

EBC's Cinderella

An interview with Toni Pimble.

Toni Pimble's staging of *Cinderella*, like no other ballet in her repertoire, reveals her English roots as well as her acute musicality as a choreographer. The Eugene Ballet presents *Cinderella* at 8 pm Saturday, Feb. 28 and 2:30 pm Sunday, Feb. 29 at the Hult Center for the Performing Arts, with Jennifer Martin in the title role on Saturday night and Brett Mills on Sunday.

In an interview early this month, we asked Pimble some questions about English ballet style, Sergei Prokofiev's beautiful score and the demands of the ballerina role:

EW: Do you think there is an English style of ballet as basically invented by Ashton, just as American style is said to have been invented by Balanchine?

Pimble: There is most definitely an English style created by Dame Ninette de Valois, founder of the Royal Ballet. [It] has restraint and finesse, but at the same time Britain's unparalleled background in theater strongly influenced the early years of British ballet as did pantomime. This combination of sometimes military precision balanced with the whimsy inherent in British character has created such masterpieces as Ashton's *La Fille Mal Gardée*. It has also at times created lackluster performances when the precise-



ness of the technique outweighs the joy of dance.

EW: What is it about Prokofiev's score that grabs you as a choreographer?

Pimble: *Cinderella* is a fairy tale that can take place any time, any place, which makes Prokofiev's score, which creates that time and place, work for me. He clearly understood the opportunity for comedy and pathos and combines them beautifully. In the fairy scene in Act I he created a perfect opportunity to show his talent [for] instrumentation that creates a feeling for the four seasons, making the variations choreographically challenging. Prokofiev clearly defines theme music for the main characters, Cinderella, the sisters and the Prince, which aids the story. But through all of the antics of the sisters, the overall impression is that [he] cared very much about Cinderella, whom he conceived of as "not only a fairy-tale character but also as a real person, feeling, experiencing and moving among us."

EW: Have you edited the score?

Pimble: I have edited some of the ballroom [music], the final *pas de deux* from Act III, using the apotheosis instead, which is light and airy, continuing that fairytale feeling and the romance of the story. I have also eliminated the long scenes of Prince

Charming searching for Cinderella in foreign countries, since after all, we all know that eventually he ends up at her doorstep, so it seemed to me, sooner rather than later would be best.

EW: Jennifer Martin is dancing Cinderella for the first time. She has been gorgeous as Aurora, Odette/Odile, Sugarplum and Kitri in *Don Quixote*. This role has different requirements. What do you feel they are and what do you think she brings to it that others might not?

Pimble: Jennifer never ceases to surprise me with her dynamic range. The role of Cinderella requires a softness and vulnerability that are the challenge for Jenny. The three solos that Cinderella dances in the kitchen scenes are very intimate. She must show the audience that she survives her drab existence by using her imagination to escape her unhappy life. At this point the ballerina must reach across the footlights and pull in the audience so that they care about the character. What delights me when working with two casts is the difference in interpretations of the same role. I always try to allow the dancers the freedom to come at the role from something personal within them. If they are artists — as Brett and

(Above) Brett Mills as Cinderella.
(Below) One of the stepsisters.

Jenny surely are — they always rise to the occasion.

Martin will be partnered by Huk-KuKwon and Mills by Hyoung II Joung's Prince Charming. Sets are by Skip Hubbard and Ann Woodruff Murray and costumes by Lynn Bowers, Amy Panganiban and Lito-Jon Demetita, with Cinderella's spectacular coach by Jerry Williams. **EW**



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