

## **About the Company of Ballet des Amériques**

A couple of years ago, on a bright Sunday in June, I found myself sitting in a small theater in Mamaroneck, New York contemplating escape routes. Having been persuaded by my wife to attend a ballet recital by a local dance school, Ballet des Amériques, in support of her co-worker's daughter, I had failed to come up with an adequate excuse. It is not that I disdain ballet. I am a fan – a longstanding, enthusiastic fan – but I have some fairly high standards.

And the thought of spending a beautiful summer afternoon in a dark theater watching children stumble through “Peter and the Wolf” did not appeal.

As we waited that day, I remember thinking back to a moment before the rising of the curtain at the City Center in New York in the 1970's when my wife and I groaned with the rest of the audience as the announcement was made that the great dancer, Ivan Nagy, had canceled. At the time, dance fans knew Nagy to be the most accomplished partner to any ballerina – elegant and impeccable in his lifts and a first rate soloist.

And that night, as he had so often since her defection, he was accompanying the magnificent Russian prima ballerina, Natalia Makarova. So an audience poised to see one of the great performances of “Giselle” of that or any dance season involuntarily expressed our dismay.

Until, after a pause, the announcement came that, dancing in place of Ivan Nagy that evening would be Mikhail Baryshnikov.

The audience erupted with the sort of cheers more often heard at a ballgame.

Suddenly, we were to witness an historic event, two of the greatest living ballet dancers in their primes joining together on stage to create once in a lifetime magic.

And magic it was, a night of dance I will never forget.

But this Sunday afternoon in June promised nothing of the sort.

The lights went down.

The only announcement was that we kindly turn off our cell phones.

And the children danced.

As I watched, to my delight, they did not stumble. Not a one.

Oh, they were cute and charming, as little girls and boys bedecked in colorful costumes will be, especially to an audience full of family and friends.

But as the dances unfolded and the afternoon progressed it became clear that something else was going on.

These children danced with purpose.

From the tiniest tot to the tallest teen, I was amazed to see not just wonderful execution of steps. With discipline and practice, and much repetition, steps can be mastered. No, I saw something much more

unlikely this surprising Sunday.

I recognized a consciousness on the part of these kids that they were participating in, and demonstrating for an audience, the art of dance. This shocked me nearly as much as an announcement of Baryshnikov's appearance as Peter would have.

This group of students from a small local ballet school were artists. Oh, they were not fully formed. They were works in progress but they were thoughtful. That in itself was unusual. And they were determined. And the steps they were dancing were not for babies.

This choreography was interesting and unusual.

To me the apex of ballet choreography is, was and always will be George Balanchine. Back in those long ago seventies, while he was still alive, I had seen as much of Balanchine's New York City Ballet as my work and my pocketbook allowed. It was never enough but quite a lot. And since those days I have revisited the NYCB often and seen many other dance companies.

I am always on the lookout for great choreography from others.

Rarely do I find it.

Well, the biggest surprise was still to come that afternoon.

The choreography for the children's dances was fascinating and evocative but, after the intermission, it turned out that Ballet des Amériques was not only a school but also a professional troupe of dancers, accomplished dancers, of ballet and modern dance.

One performance after another by the professional company amazed me. These were intriguing dances fully enhancing the music in a way that so few choreographers other than Balanchine have ever done to my satisfaction.

The movement through space and the placement of bodies was so organic that it often seemed inevitable and unique at the same time.

To my astonishment, I had been dragged to an amateur hour only to find myself riveted by mature terpsichorean artistry the like of which I had not encountered in many years.

Later, I found out that the company director, Carole Alexis, is the choreographer, the teacher and the leader who makes the dances and inspires the dancers, young and old, student and professional, to embrace and embody the art of dance.

Now rather than escaping the upcoming Sunday in June at the Emelin, (they are performing June 13<sup>th</sup> and 14<sup>th</sup> 2015) I look forward to impassioned dancing and inventive choreography – the art of Carole Alexis and Ballet des Amériques.

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