

DANCER MUSIC

Discovery for Dancers

PRE-VIEW: ASPEN SANTA FE BALLET'S
"AN EVENING WITH JOYCE YANG"

August 22, 2018 [Johnny Nevin704 Views](#)



The result is a remarkable repertoire, diverse in its creative voicing, consistent in its commitment and quality.

Forget for a moment that Aspen Santa Fe Ballet is an extraordinary artistic organization. It's a subject worth talking about (and we'll probably return to it more than once in other stories) but just for the moment, as difficult as it may be, just try to forget that. Or rather (especially since it's nearly impossible to forget), let's start from there and move on. Because in *An Evening With Joyce Yang*, Aspen Santa Fe Ballet shows that they're actually something even more remarkable. ASFB is a study in exactly *how* to be an extraordinary artistic organization.

Aspen Santa Fe Ballet is unusual, even among great dance companies, in their long-standing, slow-burning commitment to commissioning new works — thirty-five of them since 1996. Several things make them unique in their approach to this, one being an undeniable ability to find and introduce great choreographers, another being the lavish care with which they surround the creative process.

The result is a remarkable repertoire, diverse in its creative voicing, consistent in its commitment and quality. But in *An Evening With Joyce Yang*, which they have already performed to sold-out acclaim several times, you realize that there's a skill set that can be developed in how to be extraordinary — a combination of abilities and decisions that make being exceptional a process.



What can happen, apparently, is that once you've developed a history and a habit of finding ways to make great dance, then, when a widely acclaimed classical pianist approaches you with an extraordinary idea for a dance concert, you already have everything in place — all of the imagination, all of the expertise — geared up, and ready to make it happen.

In ***An Evening With Joyce Yang***, which ASFB will present at **The Lensic Performing Arts Center** in Santa Fe (September 1st at 8pm), Yang will perform live on stage with ASFB, as they present *Half/Cut/Split* by noted Finnish choreographer Jorma Elo (who collaborated with Yang to bring Robert Schumann's *Carnaval* to life), Jiří Kylián's seminal *Return to a Strange Land* (set to the music of Leoš Janáček), and Nicolo Fonte's touching *Where We Left Off* (with music by Philip Glass).

That's just part of the start of the story, though. To find out more, we reached out to Jessica Moore, ASFB Director of Marketing, to give us a closer look at this extraordinary program. Here's what she told us:

As if the repertoire itself weren't enough, what's most exciting about this program is the fact that award-winning concert pianist Joyce Yang will be on stage playing for all three ballets.

Johnny Nevin: An Evening With Joyce Yang is such an innovative program, featuring the choreography and performance of such recognizable artists, but pulled together with the unique theme of Joyce's live piano performances. Besides that, Aspen Santa Fe Ballet is just coming off of

sellouts for this program in Aspen, which makes us all the more interested in what the program is. Can you tell us a little about the works on the program?

Jessica Moore: Aspen Santa Fe Ballet is committed to commissioning new works and this particular program features two such commissions: *Where We Left Off* by Nicolo Fonte, a 2011 commission that opens the show, and ASFB's latest commission, *Half/Cut/Split* by Jorma Elo, which serves as the evening's finale. Both Nicolo and Jorma are frequent collaborators of ASFB with nine and five works in ASFB's repertoire respectively. Those two creations sandwich a ballet by master choreographer Jiří Kylián, *Return to a Strange Land*, which was originally created in 1975 for the Stuttgart Ballet and features the evening's only pointe work.

As if the repertoire itself weren't enough, what's most exciting about this program is the fact that award-winning concert pianist Joyce Yang will be on stage playing for all three ballets. From a musician's perspective, this evening sees Joyce transitioning from the music of Philip Glass, to Leoš Janáček, and finally to Robert Schumann. Not only does Joyce make for an exceptional soundtrack, but she was also the catalyst for the entire evening, which developed around *Half/Cut/Split*—the result of her collaboration with Jorma Elo to unpack Robert Schumann's *Carnaval*.

Jorma's quirky and witty choreographic reaction to Schumann's music breaks the wall between musician and dancer, making Joyce clearly a part of the team on stage.

Jorma is certainly no amateur when it comes to music; not only is he a pianist himself, but he regularly consults the musical scores as part of his choreographic process. However, while Schumann is a favorite of concert pianists, it's a bit more intimidating for choreographers, who typically prefer a steadier canvas, much like how Nicolo Fonte uses Philip Glass' *Mad Rush* in his ballet. Schumann suffered from a multiple personality disorder—abundantly evident in his *Carnaval*—which veers wildly from theme to theme seemingly without resolving any one thought. Jorma's quirky and witty choreographic reaction to Schumann's music breaks the wall between musician and dancer, making Joyce clearly a part of the team on stage.



“... the energy of the room is completely different. There are vibrations with a live musician that aren’t there with a CD and a speaker.” — ASFB dancer Evan Supple

Johnny: Joyce wrote a brilliant article on her site PianistJoyceYang.com called “Music and Movement”, in which she says “The things that Jorma [Choreographer Jorma Elo] and the dancers found interesting about the music were sometimes things that I had never considered”. Do you think there was a similar process, almost a cross-cultural discovery, for the ASFB dancers in working so closely with Joyce?

Jessica: There was absolutely a discovery process for the dancers and an excitement that came from the rarity of having a world-class pianist in the studio with them not just as an accompanist, but also as an integral part of the group. Choreographer Jorma Elo has repeatedly referred to dancers as animal-like, in that they respond viscerally to sound versus verbal cues. Having a live musician in the room, particularly someone of Joyce’s caliber, brought a different energy to the music that gave the dancers something to respond to. When her sound is vibrant and alive in the studio space, it actually impacts how the dancers move and react in a way that can’t necessarily be replicated through verbal instruction. To this point, ASFB dancer Evan Supple said that, “the energy of the room is completely different. 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.”



In performance, the dancers also feed off of Joyce’s energy and enthusiasm

Additionally, having Joyce right there in the studio allowed the dancers to find cues in the music, strategic places to breathe, and have input into the tempo at which the music was played – all things that are crucial to the performance of a ballet. The challenge, however, is that by not using a

recording, the music does change slightly from performance to performance. “Joyce’s interpretation varies slightly every time she plays,” said ASFB dancer Seia Rassenti Watson. “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 [are] magical. It’s living art.”

In performance, the dancers also feed off of Joyce’s energy and enthusiasm, particularly in Jorma Elo’s work, which involves physically demanding and technically dense choreography. Joyce has said that she tries to exude as much energy as possibly to help motivate the dancers, allowing them to channel the momentum of her playing.

Aspen Santa Fe Ballet will present *An Evening With Joyce Yang* at **The Lensic Performing Arts Center** in Santa Fe on Saturday, September 1st at 8pm. Tickets are available **online from Tickets Santa Fe** or by telephone from Tickets Santa Fe at (505) 988-1234.

An Evening with Pianist Joyce Yang will also be performed in Dallas, TX on October 26-27, and then in Denver, November 10-11. All the details are available at Aspen Santa Fe Ballet’s **ASFB On Tour**

<https://dancermusic.com/pre-view-aspen-santa-fe-ballets-an-evening-with-joyce-yang/>