza.

Zendejas is returning to the program for a second year. About last year, he says, "I had a really good experience and enjoyed the piece and the dancers." Sharing a program with other choreographers marks another benefit: "I always love to see other works, and ways of working."

Also in 2008, Zendejas got to know fellow Montreal choreographer Mark Godden, whom he'd never met in person previously. In addition, Zendejas kept in touch with several of the dancers he met.

He is excited to return to Portland, which he feels is "very open for art."

Earlier in his career, Zendejas danced with a company whose director eliminated pieces with male duets or gay themes when touring in the U.S. because of worries about how those elements would be received.

So last year, when Zendejas decided to have a male duet in his work for NWDP, called "De Wilde (the Wanted)," he was a little concerned about others' reactions. "But in NWDP, I'm free to express what is part of me," says Zendejas, who is gay. "I did the duet and it turned out very well."

NWDP's *Summer Premieres* program is 8 p.m. Fri.-Sat., Aug. 14-15, at Newmark Theatre, 1111 SW Broadway. Also, mark your calendar for *Fall Premieres*, Oct. 16-17. Tickets are \$20-\$40 through www.nwdpd.com.