

THE JERUSALEM POST

A BALLET OF TWO CITIES

1st Flash brings Elo's decisive and cunning choreography to Jean Sibelius's music. The work has been in Aspen Santa Fe Ballet's repertoire since 2007.

BY ORI J. LENKINSKI | MARCH 1, 2019 17:37



CAYETANO SOTO'S 'Human Rojo.'
(photo credit: ROSALIE O'CONNOR)

Nearly every day, Jorma Elo walks into rooms filled with dancers. As a world-renowned choreographer, he does this and has done it in dozens of cities for as many companies for many years. And yet, the magic of this simple fact, of being in the room with dancers continues to move Elo.

“Being together with these wonderful, physical, animal instruments called dancers that dedicate their lives to a short career and want to dance and be on stage... I'm blown away by that every day. Even if the day is cranky, I go home and I feel blessed that I'm sharing time with these wonderful creatures.

That's what my work mostly is and if I make a compelling ballet that we can share with the audience, that's an extra bonus,” says Elo over Skype.

Elo, 58, was born and raised in Finland. His father was a urologist, and his mother a dentist. Elo's journey to become one of the magical creatures he so cherishes happened completely by chance.

“My sisters were into modern dance, Graham and Cunningham,” explains Elo. He laughs at the memory of it. “It was in the '70s and it was a trendy physical activity to do. There was no Pilates or yoga or spinning classes, so Cunningham and Graham was the thing to do. I was playing ice hockey. I thought, 'They do this trendy, cool movement thing. Maybe it will make me a better ice hockey player.' When I followed them into the class, I understood that I love to move to the music. That's when I fell in love.”

Throughout his illustrious choreographic career – which began while Elo was dancing with Netherlands Dance Theater and continued over three continents and has spanned three decades – Elo’s work has redefined what it means to put movements to music. His dances not only echo the notes of each composition he chooses to work with, they highlight the nuances and shifts of the melody, allowing the audience a deeper, visual understanding of the score.

Elo’s process is intrinsically tied to music, which comes in from the very first days in the studio. “I give dancers three steps and then ask if they have solutions for the fourth step. And then maybe we get eight movements together and then I ask them to do those eight movements. After they’ve done that I say, ‘I’m gonna play a music and you will interpret the music with the material you have.’”

THIS MONTH, the Aspen Santa Fe Ballet will visit Israel for the second time, following a successful engagement in 2011 at the Herzliya Performing Arts Center. This tour will include four performances in Herzliya followed by shows in Modi’in, Yagur and Jerusalem. The company will bring a three-part program including Elo’s 1st Flash, Cayetano Soto’s Human Rojo, and Alejandro Cerrudo’s Silent Ghost.

1st Flash brings Elo’s decisive and cunning choreography to Jean Sibelius’s music. The work has been in Aspen Santa Fe Ballet’s repertoire since 2007.

While Elo has been commissioned to create works for many companies, including the Alberta Ballet (his first commission), American Ballet Theater and Royal Danish Ballet, the Aspen Santa Fe Ballet has a special place in his heart.

The Aspen Santa Fe Ballet is a unique troupe for many reasons, one of which is that the company splits time between two cities. Founded in 1996 by Bebe Schweppe in Aspen, Colorado, the company was repertory from the start. Four years later, the company formed a relationship with the city of Santa Fe, reaching out to a new audience base and expanding the annual activities. Artistic director Tom Mossbrucker made a point of keeping close ties with the European dance scene, bringing many established and emerging choreographers from overseas to work with the budding troupe. Elo was one of the first names on that list.

“Our collaboration has been going on for 13 years,” he says. “I created there at least three new works and they’ve done my existing works several times. Really, it’s like a family to me, I know them really well. I’m a resident choreographer with the Boston Ballet, that’s the company I go back to most often. Aspen Santa Fe is right next to that. It’s a great collaboration. They’ve given me the chance to grow and provided me the facility to create. I work mostly with bigger companies and this is a smaller company. The size makes it interesting; that intimacy is really special to the company.”

Elo adds that his love of skiing makes the deal that much sweeter.

Aspen Santa Fe Ballet will perform at the Herzliya Performing Arts Center from March 27-April 3. For more information, visit aspensantafeballet.com, or call 700-702-929 or 09-972-9972.

<https://www.jpost.com/Diaspora/A-ballet-of-two-cities-581916>