

Autumn Dreaming

Dancers, Shakespeare and Mendelssohn

As midsummer fades into memory, and the realities of the political season bombard us every hour on the hour, Toni Pimble, artistic director of the Eugene Ballet Company, reminds us that art makes fools of the powerful, and in the theater all can still end happily.

The company reprises Pimble's 1985 *Midsummer Night's Dream* at 8 pm Oct. 23 and 2 pm Oct. 24 in the Hult Center Silva Hall. Audiences will also be treated to the high-energy dancing of Pimble's 1999 "Slipstream" and the premiere of "Incidents and Accidents," created by EBC dancer Melissa Nolen.

Like Pimble's *Romeo and Juliet*, *Midsummer* is as true to Shakespeare's language as it is to the classical dance lexicon. As the dancers perform the roles of fairies, "mechanicals" and mortal lovers with the nonverbal language of mime and dance, they communicate visually both the poetry and the rough-hewn peasant vocabulary of Shakespeare's play. Pimble knows precisely what she's doing and has given it considerable thought.

Shakespeare's "ability to bring to the stage the crude behavior of the rustics and place them side by side with the exquisite delicacy of the fairies is both a challenge and a delight to the choreographer," Pimble commented in the company newsletter.

Pimble meets Shakespeare's challenge

not only with the skill of an experienced dance maker but also with Felix Mendelssohn's familiar music. (The wedding march comes from the incidental music created for a mid-19th century production of the play, when the composer was only 16.) Pimble has added music by Rossini as well as a segment by Renaissance composer Bottesini to expand the action. Peter Dean Beck designed the set, and deservedly well-known designer David Heuvel the charming costumes.

Midsummer is a fine showcase for the company's principal dancers, calling as it does for fine-tuned technique as well as comic timing. Jennifer Martin dances Titiana, the queen of the fairies, on Saturday night, partnered by the phenomenal Korean dancer Hyuk Ku Kwon as the jealous Oberon, the fairy king. On Sunday, they dance the roles of confused and quarreling

lovers Helena and Demetrius.

Managing Director Riley Grannan, whose performance as Bottom in the 1985 premiere was memorable to say the least, said he's "ecstatic" about the quality of the company's new principals. Jon Drake

dances the role of Demetrius Saturday night and Oberon Sunday afternoon, while Aline Schurger will be Helena on Saturday and Titania at the matinee.

According to Grannan, Drake's technical facility is huge. Drake trained at the École de Danse in Hattiesburg, Miss., the John Cranko School in Stuttgart, Germany, and the Vienna State Opera Ballet School in Austria. He has danced in *Midsummer* before, as well as *Cinderella*, *Coppelia* and *Swan Lake*, which are all in EBC's repertoire.

Grannan said Schürger has a formidable ability, a "steel-trap technique" as well as a lyrical quality. Born in Germany, Schürger received her training at the opera in Nuremberg, Munich and Prague. Winner of three gold medals at international ballet competitions, she has danced as a principal with Opus M Company in Munich and also the Atlantic Southeast Ballet. She has toured China.

The program begins with the two contemporary works. Nolen's brand new "Incidents and Accidents" is set to the music of Johannes Brahms. Nolen has choreographed for Ballet Idaho's school, where she impressed Pimble with her thoughtful use of the talents and experience of the dancers. "Slipstream," Pimble's sleek, nonstop ballet to the music of contemporary composer Michael Lyman, completes a truly mixed bill that shows what this company is all about. **EW**



Eugene Ballet Company dancer in *Midsummer Night's Dream*.

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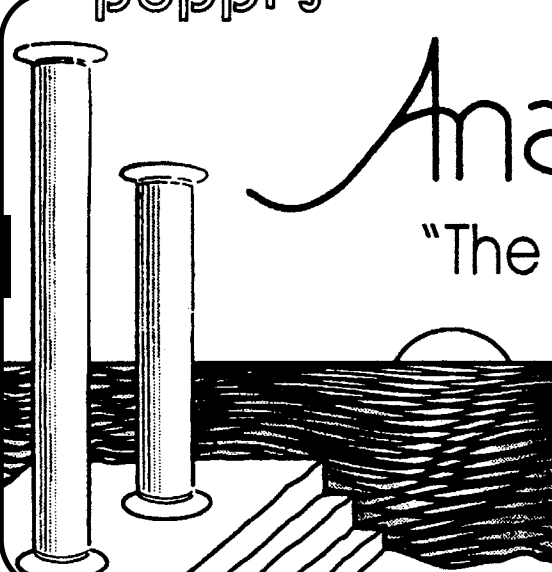


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