

'Beast' and new building for growing Lakeville ballet company

- Article by: LIZ ROLFSMEIER , Special to the Star Tribune
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Ballet Royale is nearing completion of its new studio in Lakeville and is about to stage its latest show.



As Rick Vogt kicks off his shoes to enter the studio at Ballet Royale Minnesota, he notes (and apologizes for) the dirt on them. Vogt, who runs the school with his wife Denise, has been out at the construction site for their new building every day lately. The building is going up on the other side of Interstate 35, very close to their current location in Lakeville.

“We’ve been looking to move for at least the last two years,” Vogt said. The school, he said, now in its fifth year, grew by 25 percent every year for the first three years, and during “Nutcracker” rehearsals 120 people have crammed into the 4,200-square-foot space, which translates into a lot of dancers crowding the hallways.

Michelle Ludwig and Andrew Lester rehearsed for the upcoming Twin Cities Ballet production of “Beauty and the Beast.”

“We’re more than doubling our usable space,” he said of the new building, which will house three studio spaces, two of which are larger than the stage of the Ames Center, formerly the Burnsville Performing Arts Center. This will allow their dance company, Twin Cities Ballet, the resident dance company for the arts center, to do full production rehearsals.

As construction ramps up, so do rehearsals for the company’s version of “Beauty and the Beast,” which runs May 9 to May 11 at the Ames Center.

Denise Vogt wrote the libretto, the ballet’s story line, which follows the original French fairy tale closely.

“The Disney version is very different,” Rick Vogt said. “They’ve got singing tea cups. Ours is a simpler story. It will be recognizable as a classic tale.”

In the show, Twin Cities dancer Andrew Lester plays the narcissistic and unkind prince who turns into a beast after a curse. He keeps Belle (played by Twin Cities Ballet company member Michelle Ludwig) sequestered in his castle and tries to make her fall in love with him in order to break the curse.

Their rather magical adaptation of the popular tale features an enchanted garden, statues that come to life and a dancer who plays “the spirit of the rose” — “a dreamlike Cupid character,” Lester said.

Like all of the company’s professional productions, this show features professional dancers as well as the school’s young dancers, who form the “corps de ballet” for the principal dancers. In this show, students take on roles of village children, “dancers from distant shores,” ravens and wolves. In a storm scene, they play winds and leaves flying in a storm. In the enchanted garden scene, they become peacocks, hedgehogs, rosebuds and topiaries.

Vogt said that while rooted in classic ballet, the production “leans more toward a contemporary ballet,” as they have had to work in dance moves to resemble a dockworkers’ swagger or a peacock’s movements, or moves that convey the feeling of a violent storm.

Ludwig said she enjoys doing narrative ballet, which she said emphasizes not only technique but “falling into a character.”

“It’s telling the story through your dancing,” she said, “not necessarily being a perfectly poised ballerina.”

“We have more room to play here,” Lester said.

For this show, Ballet Royale secured a grant for the ballet to be scored with original music by film composer Jordan Cox, a former Twin Cities resident. “That’s very different for us, and that’s fun,” Vogt said.

The company, which Vogt said will continue its mission to produce full-length story ballets in the tradition of classic ballet, has several possible productions in development, including a modern-day “Snow White.”

Vogt also said crews just poured the concrete for the new building and they hope to have it completed in July in time for their summer intensive program.

Liz Rolfsmeier • Special to the Star Tribune Liz Rolfsmeier is a Twin Cities freelance writer.

- 'Beauty and the Beast'
What: Twin Cities Ballet performance
Where: Ames Center (formerly Burnsville Performing Arts Center), 12600 Nicollet Av., Burnsville
When: 7 p.m. May 9, 2 p.m. and 7 p.m. May 10, 2 p.m. May 11
Cost: \$16-\$32
More info: www.twincitiesballet.org