

ASPEN SANTA FE BALLET

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ASPEN SANTA FE BALLET

WINTER 2018 NEWS

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PHOTO: MICHELE CARDAMONE

ASPEN SANTA FE BALLET

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Dear Friends,

The new year is off to a great start and memories of our magical *Nutcracker* season still linger. Our eight-performance run was completely sold out, with over 300 students from The School of Aspen Santa Fe Ballet dancing alongside professional performers. Each year we fortify our ranks with 17 guest performers who supplement our *Nutcracker* cast. Often this opportunity helps propel the careers of young artists, giving them valuable professional experience. One such performer who danced with us recently has since gone on to Broadway as a member of the original cast of *Hamilton*! (pg. 10).

This winter, we look forward to our highly-anticipated collaboration with the renowned piano virtuoso Joyce Yang and the Aspen Music Festival and School (pg. 4-6). Surrounded by ASFB dancers, Ms. Yang will play the music of Leoš Janáček in *Return to a Strange Land* by choreographer Jiří Kylián, and Philip Glass for Nicolo Fonte's *Where We Left Off*. Finnish choreographer Jorma Elo reimagines Robert Schumann's *Carnaval* in a brand-new work commissioned specifically for this project. This incredible evening of music and dance will premiere in Aspen and Santa Fe before ASFB takes it on the road with performances at the Barclay Theater in Orange County and at the sleek Valley Performing Arts Center in Los Angeles.

After ten fruitful years with Aspen Santa Fe Ballet, longtime dancer Emily Proctor Franc will make her final appearances with ASFB this winter as she transitions into a new career as a realtor in Portland, Oregon, joining husband and former ASFB dancer, Peter Franc. The couple met in 2010 while dancing together at ASFB and married one year ago in Hawaii. Don't miss her last performances with ASFB this winter season!

In January, Santa Fe audiences will be treated to a one-night-only appearance by the fabulous Les Ballets Trockadero de Monte Carlo. This all-male ensemble masterfully combines high camp parody with an outstanding display of classical ballet prowess. In February, Ailey II's cast of outstanding young dancers will bring an explosive evening of contemporary dance to Aspen and Santa Fe audiences (pg. 8-9).

We invite you to partake in all of the exciting dance that ASFB has to offer. Our hope is that the creativity, artistry, and diversity you see on stage will inspire and nurture your spirit. As always, we appreciate your loyal support and enthusiasm and we wish you a happy new year filled with the grace and beauty of dance.

Tom Mossbrucker

Tom Mossbrucker
Artistic Director

Jean-Philippe Malaty

Jean-Philippe Malaty
Executive Director

Living Art



In the studio with choreographer Jorma Elo & pianist Joyce Yang

When audiences settle into their seats for Aspen Santa Fe Ballet's 2018 winter season, they'll experience a first in the company's 21-year history: an entire evening performed to live piano music brought to life by world-renowned pianist Joyce Yang, a Van Cliburn International Piano Competition silver medalist and Avery Fisher Career Grant recipient.

While ASFB has occasionally hired a pianist when called for in past performances, there has not yet been a full evening of live music. ASFB Executive Director Jean-Philippe Malaty looks forward to this development: "This is the ideal condition, having a musician playing live. To have that collaboration and both arts being created at the same time, that's very inspiring."

What's more, the centerpiece of the program will be the premiere of a new ballet by renowned choreographer and ASFB regular Jorma Elo, who has collaborated with Yang on a new ballet set to Robert Schumann's *Carnaval*. In addition to the new work being choreographed by Elo, Yang will also play the music of Leoš Janáček for Jiří Kylián's *Return to a Strange Land* and Philip Glass in Nicolo Fontè's *Where We Left Off*.

The seeds of the Elo/Yang project were first planted four years ago, when Yang saw ASFB perform at the Joyce Theater in New York City. The performance inspired her to think about what a collaboration with dance might look like for her. "I've always imagined things when I practice and perform," says Yang. "It's all about colors and shapes, and when I realized that I can actually have that, not just in my imagination but happening before my eyes, it was like being able to see for the first time."

Yang approached Asadour Santourian, the Aspen Music Festival and School's (AMFS) Vice President for Artistic Administration, about her idea of a dance collaboration. A former student of the AMFS and now a fixture of the summer festival, Santourian says Yang often uses him as a springboard for her ideas: "Joyce has a very active and curious imagination about involving art forms and music. She came to me and said, 'I have this idea, but you're going to think I'm crazy.'"

Luckily, Santourian did not think she was crazy, instead encouraging Yang to pursue the idea. Yang reached out to John Mangum, president and artistic director of the Philharmonic Society of Orange County—the co-commissioning organization for the Yang/Elo project alongside the AMFS and the City of Aspen—where she is a



PHOTO: MICHELE CARDAMONE

frequent guest artist. Santourian also suggested that Mangum and Yang connect with ASFB, a company well-known for its risk-taking abilities. "It's been a really terrific partnership," Mangum says. "To have such generous, open, thoughtful partners who understand the dance world, the choreography, and the time that it takes to prepare the piece properly has been invaluable."

After solidifying the partnership with ASFB, it was now the responsibility of ASFB Artistic Director Tom Mossbrucker to match Yang with the right choreographer. "We wanted somebody who knows the company because, with the added element of live music, it could get complicated," Mossbrucker says. "We also wanted to find a choreographer who really gets inspired by music, so Jorma Elo came to the top of our list."

Currently in residence at Boston Ballet, Elo is a much sought-after choreographer, creating works for major companies all over the world, from New York City Ballet to the Bolshoi Ballet. Elo has a long history with ASFB, which boasts four of his ballets in its repertoire.

Elo (himself a pianist) and Yang met each other for the first time at Steinway Hall in New York City and the two immediately clicked. Yang

was intent on selecting a Schumann piece for the new ballet, so she came to the meeting prepared to play a variety of the composer's works and the two eventually agreed on *Carnaval*.

"*Carnaval* was the most challenging because it is the most segmented and most temperamental," Yang says. "And somehow [Elo] said, 'Okay, let's go for the challenging one.'"

Elo credits Yang's energy and attitude with making him feel comfortable selecting a difficult piece of music: "There's madness in it and there's freedom for me as a choreographer to feel the music in the moment when I'm creating."

It's commonly thought amongst musicians that audiences don't often "get" Schumann because of how his music tends to pull in so many conflicting directions. Yang believed that having dancers perform to such a complex score would help translate the piece more clearly and let audiences in on Schumann's genius.

"Musicians are obsessed with Schumann because of his quirky nature and how he manages to link his multi-personality syndrome into a series of character pieces that actually end up working out musically," Yang explains. "So I thought, if this can be choreographed in a way



PHOTO: MICHELE CARDAMONE

that can reveal to people what we actually feel as musicians, I think audiences would really get a kick out of it.”

Elo has taken this temperamental music and run with it. Some of the choreography is inspired literally by a carnival, but for the most part Elo has latched onto the idea of multiple personalities and conflicting emotions. “Split personalities and things that the composer was dealing with must cause tension and unpleasant feelings,” says Elo. “What comes out of the contradiction of these moods? It becomes interesting for me to create; it’s layering in a rich way.”

Having the luxury of a pianist in the studio while the dance is being created—and a world-class virtuoso at that—brings a whole new energy to the process. Elo is able to ask Yang to hold chords a bit longer, create “hiccups” in the music, and make other slight alterations to accommodate the dancers. These little tweaks and adjustments have shed new light on the music for Yang, who says in many ways she feels she’s only truly understanding the piece for the first time because of this experience.

It’s not only Yang having a breakthrough in the studio: the dancers are loving it too. “The energy of the room is completely different,” says dancer Evan Supple. “There are vibrations with a live musician that aren’t there with a CD and a speaker. It also informs your musicality in a more visceral way, which translates noticeably into your movement.”

Dancer Seia Rassenti-Watson notes that “Joyce’s interpretation varies slightly every time she plays. As a dancer, you really have to be hyper-aware of how she is playing in each moment because it’s never going

to be the exact same—just like dance. It’s exciting and nerve-racking, but I think the results will be magical. It’s living art.”

Elo can see the difference translated in the dancers’ bodies when rehearsing to live versus recorded music. “Dancers are like animals; they don’t react, really, to words,” says Elo. “They react much more strongly to the musical vibrations that the instrument gives out than to me explaining complex vocabulary verbally. They feel it.”

ASPEN SANTA FE BALLET: AN EVENING WITH PIANIST JOYCE YANG

ASPEN

March 24 - Aspen District Theatre

SANTA FE

March 31 - The Lensic Performing Arts Center

ORANGE COUNTY, CA

April 5 - Irvine Barclay Theater

NORTHRIDGE, CA

April 7 - Valley Performing Arts Center

HOLIDAY HAPPENINGS

Sugar Plum Tea Party

New in Aspen this year, Aspen Santa Fe Ballet hosted an afternoon tea party at the historic Hotel Jerome. Complete with a cupcake-decorating station, popcorn wagon, hot chocolate, and sweets galore, the sold-out event was by all accounts a rousing success! Children got to meet and take pictures with their favorite characters from *The Nutcracker* and were treated to a surprise performance by ASFB Folklorico. Many thanks to the Hotel Jerome for generously sponsoring this event.



Nutcracker Storytelling

On a quiet Sunday afternoon, children and families gathered around Roaring Fork Valley actress Dani Kopf at Willits' brand new bookstore, Bookbinders Basalt, as she brought to life Hoffman's famous Christmas tale, *The Nutcracker*. A visit from one of the friendly mice from ASFB's production capped the event, which is sure to be another holiday tradition in the making!



ASPEN

SANTA FE

ASPEN SANTA FE BALLET

2018 WINTER SEASON

PHOTO: MICHELE CARDAMONE



PHOTO: JORDAN CURET

ASPEN SANTA FE BALLET

January 20 | 7:30pm

Generously underwritten by Bebe and David Schweppe

Just in time for the height of ski season, enjoy this special one-night-only performance of fan favorites from ASFB's repertoire. The program includes Alejandro Cerrudo's enigmatic *Silent Ghost* with its haunting closing duet, Cayetano Soto's brash and extroverted *Huma Rojo* set to the popular music of Xavier Cugat, and the perspective-bending *Dream Play* by Fernando Melo. These audience-tested ballets have been performed the world over to rousing acclaim and now ASFB is bringing them back home to light up the winter!

"Aspen Santa Fe Ballet is ready for its Hollywood close-up."

— Los Angeles Times



PHOTO: EDUARDO PATINO

AILEY II

February 16 | 7:30pm

Generously underwritten by Melinda and Norman Payson

The talented dancers of Ailey II are renowned for captivating audiences and translating their strength and agility into powerful performances. Under the artistic direction of Troy Powell, this critically-acclaimed company presents vibrant performances and innovative community programs across the country and internationally. The Ailey spirit shines as these artists perform an exhilarating and diverse repertoire that includes Alvin Ailey's timeless classics and thrilling new works by today's outstanding emerging choreographers.

"The future is theirs."

— The New York Times



PHOTO: MICHELE CARDAMONE

ASPEN SANTA FE BALLET: AN EVENING WITH PIANIST JOYCE YANG

March 24 | 7:30pm

Generously underwritten by Judith Steinberg and Paul Hoenmans

Presented in collaboration with the Aspen Music Festival & School

Experience a milestone in Aspen Santa Fe Ballet history: an entire evening performed to live piano brought to life by the world-renowned Joyce Yang, a Van Cliburn International Piano Competition silver medalist and Avery Fisher Career Grant recipient. At the center of this program is a world premiere by noted Finnish choreographer Jorma Elo, who collaborated with Yang on a new ballet set to Robert Schumann's *Carnaval*. Also on the program are Jiří Kylián's seminal *Return to a Strange Land* with the music of Leoš Janáček, and Nicolo Fonte's *Where We Left Off* with music by Philip Glass.

"[Yang's] attention to detail and clarity is as impressive as her agility, balance, and velocity."

— Washington Post



PHOTO: SASCHA VAUGHAN

LES BALLETS TROCKADERO DE MONTE CARLO

January 23 | 7:30pm

Generously underwritten by Bill Thornton

Dancing the fine line between high art and high camp, the internationally beloved Les Ballets Trockadero de Monte Carlo have delighted audiences around the world for four decades. Risking comfort for brilliant pointe work, this all-male troupe wittily parodies dance classics, from *Swan Lake* to Martha Graham. Combining an encyclopedic knowledge of ballet with their uniquely wicked comedic sensibility, the Trocks offer buoyant and hilarious evenings for dance aficionados and complete novices alike.

"The funniest night you will ever have at the ballet."

— Sunday Times



PHOTO: KYLE FROMAN

AILEY II

February 13 | 7:30pm

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"The future is theirs."

— The New York Times



PHOTO: MICHELE CARDAMONE

ASPEN SANTA FE BALLET: AN EVENING WITH PIANIST JOYCE YANG

March 31 | 7:30pm

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"[Yang's] attention to detail and clarity is as impressive as her agility, balance, and velocity."

— Washington Post



Spotlight: Kamille Upshaw

by Jessica Moore

A native of Washington, D.C., and now a ten-year resident of New York City, Kamille Upshaw is making a name for herself on the Great White Way. With an intense ballet and modern background and degree from the acclaimed Juilliard School, one would think a career in concert dance might be all but set in stone. Upshaw was selected in 2014 to perform with Aspen Santa Fe Ballet as a guest dancer in *The Nutcracker* and remains connected with members of the company. However, with other performance experiences ranging from The Metropolitan Opera's *Faust* to BET Honors with Alicia Keys, Upshaw has parlayed her versatile skills onto Broadway stages, with a life-changing role in the award-winning theatrical sensation, *Hamilton: An American Musical*. Now in rehearsals for the new musical *Mean Girls* coming to Broadway in the spring of 2018, we caught up with Upshaw to hear about her life on stage.

When did you start dancing?

I have been twirling around in dance class since the age of three, but I really started to grow a deeper appreciation for dance around the age of seven. I was able to attend performing arts schools from middle school to college and continue to dance at a competition studio. My time at Baltimore School for the Arts provided me with my most intense training in ballet and modern, which 100% prepared me to move on to Juilliard—the school that molded me into the dancer I am today!

How did you get involved in musical theater?

Musical theater dance has always been a part of my life through my studio training, but not in school. I always believe that a dancer should be very versatile so that he or she can pursue any career opportunity. I graduated college and danced in a few concert dance companies for the first two years before I joined the musical theater world. I have found so much joy and growth as an artist in this industry and I look forward to all the experiences and knowledge it still has to offer me.

What is your connection with ASFB?

Besides my obsession with ASFB because of all the friends I have in the company, my connection is through the 2014 *Nutcracker* season. I was so excited to work with Tom and Jean-Philippe. *The Nutcracker* is one of my favorite ballets to perform and I couldn't have done it with a better company!

How did you get involved with *Hamilton* on Broadway and what was that experience like?

Hamilton was a dream come true for me! I finally got cast in the show after many rounds of auditions. The first time I auditioned I got very close, but no luck; then I got called back in for a private audition with a few other girls when a spot opened up two months later. Shortly after I found out that I had landed the vacation swing job, which meant learning all five of the women's ensemble parts and being prepared to go on for them at any time. I then graduated to a permanent swing position, a role I kept until I ended my run this past September 2017. The experience was OUT OF THIS WORLD! Not only did I get to make my Broadway debut in *Hamilton: An American Musical*, I also got to meet lots of celebrities, all of whom were so sweet and in such awe of what we did on that Richard Rodgers stage. Let's just say I had two years of never-ending parties and lots of hard work.

Tell us about your role in the upcoming musical *Mean Girls* and what you're most excited about for this project.

My experience with *Mean Girls* has already been crazy fun but a lot of work! I started working on the show in April 2017 in what we call a lab. After that I started rehearsals for our out-of-town run in Washington, D.C., which we just finished this December. I am in the ensemble and play the role of Rachel Hamilton. Tina Fey actually giggled when she told me my character name because *Hamilton* would continue to be a part of my life one way or another. Just like any musical theater show, I had to audition for the part. I think I went in about six times before I booked the job. I am extremely excited to continue working with this dynamite team and bring this show to life. BROADWAY HERE WE COME!!

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ENT Center for the Arts
March 28

ORANGE COUNTY, CA

Irvine Barclay Theater
April 5

NORTHRIDGE, CA

Valley Performing Arts Center
April 7



PHOTO: ROSALE O'CONNOR

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ASPEN SANTA FE BALLET
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AILEY II

SANTA FE
February 13

ASPEN
February 16



PHOTO: EDUARDO PATINO