

Silver Anniversary

EBC opening the new season

Crack open the champagne, drum rolls, please: This is the Eugene Ballet Company's 25th anniversary, and they are celebrating with some terrific new dancers and a season of classics, starting with *The Sleeping Beauty*, which opens in the Silva Concert Hall at the Hult Center for two performances, at 8 pm Nov. 1, and at 2:30 pm Nov. 2.

Pimble's 1993 staging of the 1890 Marius Petipa ballet based on Perrault's fairy tale of the sleeping princess awakened by a kiss, like the original, is all about dancing. Eloquent *pas de deux*, bravura solos, ensemble social dances and glorious third act fairy tale divertissements are all performed to what Tchaikowsky viewed as his finest ballet score.

Performing it would have been impossible 25 years ago, when Managing Director Riley Grannan and Artistic Director Toni Pimble sewed the costumes, painted the scenery and performed with six other dancers. Today, the company's roster of 19 performers and five apprentices adds up to "by far the finest group of dancers we have ever had," according to Pimble.

Pimble and Grannan are particularly excited about Hyuk-Ku Kwon, a gold medalist in the first Kirov-Universal Ballet Competition in the early 1990s and most recently a principal with Ballet Arizona. "He has beautiful technique and style," Pimble said, "and an abandoned quality when he gets going." He'll bring those

attributes to the role of Prince Desiree, which he will dance with Jennifer Martin as Aurora on Saturday night.

Also new to the company this season are Gilmar Duran and her husband, Dubraskha Arrivillaga, from Venezuela, both of them experienced in the classical repertoire as well as more contemporary choreography.

It took enormous effort on Grannan's part with the INS, but Peter Orlov, whose training is Russian and English, is now a full-fledged member of the company. And Diego Fernando Castro, who studied in Havana and has a grand jump, is also an addition to the male complement. Suzanne Haag appeared in Kirk Peterson's *Sleeping Beauty* with Hartford Ballet; Carlos Miller is a graduate of the Joffrey New School BFA program, and Phyllis Rothwell has joined the company from Charleston.

Returning dancers include Frank Affrunti, Daniel Alsedek, Juan Carlos Amy-Cordero, Neysa Fulsome, John Funk in character roles, Jonathan Guise, Melissa Nolen and Stephanie Parker. New apprentices include Mary Jane Ward and Kaitlin van Rossman, both students of Susan Zadoff and Sara Lombardi at the Eugene Ballet School.

With these new and returning dancers, EBC is obviously poised to deliver a new season with plenty of high points.

Asked about the high points of the past 25 years, Pimble pointed to *Don Quixote* in 2001, staged by the highly distinguished

Anna-Marie Holmes and her respect for the company. Curiously Pimble, this innovative contemporary choreographer whose *Silk and Steel* is arguably a masterpiece, also mentioned the first *Giselle* the company did in collaboration with Ballet Oregon in 1988, with live orchestra and guest artists Fernando Bujones and Kimberly Glassco. The much earlier *Les Noces*, performed with the Eugene Concert Choir, was also a high point for Pimble.

Grannan's choices are different. "The dramatic power of Toni's *Still Falls the Rain* was his first thought, a defining moment for this writer as well. The 1997 work, based on a horrific incident with the Taliban, made a strong statement about the horrors committed in the name of fundamentalist religion.

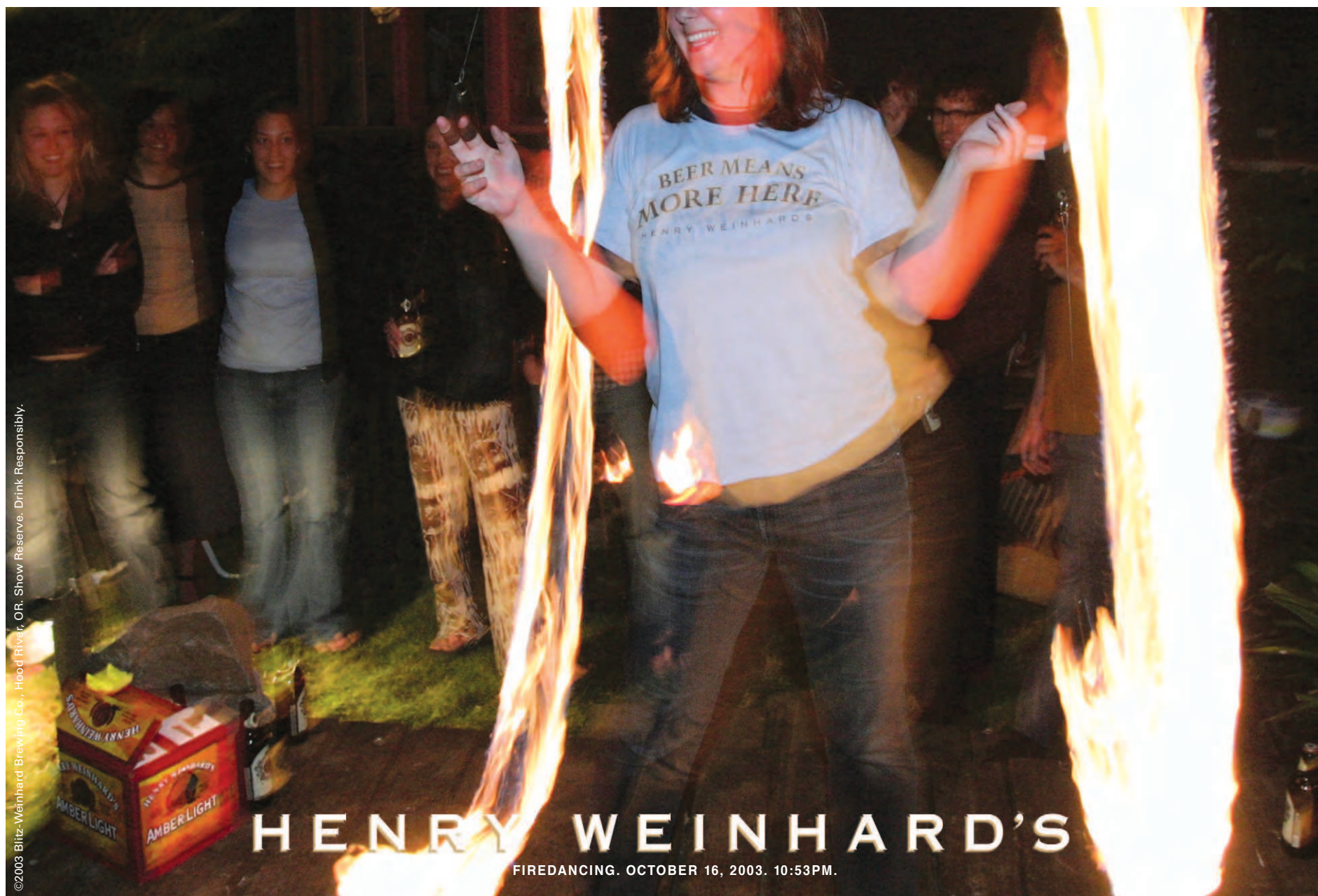
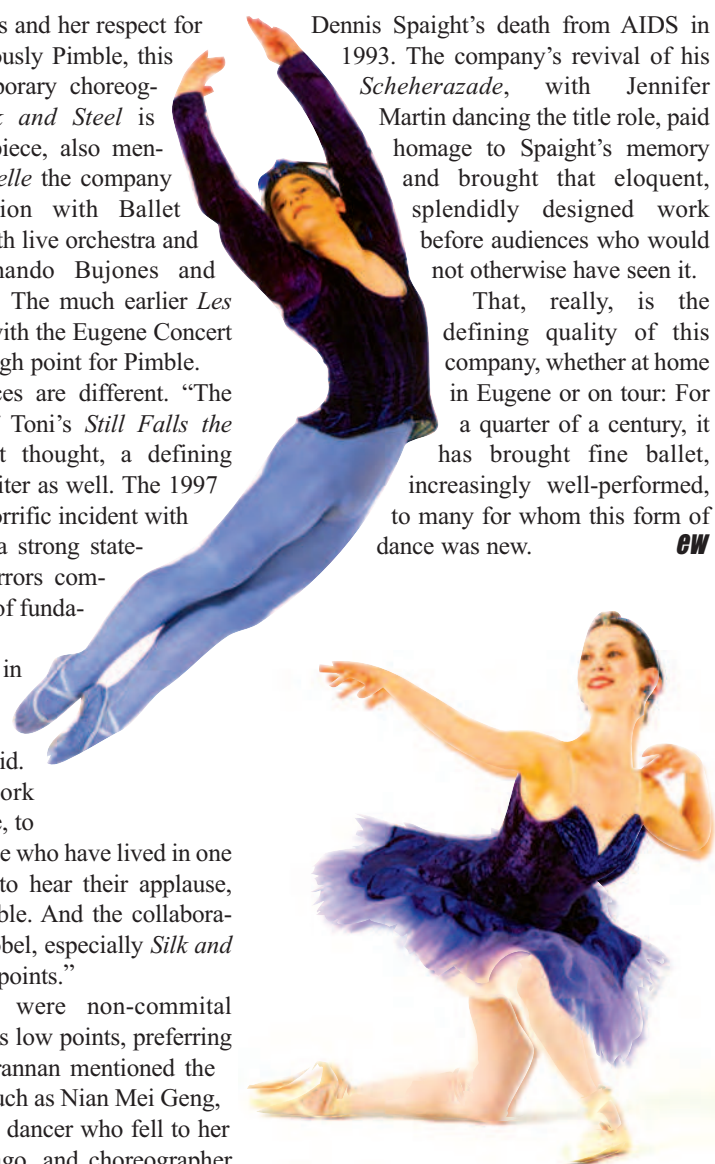
"Being in Syria, in Aleppo, on tour was another high point," Grannan said. "To share our work with another culture, to get through to people who have lived in one place for so long, to hear their applause, was really memorable. And the collaborations with Lloyd Sobel, especially *Silk and Steel*, are also high points."

Both founders were non-committal about the company's low points, preferring to forget them. Grannan mentioned the loss of the young, such as Nian Mei Geng, a beautiful classical dancer who fell to her death some years ago, and choreographer

Dennis Spaight's death from AIDS in 1993. The company's revival of his *Scheherazade*, with Jennifer Martin dancing the title role, paid homage to Spaight's memory and brought that eloquent, splendidly designed work before audiences who would not otherwise have seen it.

That, really, is the defining quality of this company, whether at home in Eugene or on tour: For a quarter of a century, it has brought fine ballet, increasingly well-performed, to many for whom this form of dance was new.

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HENRY WEINHARD'S

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