

New Dances

And farewell, ballerina

Brett Mills, who has been with the Eugene Ballet Company for more than a decade, gives her last performances this weekend when the company presents its final concerts of the season in the Silva Hall, Hult Center, Saturday night at 8 pm and Sunday afternoon at 2 pm.

Mills has made us laugh as the cowgirl in Agnes deMille's *Rodeo* and the lady at the party in Lynn Taylor Corbett's *In a Word*. She has made us weep as Giselle and Juliet and was a perfect Alice in company artistic director Toni Pimble's *Alice in Wonderland*. And last season in the *Firebird*, she textured the title role with magical power and an avian *port de bras*.

In addition, this technically versatile dancer has been a gifted interpreter of Pimble's more contemporary works, particularly *Slipstream* and *Still Falls the Rain*, which are among the 35-year-old dancer's favorites.

"After 11 years I'm sorry to lose her," Pimble said of Mills in a recent interview. "She's a joy to work with. She gives a hundred percent in rehearsals, dances full out.

She's grown tremendously in her artistry, and she excels in romantic roles like Giselle and Juliet, [in which] she has a vulnerable quality that makes her believable. And she was a lovely Titania in *A Midsummer Night's Dream*." Speaking of Mills' physical attributes as a dancer, Pimble mentioned her "amazing" arabesque and supple back, as well as her acting talents.

Mills will be moving to Portland with her pastry chef husband. She hopes to teach dance and to learn silversmithing in Portland. In a telephone interview from Idaho, Mills

noted that Pimble is unique as an artistic director. Mills, who danced with Ohio's Ballet Met and Ballet Iowa before joining the Eugene Ballet, said, "She's fair and appreciates the dancers. And I respect the way she runs rehearsal. I love her style, especially her taste in music."

In this weekend's season-closing repertory evening, Mills, partnered by Hyoung-Il Joung, will reprise Juliet in the balcony *pas de deux* from *Romeo and Juliet*, an aching lovely dance about first love in which Pimble's choreography makes the viewer hear Shakespeare's language as acutely as Prokofiev's score.

Mills' technical versatility will be more than apparent in a section of Pimble's new *Jitterbug, Jive & Jazz*, a collaboration with

the Oregon Festival of American Music's Emerald City Jazz Kings, who will perform live such songs as "Leap Frog," "My Funny Valentine," "Floatin'" and "Have You Met Miss Jones?" The work, which closes the show, is part of a continuum of Pimble tributes to American culture — this one to the big band sound and the swing era — that includes *Silent Movie* and *Children of the Raven*.

Mills and the rest of the company had to learn a completely new way of moving for this piece, the floor-bound rhythms of the Lindy Hop and Jitterbug being fairly antithetical to the elevated jumps and tiny steps on pointe of classical ballet. In one section the women are on roller skates. In another they take the poses of the pin-up girls in the watercolors of Vargas and DeVorss.

The program opens with Pimble's *Concerto for Seven Dancers*, a piece for three women and four men set to Johann Sebastian Bach's *Concerto for Three Violins*, which premiered last July during the Oregon Bach Festival. "The movement is simple and fun," Pimble said, "but the music is quite complex."

Following intermission, principal dancers Jennifer Martin and Hyuk ku Kwon will deliver classical fireworks in what is known in the trade as the "Don Q pas de deux," the oft-performed star-turn



Mills in *Firebird*.

from the Petipa-Minkus, evening-length *Don Quixote*, which had its company premiere several seasons ago. In marked contrast, Pimble has programmed choreographer Robert Battle's *Circle, Line, Square*, a trio of dances whose shapes and style are described in the title of the piece.

An interesting balance of classical and contemporary dance showcases the company's increasingly strong complement of men as well as the departing Mills. Live music accompanies Pimble's new work. After a season of story ballets, this program really shows the company at its most versatile.

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