

HEAD OF THE HARBOR, NISSEQUOGUE, VILLAGE OF THE BRANCH, COMMACK, STONY BROOK

Thursday - April 27, 2000

"Bringing Home The News Since 1887"

Subscription \$15.50 per year

Vol. 112 No. 24 - 50¢

A Night to Remember at the Ballet

By Carol Goldberg

Summing up this year's Ballet Education and Scholarship Fund, Inc. (BESFI) performance at SUNY Stony Brook's Staller Center on April 15th is easy: Wow!!

It's indeed possible that in its 26-year history, the Seiskaya Ballet has never had as many truly talented dancers at one time as it does now. And that's saying a lot, since so many Seiskaya dancers have gone on to become professionals in national companies.

The evening began with the hugely entertaining one-act ballet, "Mask," (choreography by Valia Seiskaya, music by Dvorak/Brahms). In it, the Prince, artfully portrayed by Cory Stearns searches for the perfect bride. It is immediately apparent that Stearns has come into his own as a mature danseur with dazzling potential. Which daughter of the royal court would beguile him?

The Prince wanted no part of the Snobbish daughter, danced with polished flair by Jillian Rezin, or the Voluptuous daughter, wonderfully portrayed by Emily Portoghese. Nor would he consider the Sleepy daughter, whose yawns and dozes were so well timed by Corina Flynn; or the Topsy daughter — Tracy Carlinsky had extraordinary en-poiné balance in order to look unbalanced; or the Ditzzy daughter, convincingly danced by Julie Miller. And the Prince's young sister, playfully, yet artistically portrayed by a confident Jennifer Olesuk, made no bones about *her* opinion. There had to be a better selection of damsels!

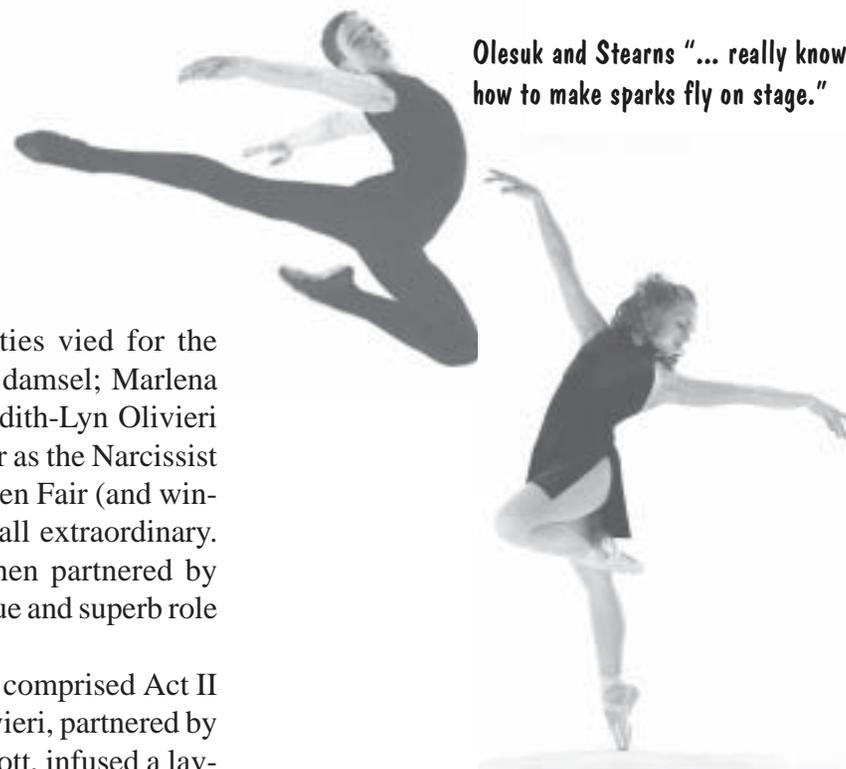
Enter an exuberant and talented Michelle Fischer as the Gypsy, who with the Princess, spread the word throughout the land that the search was on.

Ultimately, five masked beauties vied for the honor: Lisa Woods as the Shy damsel; Marlina Bono as the Moody one; Meredith-Lyn Olivieri as the Coquette; Lauren Menger as the Narcissist and Amy Ruggiero as the Maiden Fair (and winner of the Prince's love) were all extraordinary. Each in turn, as soloist and then partnered by Stearns, offered refined technique and superb role definition.

The menu of pas de deux that comprised Act II was carefully varied. First, Olivieri, partnered by able guest artist Matthew Prescott, infused a lavish radiance into the well-loved "Paquita Pas de Deux." Olivieri is a beautiful dancer with notable finesse and timing. The "Flames of Paris Pas de Deux" brought together the remarkable talents of Lisa Woods and guest artist Elie Lazar; together they lit up the stage with daring balletic panache. In addition to exceptional stage presence, Woods really "hit it," as they say; her turns and landings were perfect.

New, dynamic choreography by Mme. Seiskaya brought Jennifer Olesuk and Cory Stearns center stage in the "Hooligans Pas de Deux." Exciting? That would be like calling a World Series nail biter "ho-hum." These two dancers, separately and together, are a rare find because they really know how to make sparks fly on stage. In this contemporary work, their rapid moves and dramatic timing were electrifying.

In "La Peri Pas de Deux," Prescott returned, this time partnering the lovely Lauren Menger, who



Olesuk and Stearns "... really know how to make sparks fly on stage."

on stage makes no secret of her love of — and enjoyment in — dance. Her interpretation of this most elegant piece was indeed poetic. Then Lazar returned, this time with Amy Ruggiero, to dance the "Don Quixote Pas de Deux." This accomplished, energetic and precise duo held the audience spellbound; they left no artistic stone unturned. Ruggiero's powerful performance — from phenomenal fouettes to polished stage presence — most certainly point the way to a brilliant future in dance.

When so many fine young performers share their incredible gifts with an audience, the effect is universally uplifting. That's why "Character Dance Miniatures," a festive and colorful ensemble effort, was a perfect conclusion. The costumes were scintillating, the dancers glorious.

Carol Goldberg is a magazine and book editor who frequently reviews dance performances.