

# Eugene Ballet Works Out!

*Firebird* leads the program.

The Eugene Ballet takes the stage of the Hult Center for the last time this season with three pieces that showcase the dancers and give them what principal Jennifer Martin calls a “genuine workout.” More important, new work by artistic director Toni Pimble and former company member Eloy Barragan, plus the *Firebird* in Pimble’s 1982 staging, exemplify the transformative power of art in good times and bad.

Folk and fairy tales, onstage and off, give us hope. In most of them, in nearly every culture, some magical being is able to wave a wand and make — choose one: war, plague, hunger, despots — go away, and all ends happily, forever. In the *Firebird*, danced to Igor Stravinsky’s first, magnificent score for the ballet, a beautiful half-bird, half-woman provides the somewhat clueless Prince Ivan with a magic feather in exchange for her freedom. He summons her with the feather to liberate princesses held hostage by the wicked Kastchei, including the object of his affections, the lovely Princess Elena. All ends

well, if abruptly, with a wedding tableau.

This is a ballerina’s ballet, particularly the quicksilver leaps and fluttering *port de bras* of the title role, which will be danced by Brett Mills. Martin will be seen in a gentler, more lyrical role as Princess Elena, a very different role from the wicked Milady in *Three Musketeers* or the Odette/Odile in *Swan Lake* she has danced so brilliantly in the past.

There are, nevertheless, some juicy roles for the increasingly strong men of the company. Prince Ivan is onstage at all times, quite differently partnering both women, with a bit of virtuoso dancing of his own. Hyoung Il Joung, in his second season with EBC, assumes the role with technique to spare and beautiful line.

The dancer, a medal

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winner in a number of competitions in his native Korea, was last seen as the passionate Lord Buckingham in *The Three Musketeers* and is, according to Pimble, an increasingly fine partner.

Long-time company member Matthew Hope (and arguably its most versatile dancer) performs the role of Kastchei.

Like von Rothbart in that other bird ballet, this character role offers tremendous scope for the dancer.

Company managing director Riley Grannan originated the role with deliciously flamboyant evil

when the work inaugurated EBC’s residency at the Hult Center on the center’s opening week. Peter Dean Beck designed the handsome set, and costumes are by Molly Maginnis and Amy Panganiban.

Pimble’s “Five Bagatelles,” set to Antonin Dvorak’s Op. 47 for two violins, cello and harmonium, raises the curtain. The music holds meaning for

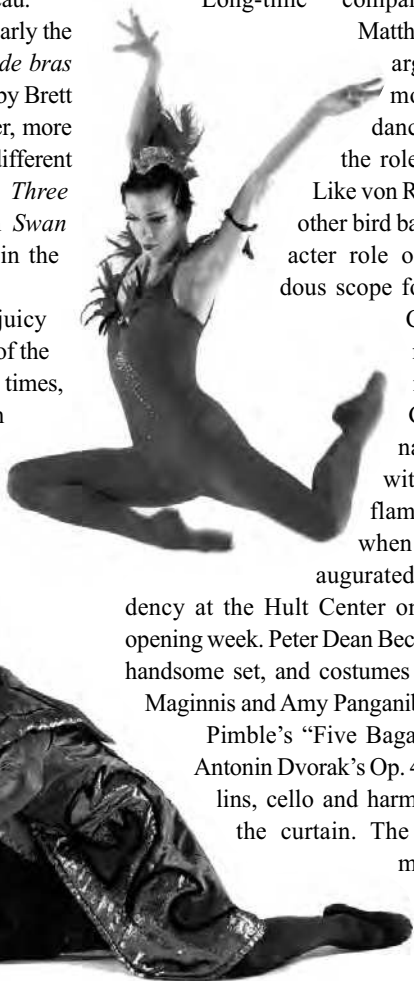
Pimble, who was a long way from

home and far from the accomplished choreographer she is today when she first got to know the beautifully structured score. She was an impoverished, young dancer living in Germany in a rented room with a tape player and four tapes, one of them the Dvorak.

It was several decades before she created the ballet, which premiered last November for the UO’s Chamber Music Series in Beall Hall. Company principals Hyoung Il Joung, Jennifer Martin, Brett Mills and Kyung Man Moon will perform the neo-classical work, which is firmly rooted in the music.

Barragan describes “Encuentros” as deeply personal, a reflection on his own life that he hopes will strike the chord of universality in its viewers. The former dancer — audience members will remember vividly his portrayal of Dracula several years ago — is now teaching ballet and choreography at the University of California at Irvine. Barragan has dedicated the work to his fiancée, Jennifer Martin.

Set to Bach’s *Orchestral Suite #5*, “Encuentros” is in five sections with a cast of 11 dancers that includes several of the company’s men. Barragan is particularly pleased with a trio he made for Juan Carlos Amy-Cordera, Jonathan Guise and Jared Hunt, whose dancing he characterizes as young and powerful. The work is performed in soft shoes and blends contemporary and classical movement as his previous choreography has done. In a departure, however, “Encuentros,” which means “encounters” in Spanish, has no Latin flavor save its title. **EW**



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