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Ballet Updated: Two styles come together in this year's American Dance Festival

By Ken Keuffel

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When Charles Reinhart looks at the new pieces that ballet companies are presenting these days, he notes that many modern-dance choreographers have created them. He also wonders why so much silence has greeted this and other manifestations of a crossover trend.

"Nobody has really said anything about it," said Reinhart, the director the American Dance Festival in Durham. "We have reached a level of integration, so to speak, where we should really examine it and ... look at the positive and the negative and see what's really developed."

The next festival -- titled "Where Ballet and Modern Meet" -- will try to do just that Thursday through July 25 in Reynolds Industries Theater at Duke University, the Durham Performing Arts Center and other venues in Durham.

Several performances and two panel discussions will both investigate the influences that modern dance and ballet have had on one another and illuminate the boundaries that "do or do not exist between the two."

The festival will feature eight world premieres, one United States premiere and four "reconstructions" of existing works. A mini-festival will showcase pieces by Israeli choreographers; a similar effort, featuring the work of Japanese choreographers, was held last summer.

For the first time, patrons will be able to follow festival developments online at www.americandancefestival.org, thanks to a video project called "May We Have This Cyber Dance?" And the Durham Performing Arts Center will replace Duke's Page Auditorium as a principal festival venue because of its better sight lines.

As for the theme, "Where Ballet and Modern Meet," the contemporary choreographers whose work will be represented at the festival have also created works for top ballet companies. They include Paul Taylor, Twyla Tharp, Laura Dean, Ohad Naharin, Mark Morris and Shen Wei.

What has this meant in terms of artistic output? Festival patrons will get a chance to see for themselves during at least three presentations by three companies:

□ Shen Wei Dance Arts will present Parts I and II of *Re*, which were originally set on Les Grands Ballets Canadiens De Montreal, along with Part III, a festival-commissioned world premiere. The performances, ushering in the festival's presence at the performing-arts center, will be June 18-20.

□ Cedar Lake Contemporary Ballet will perform Naharin's *Decadance* (2007) at the center (June 25–27). *Decadance* pieces together "two decades of choreography into an explosive masterpiece," press materials say.

□ Aspen Santa Fe Ballet will weigh in with the reconstruction of Tharp's *Sue's Leg* and that of Dean's *Night*, which "skillfully incorporates traditional ballet steps with the hallmarks of her legendary works -- Dean's own music and geometric patterns." The Aspen Santa Fe program will be July 2-4 at the center.

Modern dance's influence on ballet -- and visa versa -- will be explored further during two panel discussions that are free and open to the public.

□ The first panel discussion, "Where Ballet Meets Modern: The Choreographer's View," will be at 1 p.m. on June 24 at the Nelson Music Room of Duke University. Reinhart will moderate, and the panelists will include Dean, Naharin and Emanuel Gat.

Reinhart said he would encourage choreographers to work in different worlds.

"I'm always worried about the financial side of dancers and choreographers," he said. "This gives many more opportunities for the modern-dance choreographer to make some more money. That's not a negligible thought since (dance) is the poorest-paid profession of any."

There are potential artistic awards, as well.

"Artistically, I think that the positives outweigh the negatives in the sense that this coming together of the two will result in a third way which could be, choreographically, very interesting," Reinhart said. "It just gives more possibilities to the hand of the choreographer."

□ The second panel discussion, "Where Ballet Meets Modern: Training the Dancer," will be at 1 p.m. on July 8, also in the Nelson Music Room. The panelists had not been named as of last week.

Reinhart suggested that the training is paying off handsomely in terms of results that would have been unthinkable 40 or 50 years ago.

"Dancers today are phenomenal," he said. "The dancers today can do more. They can do more in terms of different directions."

■ The American Dance Festival will be presented Thursday through July 25 in Reynolds Industries Theater at Duke University, the Durham Performing Arts Center and other venues in Durham. For information on festival presentations, go to www.americandancefestival.org. Single-ticket prices for festival performances are \$20-\$41; contact the Duke University box office at www.tickets.duke.edu or 919-684-4444, or contact the Durham Performing Arts Center at www.dpacnc.com or 919-680-2787. Subscriptions, which reduce the price of a performance by 30 percent, can be ordered online or on the telephone at both box offices. There are also discounts for groups of 10 or more and for students.

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