

L.A. Dance Project has Aspen debut

The ambitious, enigmatic and much buzzed-about L.A. Dance Project will make its Aspen debut tonight in a presentation by Aspen Santa Fe Ballet.

The collective was founded in 2012 by Benjamin Millepied, the French choreographer and dancer best known for his work in the film "Black Swan" and as the real-life Mr. Natalie Portman. The new company was launched with a bold mission to create new work and collaborate vigorously with choreographers and across disciplines to bring dance to non-traditional venues and create new platforms for the form. Based in Los Angeles, the company has quickly established a global footprint with an aggressive touring schedule and residencies in cities like Paris and New York.

Andrew Travers
The Aspen Times

"They're hot, and we're excited to introduce them to the Aspen audience," said Aspen Santa Fe Ballet executive director Jean-Philippe Malaty.

The local company, he added, feels some artistic kinship with the Los Angeles upstart, which tackles progressive contemporary works and collaborates with a stable of international choreographers, much like Malaty's company.

Conceived and performed with youthful flare, L.A. Dance Project's performances have been credited for drawing a younger audience to ballet with a diverse group of nine classically trained dancers comfortable in cutting-edge new works or more traditional ones — adept in pointe shoes, bare-foot or in sneakers.

"Each of them is hand-picked," said Carla Korbes, associate artistic director of the ensemble. "They each bring something interesting to the company. It's not like the Paris Opera, where they all look the same. So that's really cool."

The Aspen program includes three pieces by Millepied, three rarely performed duets by Martha Graham and "Helix" by the American choreographer Justin Peck.

The company performed a similar program last week at the Joyce Theatre in Manhattan, after which the New York Times praised the Graham duos as "the freshest examples of Graham's genius that New York has seen in several years."

Korbes, acclaimed for her work alongside Millepied at

"Hearts and Arrows" is among three ballets by Benjamin Millepied in the L.A. Dance Project program tonight at the Aspen District Theatre.

ROSE EICHENBAUM/COURTESY PHOTO



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the New York City Ballet and as principal dancer with the Pacific Northwest Ballet, retired from the stage last year. Pivoting away from performance in her mid-30s, she's since had a baby and focused on her family while honing the vision of L.A. Dance Project. But she's beginning to make a return to the stage, including performances this week at the Vail International Dance Festival and a performance with L.A. Dance Project in December.

"Whenever I'm in the studio, something lights up inside of me and makes me feel alive, makes me feel like I make sense when I'm moving," she said. "I didn't think I was going to miss it. But still, I'm the happiest I ever am



ROSE EICHENBAUM/COURTESY PHOTO

L.A. Dance Project will perform tonight at the Aspen District Theatre.

when I'm dancing. So I'm going to take it day by day."

That passion and her intimate knowledge of the day-in and day-out rigors of being a working dancer has helped Korbes in her role behind the scenes at L.A. Dance Project, mentoring its company members and shaping the vision of the nascent collective.

"I can relate to what the dancers need," she said, adding with a laugh: "I can hear them saying, 'Oh, the floors aren't good.' Anybody who's not a dancer might say, 'The floors is fine!'"

Korbes and Millepied, who recently left a post as director of the Paris Opera Ballet to concentrate on L.A. Dance Project full-time, have some groundbreaking ideas that they hope to start putting into action on stage.

"I'm brainstorming with Benjamin on what else we can do with the company in 2016: what other models can we create to spread dance and combine dance with visual arts, photographers, musicians," she said.

Korbes and Millepied want to grow the company to as many as 20 dancers and continue touring the world and showcasing fresh, contemporary works. Making a home for dance in Los Angeles also is a priority.

"How do we make the city come together and look at L.A. Dance Project? To look at dance in a new way?" she asked.

That's among the questions for this young company as it carves its path forward.

IF YOU GO ...

What: L.A. Dance Project, presented by Aspen Santa Fe Ballet

Where: Aspen District Theatre

When: Today at 8 p.m.

How much: \$25 to \$94

Tickets: Wheeler Opera House box office; www.aspenhowtix.com

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