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BESFI Ballet Performance Knocks Your Socks Off!

By Carol Goldberg

You have to hand it to all the talented young people who dance their hearts out for the Ballet Education and Scholarship Fund annual performance at SUNY Stony Brook's Staller Center each spring. Under the masterful direction of teacher/choreographer Valia Seiskaya, they put on a heck of a show—polished and thoroughly enjoyable!

This year's April 28 performance opened with the opera-based ballet "Walpurgis Night," set to the music of Charles Gounod. The role of First Bacchante was danced with extraordinary skill and stage presence by Julie Miller. This rising star's professionalism was obvious in and of itself, and appealingly enhanced by guest artist Hagop Kharatian in the role of Bacchus. Admirably elegant were the Three Graces, personified by Samantha Niewadomski, Danielle Jacobson and Bonnie Ip.

A series of pas de deux filled the second act with variety that ranged in mood and style from playful to powerful. Maria Fechter and Edgar Vardanian were well complemented in the fanciful "Flower Festival of Genzano Pas de Deux." Fechter was particularly notable for the highly lyrical quality she brought to this piece.

The "Don Quixote Grand Pas de Deux"—a glorious work that is at once exhilarating, if challenging to perform, and oh-so-exciting to watch—fires up the stage in red, black and gold. When Miller and Kharatian again graced center stage, the magic in the room



was undeniable, as was Miller's virtuosity. Here, she traded her poised Walpurgis persona for a regal and fiery one, and it worked so well. Soloists Margrit Motola, Yvonne Ott and Sara Dowd were likewise outstanding. The difficult variations were performed by each with remarkable finesse. Kudos too, to the members of the corps, whose precision added just the right touch of drama and flair.

Those who know the work of August Bournonville are familiar with the intricate footwork that accompanies an often light-hearted theme. Emily Portoghesi, nicely partnered by Vardanian, was quite extraordinary in the "Kermesse in Bruges Pas de Deux." With swift-moving feet and an expansive smile, she made it look easy. It is not.

"Character Dance Miniatures," a vibrant and creative mostly ensemble piece that just knocks your socks off, filled Act III and brought the house down. Standouts were Phillip Camhi and Margrit Motola in the "Gypsy Dance Pas de Deux." "Miniatures" dazzles with Russian folk dancers, Greek sailors and exuberant Gypsy, Persian and Spanish dancers, all in costumes ablaze with color amid music that makes you want to dance in the aisles. Whew! Breathtaking!

Carol Goldberg is a magazine writer and editor who reviews ballet performances on a freelance basis.