

This was a night to remember

In the earliest days of the Liberty Theater's restoration, funders asked: "Who will use it?"

Never, in our wildest expectations, did we suggest the Dance Theatre of Harlem would perform on the Liberty's stage. Dance itself did not seem feasible, given the stage's small dimensions.



Steve Forrester

Last Saturday night's concert only shows that if you build it, you don't know *who* will come. The Dance Theatre of Harlem's appearance was the most epic event in the theater's post-restoration history.

The Dance Theatre's interest in Astoria showed itself some two years ago. Portland's White Bird was bringing the ballet troupe to the Rose City and wanted to share the costs with another regional venue. At White Bird's recommendation, Edward Shoelwer, booking agent at the Dance Theatre called the Liberty. Executive Director Rosemary Baker Monaghan, was in disbelief. "I asked him twice, to be sure this was real," said Monaghan. She explained how small the Liberty's stage was. "We want to come," he said. "We'll work this out."

The Liberty had to raise roughly \$50,000 to host the troupe for a concert and classes for young dancers.

While I am not a ballet enthusiast, I was blown away by the dancers. Meanwhile there were plenty of balletomanes in the Liberty, which was within 50 of being sold out.

Theaters sometimes build audiences, but they also depend on others to build them. The classical music audience — built by KMUN's classical programming — has been the base of the Astoria Music Festival's audience. Similarly, the country-western audience is built by radio stations of the Ohana group.

On Saturday night I realized that Jeanne Maddox created an audience that is knowledgeable about ballet. Maddox's 40 years of teaching and mounting annual productions of *The Nutcracker* has built a large base that will turn out for dance.

At the end of the first movement, the near-capacity audience erupted in a way that I've not heard at other Liberty events.

So, what did the performers think? "They were thrilled," said Monaghan, who added



Anthony Savoy and Alison Stroming, with the Dance Theatre of Harlem, perform "Tschaikovsky Pas de Deux" at the Liberty Theater Saturday.



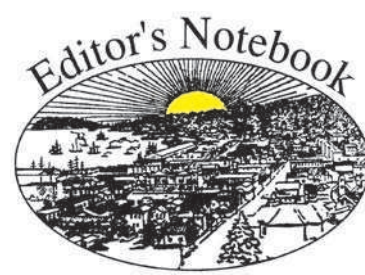
Virginia Johnson, artistic director for the Dance Theatre of Harlem, leads a ballet class in the Paulson Pavilion at the Liberty Theater Friday.

that Schoelwer said a smaller venue is good for the dancers, because it challenges them to be more fully present. That is, their movements, even facial expres-

sions are more apparent to the audience than in a large hall such as Portland's Schnitzer.

The intimacy of the Liberty Theater makes it a special per-

formance space for singers and musicians. Also, apparently for dancers. We could hear the squeak of their shoes and even a dancer's breathing. Occasionally



'This week we made a difference.'

stage lights would cast a dancer's shadow on a theater wall.

After the dancers had taken their final curtain call and disappeared, the Liberty audience stood in sustained applause. Company officials ran to the upstairs dressing rooms to tell the dancers what was going on. They returned to the stage and received the acclaim of a standing ovation.

"It was phenomenal that they brought the whole company — 18 dancers, the choreographer, ballet master, artistic director and company director," said Monaghan. "It was a bonus that Virginia Johnson, the artistic director, taught the master class. She's a legend in the ballet world."

Here is another way of understanding how significant Astoria's exposure to the Dance Theatre of Harlem was. This was their performance schedule: four shows in New York, two shows in Portland, Astoria's Liberty Theater, Tel Aviv, Israel, followed by Italy.

Education is the pivot point of the arts. If the next generation does not find its way into a theater for live performance — of music, theater, dance or opera — those arts will lose their audience.

When we scoured for money to restore the Liberty Theater, we listed education as one of our five goals. That goal was addressed big time last week, as a bevy of school children were given a first-class introduction to one of the nation's premier dance troupes. "Fourth- and fifth-graders from Naselle, Seaside and Gearhart rose for a standing ovation at the end of the dance number," said Monaghan.

"This week we made a difference," she added. "This is why we're here."

Jeanne Maddox Peterson said it was "a glorious experience" for her students to have a class with Virginia Peterson. "The younger kids had no idea who that was, so we looked on the Internet and watched Virginia in her dancing years, doing *Giselle*."

— S.A.F.

Open forum

Help homeless teens

The recent tragic death of Jerad Knutson, aka Ingrid Mayner, brings the hidden problem of youth homelessness into stark view. We sincerely hope that this is not the case in this tragedy, but the loss of any 19-year-old so far from home reminds many in our lesbian, gay, bisexual, transexual and questioning (LGBTQ) community of the peril of living on the streets.

Family rejection drives an epidemic of homelessness for LGBTQ children in this country. Our community lacks open and welcoming facilities to help young people living homeless, and we are working to establish

needed resources. We send heartfelt condolences to the family of this young person.

JERALYN O'BRIEN
TESSA SCHELLER
ALICIA PALMER
Lower Columbia Gender Alliance
Astoria

Sen. Johnson sides with GOP

It is time for state Sen. Betsy Johnson to show her true colors. While she has proven to be an effective state senator in many ways, for her to call herself a Democrat is becoming laughable.

Recently Sen. Johnson voted against her party and with the right wing of the Republican Party on two seminal bills. First was the new voter registration bill, that allows a person to become a registered voter just by applying for a license or ID card at the Department of Motor Vehicles. This bill was originally instigated by then Secretary of State Kate Brown, and signed into law by now Gov. Brown. The Democratic Party supports laws that make it easier for persons to legally register to vote. It is hard to understand why Betsy Johnson would side with the Republicans in making it harder to register to vote.

Johnson also just voted against the bill that makes persons selling guns to one another go to a licensed dealer and go through a background check. Her support of the gun rights lobby is legendary, and they don't call her Machine-gun Betsy for nothing. However, her views on guns are not in keeping with the mainstream of the Democratic Party, and Betsy Johnson should just switch parties.

It is time to get rid of this DINO (Democrat in Name Only) and find someone who truly represents Democrats in Northwest Oregon.

DON ANDERSON
Astoria



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