

WELCOME TO THE PLAYHOUSE

Portland's athletic BodyVox dance company brings retrospective *Urban Meadow to the Hult*

Eugene Ballet Company presents a rare treat for Eugene audiences Saturday when Portland-based BodyVox returns to the Hult Center with *Urban Meadow*, a retrospective of work from its 18 dynamic seasons.

"We wanted to make a show that was repertory," says BodyVox co-artistic director Jamey Hampton, sitting in the airy lobby of the BodyVox studio and performance space in northwest Portland.

Hampton got his start with Pilobolus, a world-renowned modern dance company that famously germinated at Dartmouth College in the 1970s. Later, he was one of the founders of MOMIX, the company of dance-illusionists.

Born and raised in Portland, Hampton co-founded BodyVox in 1999 with his wife, Ashley Roland. (Some readers may have a calendar or coffee table book by photographer Lois Greenfield kicking around — every other picture, it seems, is of Roland.)

Though he'd danced in high school musicals and, like so many boys, played sports, Hampton had never experienced the thrill of dance until he got to Dartmouth College. That was all it took. "I had this moment, an epiphany, that I could communicate with my body," he says.

Flash-forward to graduation: Hampton is home in Portland, working and "smoking clove cigarettes," he says.

But a Pilobolus performer's knee injury led to Hampton's first big break. "I got a call: 'Get to L.A.," he recalls hearing on the phone. "'We need you to learn the part so we can go on Johnny Carson.'"

After scrambling to learn Pilobolus's notoriously noodly yet athletic choreography, Hampton was on the road, touring with what was then one of the most popular and recognizable modern dance companies in the world.

They were like rock stars.

"When I joined the tour, I was their utility man," Hampton says, "doing whatever someone else couldn't."

He formally became a Pilobolus company member in 1978, and started to make and contribute choreography. "It was a dream of mine," Hampton says.

By the early 1980s, though, "the company had more

directors off the road than on," he adds.

He felt a tug toward more artistic freedom.

Hampton began attending movement workshops with fellow dancers, including Roland, Daniel Ezralow, Morleigh Steinberg and Moses Pendleton. These are some of the giants of contemporary dance history, and together they co-founded MOMIX, which 35 years later is still under Pendleton's wing.

"I gave him the name," Hampton quips. (Hampton used to make mixed tapes, and one day he gave one to Pendleton, saying, "Here's a Mo Mix.")

After a stint with MOMIX it was home to Portland in the mid-'90s, a time when the dance scene in that (then sleeper) town was taking off. "I wasn't interested in just movement," he says. "Whether it's abstract or non-verbal, I was always interested in the story it would tell."

Hampton and Roland developed varied collaborations, including opera and film. "Opera is a longer wave form than most mediums, with power, momentum and resonance," Hampton says.

An early BodyVox partnership with Portland Opera sought to create an interdisciplinary vision of Orff's *Carmina Burana*. The experience gave Hampton a new appreciation for "line, form, symmetry and pattern," he says.

Film, too, has continually inspired Hampton's work, and audiences will see short film pieces as a part of *Urban Meadow*. "Dance and film, as art forms, are compatible," Hampton explains. "The film changes the location for the audience — it takes them out of this room, to somewhere else, a hiatus, a sojourn."

Now 61, Hampton still dances, and will dance Saturday night, although he admits that he feels it more now.

"My knees used to be made of rubber," he laughs.

After a lifetime in dance, though, Hampton says he's

URBAN MEADOW DANCERS:
BRENT LUEBBERT, SCOTT
STAMPONE, ANNA MARRA



PHOTO BY DERRIN BATTLES/POLARA STUDIO

still excited to get in the studio. "Seeing something that wasn't there before and knowing that we had a hand in making it, and that maybe we impacted someone who sees it, that's really the reason to do it," he says.

And by presenting BodyVox to the community, independent nonprofit Eugene Ballet has stepped in to fill a niche left empty when the Hult Presents dance series was put on hiatus by the city in 2010.

Notes EBC artistic director Toni Pimble: "Where possible we like to add a guest company to our season. We mostly look at companies that perform the kind of work we either don't have the opportunity to perform ourselves or wouldn't, given that we are a classical ballet company." ■

Eugene Ballet Company presents BodyVox's Urban Meadow 7:30 pm Saturday, May 14, at the Hult Center; \$37.50-\$70.50, tickets at the Hult Center Box Office or hultcenter.org.

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