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Aspen Santa Fe Ballet

twenty years of dance

by Elizabeth Sanchez

Aspen Santa Fe Ballet presents two ballets, *Huma Rojo* (which features dancers Samantha Klanac Campanile and Łukasz Zieba, pictured) and *Re:play*, for their 20th anniversary season.

Aspen Ballet began as a mere idea, conceived by founder Bebe Schweppe and implemented by former Joffrey Ballet dancers Jean-Philippe Malaty and Tom Mossbrucker in Aspen, Colorado. One year later, the company created a sister site in Santa Fe, New Mexico. Today, after 20 years of success from California and New York to Venice and Moscow, Aspen Santa Fe Ballet (ASFB) has traveled the world, been honored with grants and awards (including the Joyce Theater Award and the Santa Fe Mayor's Award for Excellence in the Arts), and received funding from the Jerome Robbins Foundation New Essential Works Program.

Twenty years ago, Artistic Director Mossbrucker would never have dreamed that the group might expand into such a vast organization. He and Executive Director Malaty have watched the company evolve from a small group to a nationally and internationally recognized brand.

Malaty says the company started with seven dancers and has expanded to 12. ASFB has launched many world-renowned choreographers' careers, and the budget has grown from a few hundred thousand to a whopping \$4.2 million annually. Today, Aspen Santa Fe Ballet stands as "an ambassador of Santa Fe," says Malaty. The acclaimed company offers a Mexican folkdance outreach program reaching 240 children; two dance schools with a network of six different locations—two in the Santa Fe area—reaching roughly 500 children; and has joined forces with Juan Siddi Flamenco, a local dance group.

Anthony Tiedeman and Emily Proctor, both graduates of The Juilliard School, dance in the ballet company's *Re:play*.



MICHAEL ALVAREZ

Aspen Santa Fe Ballet Presents is another of the company's successful creations; the series has brought dozens of other companies (including Ballet West, Hubbard Street Dance Chicago, Les Ballets Jazz de Montréal, Hong Kong Ballet, and Twyla Tharp Dance) to Aspen and Santa Fe.

To celebrate their anniversary, ASFB has an ambitious summer program planned. Mossbrucker says the company will present two different programs and host performances by Juan Siddi Flamenco, as well as open and perform for the seventh time at Jacob's Pillow Dance Festival in the Berkshires town of Becket, Massachusetts.

So, what exactly is the secret behind ASFB's success? According to Malaty, the company's core values include excellence, integrity, innovation, and creativity. "We deliver a product that is very unique. There is no other dance company that looks like the Aspen Santa Fe Ballet," he says, citing the company's strong business model and aesthetic. "We were not interested in being a museum for dance. We were not interested in keeping up *Swan Lake* or *Sleeping Beauty* We always look forward."

Mossbrucker concurs, adding that he has watched the company's repertoire improve over the years as it constantly develops new work and voices. "When people come to a show, they know they are going to see something new, something current—not something from 40 years ago."

Samantha Klanac Campanile began dancing with ASFB at 19 and couldn't be more at home. "I feel like I've gotten to be there right along the way. In many ways, I feel

Huma Rojo pairs dancers Pete Leo Walker and Katherine Bolaños.



ROSALIE O'CONNOR

Samantha Klanac Campanile, the company's most longstanding member, dances with Kraków, Poland, native Łukasz Zieba.



CORDAN CURET

that I kind of grew up alongside [the company],” she says. Klanac Campanile is now in her 14th season dancing with ASFB and applauds the “20 years of success and growth within the company.”

Though the dancers are classically trained, they perform across the spectrum, which in Klanac Campanile’s eyes sets them apart: “The dancers in the company feel a sense of pride and ownership in the work [which] has become part of our identity.” She agrees that Mossbrucker and Malaty head the company with the desire to look ahead, constantly discovering new choreographers and creating new productions, all in the desire to challenge not only the dancers, but the audience as well.

As the company has grown and matured, its leaders have gained knowledge and expertise. Mossbrucker explains that he and Malaty originally did not know how to run a company, and that they evolved from dancers into their roles as directors and leaders. “Each experience taught us something new,” he explains. “I’ve learned something every single day.” Malaty, an immigrant from France, says that the company is an “integral part of who I am and has taught me everything. [The experience has been] a realization of the American dream and opportunities that are possible here.”

Santa Fe was culturally rich in visual arts and music before ASFB’s arrival, but Mossbrucker and Malaty agree that the resident dance company offers a vital, previously missing performing arts component to the city. In turn, the company’s locations in both Aspen and Santa Fe have also shaped Aspen Ballet. Mossbrucker correlates much of the company’s cutting-edge artistry with the natural beauty that comes with each vicinity, explaining, “We look like our community and take that to heart.” Klanac Campanile says each city complements the other with its heightened interest and respect for art and culture, which creates a natural fit for the dance company. She also feels much of the ASFB’s success can be attributed to the encouragement from Aspen’s and Santa Fe’s communities. “Beyond how talented [Mossbrucker and Malaty] have been in creating the company and the contributions from our dancers, I do think it’s important to mention all of the support we’ve received from our audiences.”

Perhaps Aspen Santa Fe Ballet has been shaped most by its decision to look to the future without excessive planning. “We’ve never had a perceived vision for the company; we’ve always just moved forward with intuition and with the best intentions, wanting to do the best job we could,” Mossbrucker says. “The company grew into its own entity.”

Malaty agrees. “Today, I would be very careful in establishing goals, because if I had followed the goals we had [initially], we would have a much more modest success than what we have today.”

Aspen Santa Fe Ballet
aspensantafeballet.com



Pete Leo Walker lifts Katherine Bolaños in the ballet *Huma Rojo*, which was commissioned specifically for the ballet’s 20th anniversary.

ASFB’S PROGRAM B

includes the premiere of Jiří Kylián’s *Sleepless* along with two previously commissioned pieces, Alejandro Cerrudo’s *Silent Ghost* and Cayetano Soto’s *Huma Rojo*, choreographed for the Aspen Santa Fe Ballet’s 20th season. One performance only, September 3 at 8 PM.

—Lisa Van Sickle