

ASPEN

LIFESTYLE • ARTS • ENTERTAINMENT

FEBRUARY 17-23, 2017

HAPPY DANCE

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open-mic comedy night

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Valentina Kova's
first winter in Aspen

Cherice Barton Premieres
'Eudaemonia' with
Aspen Santa Fe Ballet



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HOPPING FOR HAPPINESS

Los Angeles
Choreographer
Makes Aspen Debut

BY CHRISTINE BENEDETTI,
TIME OUT STAFF WRITER



'Eudaemonia,' photo by Jordan Curet

Once Jimmy Durante's voice enters your mind, his gravelly tones percolate and it's hard to feel anything but a irreverent hope. He's the signature sound behind the iconic "Frosty the Snowman" and "Make Someone Happy," and it's the latter that wouldn't escape choreographer Cherice Barton's mind.

When it came time to execute a commission that Aspen Santa Fe Ballet and Los Angeles' Valley Performing Arts Center — where ASFB has a three-year residency — hired her to create, the theme of happiness and Durante's crooning kept following her. The result is, "Eudaemonia," a 25-minute ebullient piece the makes its world premiere on Saturday, Feb. 18, at the Aspen District Theatre.

"It's based around the universal search for happiness," she said during an interview while she was in Aspen rehearsing in early January. "My work is very character-driven, it's very human. I don't like to choreograph dancers dancing, I like to choreograph people dancing."

Two of those people are ASFB's Emily Proctor and Pete Leo Walker, whose grace and athleticism are exemplified in the work, alongside seven ASFB dancers. As Barton notes, her choreography typically follows a story arc: Walker personifies happiness in "Eudaemonia" along with playful nods to classic physical comedians like Donald O'Connor.

Barton says she invited the dancers to help in creating the piece, both emotionally and physically. Some assisted in choreographic adjustments while others were asked to dig deep spiritually to uncover feelings that would fuel them. That

personal edge resonates with Barton as well.

"I've had a very full career as a dancer, now a choreographer and director and producer and new mom," says the mother of two. "There's no more room in my life for bullshit. ... I think as humans we all seek some sort of happiness and it's easy to blame others when we're not happy."

Her life is mid-story too. Though she's always been a dancer — her two sisters, Charissa and Azure, dance as well and Cherice and Charissa recently founded their own Barton Sisters dance company — only in the past 10 years has she moved into choreography, mostly on the entertainment side with jobs on the set of Broadway's "Spider-Man," the "America's Got Talent" stage and designing Katy Perry's Grammy Award performance in 2015. She was also the resident choreographer for a Cirque show in Las Vegas, overseeing 80 dancers on a \$200 million budget, so transitioning to the contemporary ballet world was a departure.

"We think it is quite interesting that she comes from the commercial [dance] world, where the emphasis is on accessibility, connection to the audience and thinking about who you are trying to reach," Tom Mossbrucker, ASFB artistic director, said in an article published by the company. "In curating new works, we always consider how will our audience will feel. Like an outsider, or will they feel like part of it? Cherice suits our aesthetic, and since she was originally part of the ballet world, we are cut from the same cloth."

ASFB is known for helping to launch the careers of emerging choreographers and welcomes innovative, edgy and provocative work. By commissioning Barton, they meet this mission and

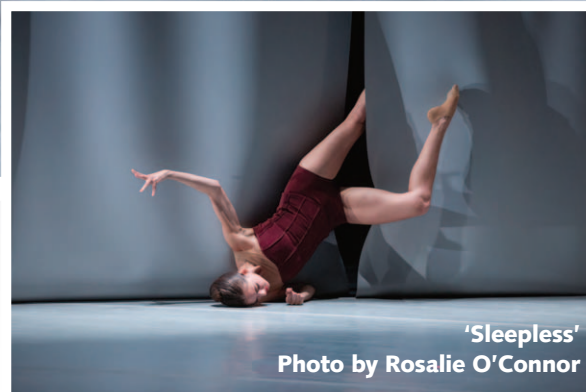


'Eudaemonia,' photo by Jordan Curet

'Little mortal jump'
Photo by Rosalie O'Connor



'Little mortal jump'
Photo by Rosalie O'Connor



'Sleepless'
Photo by Rosalie O'Connor



'Sleepless'
Photo by Rosalie O'Connor

follow through on their partnership with the Valley Performing Arts Center in L.A., which is where Canadian-born Barton now calls home. ASFB performs "Eudaemonia" there March 3.

She enlisted L.A. peer Daniela Gschwendtner, who is currently costume designing for "Dancing with the Stars" and "America's Got Talent" as well as consulting for EmilCouture, an Austrian eveningwear label, to style ASFB dancers. For both women, the homecoming presentation means even more because it's a "heart project," Barton says.

"With shows like that you have such a fast turnaround and you have to produce every week. You just bang it out. With this we could take our time and collaborate in a beautiful setting. Aspen is the perfect place to create," she says.

Barton first met with ASFB dancers more than a year ago, and returned twice over the actual choreographic process to evolve the piece in person. For the past two weeks, she's been constantly rehearsing with the group to fine-tune movements. On Monday, as dancers ran through "Eudaemonia" again in the studio with Durante overhead, they finished the rehearsal with smiles — an indication of success on the pathway to happiness.

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ASPEN SANTA FE BALLET

Saturday, Feb. 18

7:30 p.m.

\$25-94

Aspen District Theatre

World premiere of "Eudaemonia"
by Cherice Barton

Program also includes
"Little mortal jump" by Alejandro
Cerrudo & "Sleepless" by Jíí Kylián



'Little mortal jump'
Photo by Rosalie O'Connor