

WOMEN IN DANCE

Eugene Ballet highlights one favorite and two premiers

Eugene Ballet Company fulfills a vital role in our community by regularly commissioning and presenting contemporary dance. This season, EBC's *Midsummer Night's Dream* shares the billing with two rising stars: EBC's own **Suzanne Haag** and Chicago-based choreographer **Stephanie Martinez**.

"It is important to the mission of Eugene Ballet to expose our audience and our artists to different creative talents," says Eugene Ballet artistic director **Toni Pimble**.

Pimble's *Midsummer* focuses on the forest scene — fairies, lovers, asses — and features live music by Felix Mendelssohn, played by the can-do wunderkinds **OrchestraNext**, who fundraised for themselves in order to pay their student and professional musicians.

Also on the bill, **Suzanne Haag** premieres *The Surrounding Third*.

"The piece uses the ebb and flow of Barber's *Adagio for Strings* to evoke images of the ocean," Haag says.

"The title is a loose translation from the Greek *Amphitrite*, the goddess of the sea," she adds. "In this non-narrative work for four dancers, one woman is dressed in a flowing blue dress to represent the power, beauty and control of the ocean, while three men are manipulated by her."

Each male dancer represents a different characteristic: hope, power and sorrow. That shows, says Haag, "that no matter our outlook, we are not entirely in control of our lives, there is another natural force guiding and hindering us."

Haag is one of the founders of **Instaballet** — an exciting, boundary-breaking improv group that seeks to demystify dance — and she premiered as a choreographer for Eugene Ballet last season with a compelling new work, *Look*. In it, she played with themes around relationship and communication. *The Surrounding Third* offers audiences the chance to see what's next on the horizon for this intriguing artist.

Rounding out the performance, **Stephanie Martinez's** *Wandering On*, a brand-new commission for the Eugene Ballet, is a mathematically complex, satisfyingly balanced work: clever and energetic, yet rooted and earthy.

We caught an informal showing of the *Wandering On* in January, when Martinez and a few of her company members traveled from Chicago to set the piece on EBC. "The title, *Wandering On*, refers to the Sanskrit term *samsara*," Martinez says. "We hope to have this journey, from this world to the next, with the help of others."

Martinez found choreographic inspiration in the dancers themselves, the real people she's working with — in their ideas, their way of looking at things and their ways of solving problems.

"The duets should seem personal," Martinez says. "There has to be form and technique that thread them together, but they're elemental, like the air, land and sea."

An early duet featuring Colton West and Cory Betts occupies a space between reason and emotion, between head and heart.

"I created that section as if its two brothers," Martinez says. "One had passed on and one hadn't and the dancers are physicalizing that idea."

But as the piece developed rich layers of shape, time and force, something else appeared to Martinez.

"Maybe they're not brothers, but instead, this is the moment at death, when you're looking back at yourself on Earth," she says.

Martinez is comfortable within the blurry realm between contemporary modern vocabulary and ballet aesthetic, a place where lush lifts, slides and drags can coexist beautifully with gestural and relational themes and variation.

An arresting solo by Sarah Stockwell is a prime example: Bound and focused, carving the space ferociously, Stockwell burns up the atmosphere.

And no wonder. "She is helping people pass to the afterlife," Martinez says.

While watching a contemporary work like this, it's not necessary to ascribe a story, to assign characters or to try to figure out what's going on. It's enough to take in the moments of individual and collective expression, at once accessible and strong.

Eugene Ballet Company presents A Midsummer Night's Dream 7:30 pm Feb. 11 and 2 pm Feb. 12 at the Hult Center; \$15-\$69. Tickets available at eugeneballet.org or at the box office.



The days are getting a little bit longer, and dance is starting to bloom.

We recently caught a performance of the U.K.'s **Ballet Boyz**, part of the inimitable **White Bird Dance Series** in Portland. Catch the review of the show on the *Eugene Weekly* blog at bit.ly/2kNAsVw.

Xcape Dance Company presents *LOVE* at 7:30 pm Feb. 3 at the Hult Center, featuring "real-life LOVE stories, multimedia design and theatrical elements." Proceeds from this student performance benefit Ophelia's Place. \$15-17.50.

Also this week, movement all-stars the **Shaolin Warriors** burst onstage at 7:30 pm Feb. 6 at the Hult. While not dance, per se, the Shaolin Warriors put on a rousing show, with skillful choreography, a huge array of weaponry, storytelling and humor. \$23-\$48.75.

Eugene Ballet Company presents *A Midsummer*

Night's Dream at 7:30 pm Feb. 11 and 2 pm Feb. 12. EBC dancer **Suzanne Haag**, who premiered her stunning work *Look* last season, presents *The Surrounding Third*. And Chicago-based choreographer Stephanie Martinez will present the ballet titled *Wandering On*. \$29-\$65, with college and youth discounts available. See more about the EBC's effort to expand contemporary offerings in this issue.

At 7:30 pm Feb. 18, **The ZAPP Dancers** present *StoryStruck* in the Hult Center's Soreng Theater; \$15-\$17.50.

In dance education news, **Dance With Us** offers its *First Saturday Dance* at 7 pm Feb. 4 at the Trinity United Methodist Fellowship Hall; 440 Maxwell Road, featuring a mix of swing, West Coast, night club two step, ballroom and Latin. Following a lesson, there will be open social dancing from 8 to 10 pm. \$8 per person, new and experienced dancers welcome, no partner needed.

And **Argentine Tango** presents a *Milonga Vino Social Dance*, 6 - 8 pm February 15 at the Oregon Wine Lab, 488 Lincoln St. Free.

Pining for summer? Well, the **Oregon Country Fair** is looking for dancers and movement artists to teach and perform in its **Workit Shop** area and **Dance Pavilion**. "The Workit Shop area is a fun, safe, empowering space to explore, move and create with our bodies and voices," says the 2017 *OCF Entertainment Application guide*. "And the Dance Pavilion is a stage designed to host a variety of dance styles, ranging from African to Eastern European, salsa to contra." Apply to teach and perform at oregoncountryfair.org. And tell your friends: "We're trying to do outreach to performers and movement artists in other communities," says Dance Pavilion coordinator (and my next-door neighbor) Shawn Kahl.

Got a scoop on the local dance scene? Email Rachael Carnes at eugeneweeklydance@gmail.com