# SHADOWLAND

PILOBOLUS

story by EVE TOLPA
photo by IAN DOUGLAS

In a town that consistently punches above its weight vis a vis the arts, the Aspen Santa Fe Ballet is a leading light, and on the heels of its 20th anniversary, the multifaceted company continues to raise the bar (perhaps even the barre?) on local culture.

Its mere presence has gone a long way toward educating Santa Feans about dance (it also encompasses two educational programs, the School of ASFB and ASBF Folklórico), yet the organization is decidedly reluctant to dictate meaning or interpretation to its audiences. "We don't want to intellectualize dance," ASFB Executive Director Jean-Philippe Malaty says. "We take a step back from that approach. We believe dance is a very visceral experience, and that is how you respond to it." As a result, he and his colleagues prefer to let dance to speak for itself, allowing it "to provide an escape, to provide beauty, to provide the pure human spirit of expression." At the same time, however, he adds, "We feel it's important for us to have an audience that's been exposed to different styles."

That's where ASFB Presents comes in. One of the country's largest dance-exclusive presenters, it brings roughly a half-dozen companies to perform locally each year. "It's important to provide a well-rounded experience for our audience," Jean-Philippe says. "Usually we bring in a dance company that's different from what we do."

Since ASFB Presents was created in 1999, it has hosted companies from the Joffrey Ballet of Chicago to Paul Taylor Dance Company and Twyla Tharp to Mark Morris Dance Group, as well as international ensembles like the Peking Acrobats and Les Ballets Africains. The practice, Jean-Philippe says, is unusual in the field. "It's part of the hybrid model we have," he explains. "It's a great collaboration with our colleagues in the field—giving back and helping another dance company. It keeps us on our toes. There are few other dance companies that bring other companies on their turf." (Then again, ASFB has always done things a little bit differently. Founded in 1996 in Aspen, Colo., the company expanded its reach to Santa Fe in 2000, creating a dual-city company model.)

On Feb. 28, through ASFB Presents, the organization is bringing Pilobolus to Santa Fe to perform its new show, *Shadowland*. "We have always been very fond of the work of Pilobolus," Jean-Philippe says. "They are an American icon in the dance world, and we've brought them to Aspen and Santa Fe a number of times over the past 20 years. The exchange went even a little bit deeper when we took one of Pilobolus's ballets [*Untitled*] in our repertoire."

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**~ Pilobolus Creative Director Mark Fucik**

Pilobolus, which shares its name with a barnyard fungus that rapidly propels its spores, is the brainchild of a group of Dartmouth students who came together in 1971 to stretch the boundaries of modern dance. With choreography that often tends toward the acrobatic, the athletic and the androgynous, Pilobolus's approach to movement extends well beyond the reach of traditional modern dance. "They still innovate," Jean-Philippe says. "They are still pushing the envelope."

Case in point: *Shadowland*, Pilobolus's latest touring piece, showcases the qualities that continue to make the company so interesting: a combination of multi-media and dance, incorporating projected imagery with front-of-screen choreography. Pilobolus Creative Director Mark Fucik, who coordinates the tour, says, "We're known for being able to create sculpture from bodies in space." In *Shadowland*, different groups of bodies come together to form recognizable composite images, which appear on the lighted screen.

"*Shadowland* is kind of a dream world, where this young girl takes a journey to find out what she wants to be and what she has to be," Mark says. The shadow acts an extended metaphor. "That whole idea is that it's your other self. In the piece, sometimes it moves with you and sometimes it doesn't. The shadows go awry." For the piece's protagonist, navigating the movement of the shadows is a way of "finding out how [to] become a whole person." Mark adds that each performance differs slightly. "Whenever we go into a new city, we have a finale that we craft for that specific city."

Both Jean-Philippe and Mark agree that Santa Feans possess an aesthetic sophistication that makes them an ideal audience for both companies. They are, Jean-Philippe says , "eager to have their imaginations engaged a little bit. There's a sensitivity we don't see everywhere." *Shadowland* is very innovative graphically, he adds. "Because of the strong visual art community we have, I think the audience will really relate to it."

It would seem that Santa Fe is pretty fortunate to get such outstanding programming coming through town, right? Well, Mark says, maybe it's the other way around. "The thing about Santa Fe is the [level of] culture is so high, and the audiences are so responsive to what we bring to them. As artists, we're lucky to have people in a city that come to see work like *Shadowland*."

*Shadowland, Feb. 28, 7:30 p.m. The Lensic Performing Arts Center, 211 W. San Francisco St., Santa Fe. Box Office: 505.988.1234, lensic.org.*