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Seiskaya's BESFI Dancers Dazzle L.I. Audiences

by Carol Goldberg

The Ballet Education and Scholarship Fund, Inc. (BESFI) annual performance at the Staller Center for the Arts at SUNY Stony Brook is always an exercise in amazement. Here, the Seiskaya Ballet, whose members are the dancers who train for professional careers and college scholarships in dance, under the direction of renowned teacher and choreographer Valia Seiskaya, show the world what they've got. But, don't make the mistake of thinking this is a typical local dance recital. These amateur dancers with professional potential positively dazzle you. And so, again this year, on April 28th, the line between amateur and professional was appropriately blurred.

The program opened with *Concerto in D Major*, a delightful work set to the music of Vivaldi, in which soloists Emily Portoghesi and Joanna Janetakakis were standouts, as were Maria Fechter and Cory Stearns, whose pas de deux was indeed noteworthy. Two gorgeous pas de deux followed: *Sleeping Beauty* and *Grand Pas Classique*. In the former, lovely Kristan Brodie, ably partnered by guest artist Matthew Prescott, brought this well-loved fairy tale wedding scene to life. A word here about "Grand Pas," as the latter work is affectionately (and sometimes fearfully) known among dancers. Few other pas de deux are as technically rigorous as this. A highly accomplished Lauren Menger and her dashing guest artist partner Hagop Kharatian, brought to the stage every bit of the excitement the work

engenders, as well as the finesse it takes to pull it off with panache.

The program didn't skip a beat or take a breath in the second thrilling act. WOW! is probably the best way to describe the performance of Lisa Woods and Cory Stearns in the elegant and challenging *Black Swan Pas de Deux*.

This work demands a refined stage presence, stamina and technical expertise, all of which were in abundance. Woods was radiant, Stearns dynamic, and together the two lit up the stage. In the *Swan Lake Pas de Trois* that followed, Matthew Prescott returned to dance with Marlena Bono and Julie Miller. Bono's refined technique and Miller's notable virtuosity melded in a most exuberant and satisfying way. Then, strains of Delibes' marvelous music set the tone for the mythological *Sylvia Pas de Deux*, danced to perfection by Amy Ruggiero, partnered with flair by Kharatian. Remarkable grace, musicality and proficiency highlighted Ruggiero's brilliant performance.

And what would a BESFI performance be without a Seiskaya-choreographed one-act story ballet? This year, *La Boutique Fantasque*—an all time favorite—thoroughly delighted the audience. This is a work of sheer joy, enhanced by stunning costumes donned by an array of young talent. Special kudos to Bono and Stearns who, as the exuberant and oh-so-polished can-can dancers, were downright fun to watch.

If you missed the BESFI event this year, make a mental note to get there next year. You will be amazed!



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