A Miami Troupe Raises the Bar In New York

As Miami City Ballet — both heroic and sweet — went on dancing last week at the David H. Koch Theater, the extraordinary achievements of this company (founded 39 years ago) became newly clear. Of all the ballet troupes who have visited the Koch in recent years, none looks so truly and completely a company. None feels so effortlessly right for New York. None seems so satisfying a continuation of several trains of choreographic thought already known in this city. None gives us such warmth and energy.

Above all, the season firmly placed this troupe at the forefront of all those dancing choreography by George Balanchine today. The week’s performances of his “Serenade” (1934), “Bourrée Fantasque” (1949) and “Symphony in Three Movements” (1972) were superb. Balanchine used to ask his dancers “What are you saving it for?”, these Miami dancers don’t need to be asked. The effortlessly spacious way they eat up space — fearlessly, again and again, stepping over the brink as if into the unknown — is a thrill to the senses. So is their sparkling musicality, catching multiple facets of the music and, like mirrors, beaming them out into the auditorium.

The exhilarating production of “Bourrée Fantasque,” staged by Sascha Pilarre, is a special triumph. Despite being choreographed here for New York City Ballet and despite brief-lived stagings by that company, American Ballet Theater and School of American Ballet in the last 35 years, this has become one of the Balan-

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Jennifer Carlynn Kronenberg and Carlos Miguel Guerra of the Miami City Ballet performing Liam Scarlett’s “Viscera” at the David H. Koch Theater at Lincoln Center.
Miami City Ballet, on New York Stage, Raises the Bar

From First Arts Page

Chore classics least known in this city. Set to three dance-filled scores by Emmanuél Chabrier (1841-94), it moves from comic absurdity, via cooly ceremonious romance, to dazzling ebullience. There’s a dash of crazy interaction to the whole ballet that’s entirely insidious.

Even if you think you know how exciting a Balanchine masterpiece might be, the one that ends “Bourrée” proves yet more intense than others, with astounding shifts of geometric formation. There’s one ultra-efficient sequence where no fewer than four concentric rings of dancers are all moving to frenetic and out and around, while a ballet dancer at the center (the fabulously fearless Nathalia Arja) is bursting into the air in lift like a champagne cork. A moment later, they’re all arrayed in vertical lines, moving with no less energy.

Three of the season’s works were created for the Miami troupe and enjoying New York premieres. The greatest (and strangest) of these is Alexei Ratman’s “Symphonic Dances” (2015). Although I reviewed this earlier in the week, I can’t resist noting here how another viewing enhanced its drama. Its central ballroom scene has an extraordinary doubling quality, with two doppelganger ballerinas moving through alternately similar and opposite experiences in a through-the-looking-glass world. “Heatscape” (2015) proves one of Justin Peck’s most poetic and engaging creations. Several repeated motifs stand out - not least the existing opening and ending, when the company of dancers (in single summer clothes designed by Rea Bartelme and Jocelynn King) rush to the front of the stage, against the red umbrellas burst of the patterned backdrop designed by Shepard Fairey/BFF Giant.com. In the first movement, a man and woman (Renan Cardeiro and Emily Brouwer) come together amid imagery that suggests the mirage of heat; they find their hands meeting and their feet passing together as if by chance, but after this happens three times in succession, it looks like destiny. There’s also a mine gesture that says “sleep”. They don’t sleep, but the desire is part of the intimacy.

In the second movement, a different woman (Thalia Allvison) dances with a different man (Kiefer Retelky); several times they rise up through a hoop made by his arms, then falls gently to the floor. The merely dance-packed third movement is led by three other dancers: Andree Cagnes and Shimon Ido with either Janette Delgado (Friday evening) or Jennifer Lauree (Saturday evening).

Atrope is at the forefront of specialists in Balanchine.

At times it’s hard to follow the way in which Mr. Peck tracks his music, but his Miami version of “Bourrée” is part of the fun; from that easy opening, we always know we’re in safe hands. In the third movement, Mr. Peck, too, makes a dramatic effect from concentric group circles - just two. But unlike in Balanchine’s “Bourrée” these move slowly, in and out of each other, with a strange tension that catches both the stage world’s shifting hierarchies and the pressure of the music’s harmonic.

Liam Scarlett's slick “Viscera,” which I reviewed in its 2015 Miami premiere, is made into another Piano Concerto No. 1. Lowell Lieberman’s, Mr. Scarlett is choreographer in residence at the Royal Ballet, this was his American debut as a choreographer. This season the Royal broadcast internationally its own performance of “Viscera”, although the Miurumians dance it better, that helps little. We see Mr. Scarlett’s virtuoso control of groups and acrobatic partnering, as well as the effects of smart timing, but this remains a glossy, lengthy sight piece of nothing much.

It’s very good to again see Twyla Tharp’s “Sweet Fields” (1996), set to (taped) hymns by the choral composer William Billings, and others drawn from the Shaker tradition and the Sacred Harp. Images of Shaker worship, community, “song and dance” and beauty succeed one another here with a grave beauty. The style is informal, elegant, ceremonious.

The stunning effect of the “Symphony in Three Movements” production arises, above all, from the sharp dynamic contrasts of the outer sections. The Miurumians’ naturally outgoing attack — led by Ms. Arja with Mr. Retelky, Patricia Delgado (Janette’s sister) with Mr. Cerbeirin, Ashley Knox with Jocelynn Portan — here is fully released. Although the central pas de deux has been beautifully danced by some casts at New York City Ballet in recent seasons, it’s fascinating to see the differently different interpretations it receives from Patricia Delgado and Mr. Cerbeirin.

All the dancers I have named are superb, as are Simone Messner, Jennifer Carlyn Krennberg and others. The season was presented by the enterpriseing Joyce Theater which has also brought the National Ballet of Canada and the Royal Ballet to the Koch in previous years. Here’s hoping the Joyce can now build a larger audience for these and other visiting troupes. These Miurumians, above all, deserve the same kind of packed houses that are often to be found for troupes visiting the Brooklyn Academy of Music.
A Troupe At Home Outside Its Surf

Bold, light, intimate, intensely musical, the dancing of Miami City Ballet flies straight to the heart. This company is now 30 years old; it's long been an international fixture with successful seasons at the Edinburgh Festival (1994 and 1995) and in Paris (2010). On Wednesday, it made its Lincoln Center debut at the David H. Koch Theater, with a double bill of George Balanchine's "Serenade" (1934) and Alexei Ratmansky's "Symphonic Dances" (2002). The two works, made 78 years apart, are dissimilar and yet related. Both were created in America by Russian-born choreographers to Russian music (Tchaikovsky, Rachmaninoff); both are pure-dance works that hint at darkly mysterious yet openhearted stories; both feature a great deal of sheer running, as if the dancers are driven by the music's gale force.

Miami City Ballet is here all week, with other works by Balanchine notably the ravishing "Bourrée Fantasque," from 1941, "Twylla Tharp ("Sweet Fields," 1995) and Justin Peck ("Beastscape," 2015), as well as Liam Scarlett's "Viscera." This representative choice of repertoire makes this company closer to the New York dance audience than any other troupe outside New York: Balanchine, Ms. Tharp, Mr. Ratmansky and Mr. Peck are all choreographers based in New York whose work has enriched the dance life of this city. The Ratmansky and Peck ballets — both important creations — were made for this company; their intense interest to New York dancegoers will be obvious.

That's not to say the Miamians are clones of New York's ballet companies; their high energy has a warm sumptuousness that surely speaks of Florida, and — even by ballet standards — they have an exceptionally youthful quality.

And there's no better ballet company to follow on Instagram, with its perfectly chosen miniature film clips of repertory and individual ballet steps. The choice of "Serenade" to open the gala says much. This was the first dance Balanchine choreographed on American terrain and with American dancers: those of the School of American Ballet. Over the decades, the work has started to seem the foundation stone of American ballet as we have come to know it. Both of Miami City Ballet's artistic directors, first Edward Villella and now Lourdes Lopez, are alums of the School of American Ballet and New York City Ballet.

The opening sequence of "Serenade" contains the three most crucial articles of faith in the Balanchine lexicon: first position, in which the dancer turns out legs and feet from the center of the body; tendu side (in which the dancer points a leg and foot); and fifth position (in which one turned-out foot is placed directly in front of the other, the light-crossed leg that will unlock space). The ballet's many moods include classicism and Romanticism

On Wednesday, Gary Sheldon conducted "Serenade" with welcome briskness. The orchestra of New York City Ballet is used to this music (Tchaikovsky's "Serenade for Strings" — with third and fourth movements placed by Balanchine in reverse order), and yet the sound was leaner and cleaner than usual, with striking attack. The ballets three leading roles were danced by Simone Meg勒, a former American Ballet Theater soloist who now, as a Miami principal, is reaching her high summer: the exaltant Nathalia Arja, and the ardent Emily Blumenfeld; the two solo men were Roman Krenstetter and Chase Swatosh. The staging was supervised by Ms. Lopez. There were questionable touches. When Ms. Blumenfeld held a single arabesque on pointe that was revolved twice by Mr. Swatosh, wasn't her arm stretching too high? When Mr. Swatosh held Ms. Meg勒 for a long time before finally lowering her to the floor near the end, shouldn't her hands have been completely still? But these matters little. From the opening tableau on, the Miamians made "Serenade" project heroically into the challenging broad, deep tail space of the Koch Theater, and caught both the sweep and detail of the music. Then in the moments when the simultaneity of movement and music — flickering beats of the legs matching rapid passage work in the strings — was so elusive, so felicitous, as to seem heart-stopping.

It was fascinating to see and feel the connections between Balanchine's choreographic masterliness in "Serenade" and Mr. Ratmansky's in "Symphonic Dances." Here, too, were thrilling connections of fast footwork and jumps with figures in the score: which is the three-movement coda of Rachmaninoff, this composer's final composition (written in America). Mr. Ratmansky, like Balanchine, suggests love, fate and community — and also dramatic situations between individuals and the ensemble.

Mr. Ratmansky is a dramatic poet and a compelling storyteller, but again like Balanchine, he is happy to let ideas of emotion and narrative flow upon a larger dance current. The three movements feature different costumes and take us in different directions. (The costumes, by Adeline Andre and Intra Dom, brighten the drama — and its mysteries.) Having seen "Symphonic Dances" in Miami two years ago, I find not one of the most remarkable dance creations of our century.

Between the two works, the Theme and Variations from Tchaikovsky's fourth suite for orchestra ("Mozartiana") was played. This really served two purposes. It linked the evening to Balanchine (who choreographed Mozartiana more than once) and to two of his musical interests, and it gave the stage staff time to lay down new flooring. Part of the magic of "Symphonic Dances," marvelously lighted by Mark Stanley, is the way its colors are reflected on the floor. The central movement is a balletic sequence in which women wear blue, yellow, red and pink; and the final movement begins against a backdrop on which four bears of white light aim upward. It's a great pleasure not knowing what's going on here, but it involves secrets, intimacy, romance, fire and rapture.

This is Miami City Ballet's first New York season since 2009. What can be done to bring this company to this city more often?
Miami City Ballet makes a splash in Lincoln Center debut

BY JORDAN LEVIN
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On hand were NYCB artistic director Peter Martin and two of ballet's most renowned choreographers: NYCB's Justin Peck, whose ballet Skate
take MCB performances Fri
day, and AIF artist in resid
cence Alexei Ratmansky, whose Symphonic Dances, another MCB commission, was featured Wednesday.

Dance critic Arja D'Anna said: "MBC dancers were incredibly successful.

Miami City Ballet's rousing performance was like a love letter to the Miami troupe. The artistic significance of this theater gave the world a reason to believe in Miami's potential as a major dance capital," she said. "We're not only creating, but also being inspired by the city's culture and history."

For 40 years, photojournalist Tim Chapman documented the city's vibrant arts scene. On Friday, some of those photographs will be on display at the Miami Herald's "Photojournalism: This Is Miami" exhibition. Chapman was one of the first to capture the city's unique energy and beauty through his lens.

Chapman said: "Miami is a melting pot of cultures and ideas. It's a place where creativity flourishes and everyone is a part of something special."

On Friday evening, Chapman was joined by MCB's artistic director to discuss the exhibit and the role of photography in capturing the city's spirit.

Chapman's photos captured the essence of Miami's vibrant arts scene, from the Closing of Times Square to the霄al Sunset in the Everglades. The exhibit features over 15 photographs, including some of the most dramatic images of Miami's rich history.

"It's a way of honoring all the great journalists who have gone through these [MBC] doors," Chapman said. "And I hope this exhibit will inspire others to keep telling the story of Miami, because it's such an important part of our city's identity."
Miami City Ballet dancers Emily Browning, Simone Monvar and Chase Swatosh dancing in ‘Serenade’ at Lincoln Center.
Miami troupe turning point from New York shows mark a debut Miami City Ballet makes the theater could be a seasoned dance audience siastic ovations from a on every level, with enthu-

dance critic Alastair Ma-
doesn't get any better than

turned at Lincoln Center in Washington, just nine years after it first stepped on stage in Miami (followed by more successful outings there in 2010 and 2015). Each time the troupe returned home glancing with achievement and

And they did in their way Miami City's dance style was a draw for Linda Shel-

New York shows mark a turning point from Edward Villella to Lausanne. Leippe er

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The Reinvention of Simone Messmer

At Miami City Ballet, the new principal has found her sweet spot.

BY GIA KOURLAS

What does it take to make Simone Messmer happy?
It’s not just another new job; it’s the right new job.

Messmer, the latest principal with Miami City Ballet, seems to have found it. As she told her new boss, artistic director Lourdes Lopez, the other day, “I’ve never been in a company with such mentally healthy people in my life.”

Of course, that’s not the only reason the company is such a brilliant fit for this transcendent, but not exactly mild-mannered ballerina. Messmer, a former soloist with American Ballet Theatre and, briefly, with San Francisco Ballet—she only lasted a season—has found herself where she’s always wanted to be: in an environment full of rigor, in which studio exploration is as valued as a performance.

“Every single person in the company is in ballet class every day,” she says. “I’ll do a pas de deux, and they stay in the room just to watch. Everyone is on board. I’m working for someone who actually really believes in what I’m doing, so I’m going to run with that.”

Messmer, who wrote to Lopez in May, was offered a principal contract with Miami City Ballet shortly after. Though the budget was already wrapped up, Lopez obtained special permission from her board to add another dancer to the roster.

But while it all happened quickly—she started on June 1—getting to this point hasn’t been easy for Messmer. In San Francisco, she quickly realized that “it was not an environment that I was working well in. I wasn’t dancing well. But other people have really flourished there. It depends on something I’m not sure I have.”

She did get little pearls of wisdom from certain people, including Sofiane Sylve and Yuri Possokhov (dancing his Firebird was a highlight, as was tackling a new role in Alexei Ratmansky’s Shostakovich Trilogy). “But in general I was floating on the ether because I wasn’t a focus of the staff, therefore my rehearsals were almost nonexistent,” she says. “I think it was a combination of the wrong place for me and also the first time in a brand-new environment. I was at Ballet Theatre for over a decade. It was the only thing I knew.”

In leaving ABT, a company in which she felt she had little room to grow, her aim was obvious: more meaty dancing roles. When that didn’t seem to be happening in San Francisco, Messmer told artistic director Helgi Tomasson that the company wasn’t the right fit. According to Messmer, she asked him if he wanted her to remain for the Paris tour, and he told her that he was planning on having her dance Choleric in George
At Miami City Ballet, the new principal has found her sweet spot.

By Gia Kourlas
“They all said that she's really talented, but has a very strong personality and asks a lot of questions. I wondered: If we were talking about a male dancer, would you have the same reaction?” —LOURDES LOPEZ

Balanchine’s *The Four Temperaments*. For Messmer, that would mean missing out on auditions, but the role was worth it.

Yet she never got to dance it. “I was never called to a rehearsal,” she says. After the Paris season, she left. “Very quickly.”

Shortly after, she returned to New York City, where she got in touch with her ballet teacher Wilhelm Burmann and resumed Gyrotonic training. “They got me back to a place where I was comfortable being seen again,” she says. “It was more of a mental thing.”

But it took time. In between San Francisco and Miami, Messmer experienced several difficult months when, in order to save money, she and her boyfriend, Mike Diaz—he’s the master carpenter at Alvin Ailey American Dance Theater—lived with his sister in New Jersey. “All of a sudden, I was unemployed,” she says. “Stagnant is not a place for an artist. I don’t think I’ve ever had a struggle like that. It’s a toll on your relationship, it’s a toll on your ego, it’s a toll on everything.”

Even though she was depressed, she didn’t fall back into old patterns. Ten years ago, Messmer took a leave of absence at ABT after going down what she calls “a self-destructive path.” She declines to talk specifics, but will say that she couldn’t live with herself if she’d done that again. “It would have made it worse, and it couldn’t have gotten worse, because I maybe would have quit.”

Burmann, who admires Messmer’s rare qualities—she is both a romantic dancer and one suited to contemporary works—and has worked with her since her ABT days, has had the opportunity to study her, then and now. “She is calmer,” he says. “She is more focused, and that makes a big difference.”

But it is hardly surprising that Lopez says she needed to first believe that Messmer was interested in Miami City Ballet for the right reasons. “I was very open with her. I said, ‘You’ve left Ballet Theatre and you’ve left San Francisco, and those are major companies that any young dancer would give an eye and a tooth to join. So what’s going on here? Because something’s going on.’”

Messmer recalls that she was nervous. “In all honesty, I don’t want to place blame—I was unhappy in San Francisco, but it’s not my place...
“It was difficult to answer questions like ‘Why didn’t it work?’ It’s not a simple answer,” she says. Even though Lopez was already a fan of Messmer’s dancing, she watched Messmer’s class and spoke to friends who had worked with her. “They all said that she’s really talented, she’s a workaholic, she’s very focused and present, she delivers onstage, but she has a very strong personality and asks a lot of questions and wants to know the answers,” Lopez says. “There was a part of me that made me wonder: If we were talking about a male dancer, would you have the same reaction?”

Lopez explained to Messmer that her sense of her was that she needed to find a place where someone would take her into a room and say, “Let’s make you a better dancer.” She told her that could happen in Miami. “We’ve got our eyes on the door and it’s really all about working—but I can’t do that on my own. You’re going to have to meet me halfway. What I’m talking about is no BS, no attitude, no diva, no overthinking a situation, no under-thinking it.”
To Lopez’s delight, there has been none of that. Messmer likes to work. She’s professional and serious. “She’s been wonderful,” Lopez continues. “And it hasn’t been easy for her because the technique is different, it’s faster. The Balanchine style is very different and she has not fought it. Quite the opposite.”

Now Messmer is learning a slew of thrilling parts, including Odette, in Balanchine’s Swan Lake, in which Lopez is coaching her, along with Janie Taylor’s luminous role in Justin Peck’s Year of the Rabbit and Balanchine’s Symphony in Three Movements, Serenade and A Midsummer Night’s Dream (both Titania and the divertissement pas de deux). While it hasn’t been easy to master the speed and intricacy of the Balanchine approach, Messmer, who has been able to work with Suki Schorer and Susan Pilarre—Lopez brought both School of American Ballet teachers to Miami to work with the company in separate visits—says that she may be more of a Balanchine dancer than she realized.

“Playing with the music the way I naturally do is geared well for this,” she explains. “There’s a big difference in the dynamic of every step. A tendu is a tendu, but in Balanchine the out-in is not even. You can do out–hold; in and out; or you hold the in. It’s that playing that makes you such a dynamic dancer.”

Now Messmer, who moved to Miami with Diaz, lives three blocks from the beach. It helps to have a carpenter-boyfriend; he is planning on building a sprung floor in their extra bedroom. She’s also grateful to her mother for sending her to Spanish-immersion school from kindergarten through eighth grade. And the Delgado sisters—Jeanette and Patricia, two of Miami City Ballet’s most treasured principals—are, in her words, “like a ray of sunshine. It’s not like anything I’ve ever seen in my life,” she adds. “I mean really.”

Messmer doesn’t think she’s ever danced as well as now—or been as confident. “I have a ton of things to work on, but I know clearly what I want to say,” she says. “It’s humbling to be in that position. And I’m super-grateful to Lourdes for taking this risk. There’s no words that can actually say thank you enough, so I just have to be that person in the company. I have to say my thank-yous through my dancing.”

Gia Kourlas writes about dance for The New York Times and other publications.
Taking Charge

Too often when we talk about the lack of female leaders in ballet, we focus on the unfairness of the glass ceiling. But in a field where so few careers are based on what’s fair or not, fairness seems almost beside the point. The real issue is what the dance world misses out on when we don’t have a diversity of experiences and perspectives among those who make major decisions.

This distinction hit home for me in this month’s cover story on Simone Messmer. Miami City Ballet artistic director Lourdes Lopez explains to writer Gia Kourlas that before hiring Messmer as a principal, she questioned the dancer’s reputation for having what colleagues called a “strong personality.” Lopez asked herself, “If we were talking about a male dancer, would people have the same reaction?” If it were a male director doing the hiring, would he have thought to ask that same question? Maybe, but maybe not. Having lived that life herself, Lopez knows firsthand the kinds of limitations that female ballet dancers face, how they’re expected to always smile and do as they’re told while men typically have a bit more leeway to assert themselves. That vantage point gave her a unique outlook, encouraging her to take a chance others might have passed on.

It’s by asking these kinds of questions and taking bold risks that dance will thrive. This month, Dance Magazine honors five luminaries who have done just that: We present 2015 Dance Magazine Awards to flamenco star Soledad Barrio, American Ballet Theatre principal Marcelo Gomes, National Ballet of Canada artistic director Karen Kain, dance historian and archivist David Vaughan, and Urban Bush Women founder Jawole Willa Jo Zollar. We salute not only their outstanding achievements, but their endless drive to push our field forward and make dance an even more meaningful and moving art form—one that doesn’t shy away from strong personalities.

Jennifer Stahl
Editor in Chief
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“I’m working for someone who really believes in what I’m doing, so I’m going to run with that.”
—Simone Messmer, on Lourdes Lopez.

THE VOTES ARE IN
Turn to page 80 to find out what readers chose as their favorite performances of 2015.
Growing up with The Nutcracker

The Christmas ballet tradition means so much to young aspiring dancers – as one Miami City Ballet dancer knows.

BY ERIK PETERSEN

Details
The Nutcracker is at the Broward Center from December 11 to 13 with a 7:30 p.m. performance on the 11th, 2 p.m. and 7:30 p.m. performances on the 12th and 1 p.m. and 6 p.m. performances on the 13th.

For tickets or more information: Visit browardcenter.org or miamicityballet.org. The Nutcracker runs from December 5 to 29 and also goes to Naples, Miami and West Palm Beach.
THE NUTCRACKER has loomed large in Ella Titus’ journey to becoming a professional ballet dancer. So has Miami City Ballet.

Titus’ first experience of professional ballet was a Miami City Ballet performance of The Nutcracker that came to her hometown, Clearwater. She was a little girl, but she knew what she wanted.

“Right away I was like ‘Oh, I want to do that’ to my parents,” she says.

Now she’ll be a part of a show that might just do that for other young aspiring ballet dancers in the audience. For most of the year, Miami City Ballet offers a diverse program of dance – new and classical, challenging and culturally expansive.

But in December, nobody wants new, avant garde or unfamiliar from their favorite ballet company. They want The Nutcracker – and Miami City Ballet is happy to oblige.

Tchaikovsky’s fanciful Christmas trip through a land of toy soldiers, troublesome mice, princes and little girls gets brought back to the Broward Center for the Performing Arts this year. They’ll do the George Balanchine version, easily the most famous modern Nutcracker.

“Whenever I think of Nutcracker, I think of this version,” Titus says. “A lot of other companies do other Nutcrackers, but I personally fell in love with this one.”

As with many ballet dancers, The Nutcracker brings back memories for Titus. After that initial announcement to her parents, they signed her up at a local dance studio. When Miami City Ballet returned, she auditioned for one of the children’s roles the company reserved for local kids. She got it, and that started a run of holiday performances with the company.

“I did it for five years there,” she says. “It was the best part of my childhood; everybody loves being in Nutcracker. I went up through the ranks of Nutcracker. It was the best part of the year for the family.”

That led into a move to Miami as a teenager for high school and a spot in the company’s pre-professional division. Then came graduation – and this year, Titus will for the first time dance The Nutcracker as a fully professional member of Miami City Ballet.

“This is my tenth year of doing Nutcracker with Miami City Ballet, but my first year with the company,” she says. “It’s just really, really special because all the kids from the school are involved. It’s really just a family tradition for so many families.”

With performances through most of December including a number of two-performance days, it’s a demanding schedule. But it’s worth the tiredness, Titus says.

“I think The Nutcracker is an exciting time for the whole company because everybody gets to try a lot of roles,” says Titus, who plays a handful of roles. “(It’s) not just the same two couples – there are three or four casts for most of the principal parts. People get the opportunity to see their friends as well.”

And then there are the children – aspiring dancers in the same position she was once in.

“I just love watching them dance,” she says. “It makes everyone excited about doing a million shows. You’re tired and then you look over and see the excitement.”

Find us on: f, g, i, t, p
He's a sly one, that J.J. Abrams. A year ago, the prolific producer-director of everything from TV's *Lost* and *Fringe* to the Spielberg-homage *Super 8* and the big-screen reboot of *Star Trek* was the subject of immense fan scrutiny as he directed *Star Wars: The Force Awakens*, one of the most anticipated movies ever made.

At the same time, Abrams was working on another film that wasn't on anyone's radar, because few people knew it existed. When the trailer for *10 Cloverfield Lane* snuck into theaters on Jan. 15, shown in front of Michael Bay's war drama *13 Hours: The Secret Soldiers of Benghazi*, audiences were stunned. In an era in which advance posters and teaser trailers are analyzed...
**A ‘Dream’ of a ballet for Miami**

Miami City Ballet premiered a new production of ‘A Midsummer Night’s Dream’ today. Below are sketches and photos of the new production, directed by Miami visual artist Michele Oka Doner.

**By Jennifer Canales**

“When I was a dancer,” says Miami City Ballet artistic director Edward Villella, “I would have loved to see this production.”

And why not? It’s not just that the lead parts are danced by two of the ballet’s male lovers, Chase Swatosh and Jennifer Lauren, pose for the troupe’s new undersea production of "A Midsummer Night’s Dream." It’s also the collaboration between Miami visual artist Michele Oka Doner, current artistic director Edward Villella and current artistic director Edward Villella.

Villella, who has been in charge of the company’s production since 2003, says the new production has been a long time coming. "It’s been a dream of mine," he says, "to have a production that is both a visual and a physical experience."

For Villella, the key to making this dream a reality was finding a director who could bring the story to life on stage. Enter Michele Oka Doner, a visual artist whose work has been described as "magical" and "surreal." Doner’s vision for the production was to create a new setting for Shakespeare’s classic tale, drawing inspiration from the underwater world of the Caribbean.

The result is a production that is both dazzling and thought-provoking. The costumes are designed by Oka Doner, who has worked with companies such as the American Ballet Theatre and the Boston Ballet. The sets are created by local artists, including the Miami Art Museum.

The cast is made up of some of the company’s top dancers, including Chase Swatosh and Jennifer Lauren. The production is directed by the company’s current artistic director, Edward Villella.

"This is a dream come true," says Villella. "It’s been a dream of mine for a long time to have a production that is both a visual and a physical experience."

The production opens today and runs through Sunday, March 13. Tickets are available online or at the box office.
DANCE REVIEW | MIAMI CITY BALLET

Miami City Ballet dancers perform in the company’s new production of Balanchine’s ‘A Midsummer Night’s Dream.’

MCB’s ‘Midsummer Night’s Dream’

an undersea fantasy

BY JORDAN LEVIN
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Miami City Ballet’s new production of A Midsummer Night’s Dream is a shimmery, shadowy, magical jewel box of a show. Artist Michele Oka Doner’s set and costumes, which transpose George Balanchine’s beloved rendition of the Shakespeare play from its traditional forest to the depths of a fantasy ocean, are not just visually enchanting. They add a layer of ominous mystery (and some charming whimsy) that suit this tale of magically tangled lovers and fairy royalty, and strikingly affect the ballet’s atmosphere.

Add Balanchine’s brilliant choreography, vivid performances by the dancers, a flock of eager children, delicious Mendelssohn music in a bright performance from the Opus One Orchestra, and together they make Miami City Ballet’s Dream, which premiered Friday night at the Ziff Ballet Opera House at the Adrienne Arsht Center, a captivating package.

Dancer sets shifting images (Wendall Harrington is credited with projection design) on the back wall and a transparent scrim in the front of the stage, layering enormous, ethereal sea plants and creatures, which change with each scene and even undulate slightly, creating a shifting, cinematic atmosphere.

John Hall’s shadowy lighting adds to the surreal mood. The intricate costumes combine silvery, shimmery unitards, feathery seaweed skirts, swooping coral headdresses; they make the dancers seem like darting fish in the dark depths.

Balanchine is known for his abstract ballets, but the speed and assurance with which he relates Dream’s complicated plot and meshes storytelling and character with musical inspiration and compositional coherence, is astonishing. He packs the first four acts of the play into just one. An early scene where the lovers make their case before Theseus (Carlos Guerra) transposes a verbose exposition into four quick gestures: Helena (Emily Bromberg) loves Demetrius (Renan Cerdeiro), who rejects her for Hermia (Jennifer Lauren), who’s happily united with Lysander (Chase Swatosh). Segments like the one where Titania (Simone Messmer, with a newly luxuriant, precipitous grace) dances with a regal Cavalier (Reyneris Reyes), while her flock of fairies repel Puck (Shimon Ito) as he tries to steal her tiny Page (Olivia Quintane, daughter of ballet master and mistress Arnold Quintane and Joan Latham), are contained compositional jewels. Puck and the bewildered lovers chase each other at a breakneck pace that wonderfully expresses their delirious predicament, simultaneously funny and frightening.

As the fairy king Oberon, Kleber Rebello added new authority to his familiar technical facility, simultaneously capricious and...
regal, skimming through beats and leaps at dragonfly speed. Nathalia Arja was a sparkling, quicksilver delight as the lead butterfly. Ito also emerged in a new way, giving a vivid, adroitly comic and graceful portrayal of the mischievous Puck. Didier Bramaz was effectively funny as the bumbling Bottom, and the idea of turning him into a manatee (instead of a donkey), swaying his head in search of seagrass while Messmer cavorts adoringly around him, works. (Although the scene was marred by a manatee mask that looks like a cheap plush toy.) Cerdeiro and Bromberg gave a compelling portrayal of the emotionally agonized undertones that darken their comically fraught conflict, a sign of director Tarell Alvin McCraney’s efforts as Shakespeare coach and dramaturge.

Gary Sheldon led the orchestra in a rippling, crisply nuanced performance of Mendelssohn’s music, with the added pleasure of six singers in a crystalline rendition of two Shakespearean songs.

The second act is primarily a grand, formal divertissement, with ranks of dancers in gorgeously elaborate, glittering costumes of pale lavender, seafoam and gold. It’s centered around an exquisitely lyrical pas de deux, danced Friday by Tricia Albertson and Rainer Krenstetter. Their performance was beautifully shaped and finished, but cool, restrained — a sense of emotional release would have given it more depth. Jordan Elizabeth Long was uncomfortably tense in what should be the powerful role of Hippolyta.

Yet these weaker elements did not ultimately take away from the climax of Dream, as the fairies, shimmering in white, silver and gold, gather — in farewell, but also to remind us of the magical, disturbing possibilities that lie beneath the surface.