

# MESSENGER

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## An Eclectic 30<sup>th</sup> Anniversary Gala at the Staller Center

By Michelle Isabelle-Stark

The 2009 benefit performance for the Ballet Education Scholarship Fund, Inc. last Saturday at the Staller Center was a special milestone for this venerable non-profit organization dedicated to promoting ballet education in Suffolk County. This year marks the 30<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the annual event, with performances by the principal dancers of the Seiskaya Ballet Company and a roster of world-renowned guest artists, including four alumni of the Seiskaya Ballet Academy, now enjoying professional dance careers. The program was dominated by pas de deux from the classical ballet repertoire, featuring the choreography of Marius Petipa, Jules Perrot, Victor Gsovsky and Valia Seiskaya, with contemporary works by Edward Ellison, Mihailo Djuric and Jonathan Windham.

Act I opened with principal dancer Karissa Kralik partnered by guest artist Boyko Dossev from the Boston Ballet in the *Harlequinade pas de deux*. As Columbine, Ms. Kralik exuded the comedic elements of the ballet with a witty brightness and virtuosity complemented by the great elevations of Mr. Dossev as the impetuous Harlequin. Another piece of Petipa choreography was danced by principal Stephanie Scutari and featured soloist Justin Meyers in the lovely grand adage from the



Seiskaya Ballet principals Mariana DeMarco, Karissa Kralik and Alexis Lucena ▲ plus featured soloist Danielle Kistulinec ▼ were part of the outstanding cast of the one-act ballet "Seasons."



Guest artist Megan Liberty displayed explosive jumps and high extensions in a lovely variation from Paquita



Karissa Kralik ▲ Mariana DeMarco ▼



principal Danielle Morano, whose lingering arabesques and series of fondues with turns across the diagonal showed off her extraordinary technique and balance. David Hovhannisyan, a guest artist from the Milwaukee Ballet and a brilliant technician, was a perfect partner.

Rounding out Act I were two Seiskaya alumni; the elegant Megan Liberty, a Ballet Performance major at Indiana University performing a lovely variation from *Paquita*, and Amy Ruggiero, now with American Repertory Ballet, performing a compelling modern piece set to the music of Bon Iver, danced with extraordinary physical and emotional clarity.

Opening Act II was principal Mariana DeMarco, a petite spitfire, partnered by Mr. Dossev in the joyful *Esmeralda pas de deux*. She performed the popular "tambourine variation" with a flourish of pirouettes accentuated by the percussive action of the tambourine on shoulder, pointe and hand, all in sync with the music, producing a highly stylized and dramatic effect.

featured principal Alexis Lucena who executed the jazzy neo-classical ballet with her signature dramatic flair and supreme musicality, partnered by Mr. Dossev once again demonstrating his elevated wide jumps and movement phrasing.

Act II also featured two Seiskaya alumni; the lean and sculpted Lauren Menger is the epitome of a modern day ballerina, dancing with speed, agility, and technical acumen to spare. Partnered by her husband, and fellow Festival Ballet Providence company member Roger Fonnegra, the couple delivered a blistering performance of the contemporary ballet *Playing By Ear*. The gorgeous Christina Schifano of the Washington Ballet Studio Company was a sensuous delight performing a witty and modern interpretation of *Carmen*.

*Seasons*, a poetic homage to the perpetual cycle of nature, set to the delightful score of Glazounov with choreography by Valia Seiskaya, completed the program in Act III. The entire cast was outstanding. But a real standout here was Anna Cradock, a spry young dancer in the role of Bluebird who added freshness and energy with all of her fluttering, jumping, and turning throughout the piece. Justin Meyers as Rain once again demonstrated his facility with the ballet idiom while partnering featured soloist Danielle Troyan in the role of Sun, where she embodied the radiance and majesty one would expect in the role.

Finally, a fond farewell to Mlles. Pandolfi, Morano, and Scutari on their way to NYU Tisch School of the Arts, Butler University, and Baruch College, respectively. All have received scholarships, an achievement common amongst Mme. Seiskaya's students. Perhaps they will return to the Staller Center as guest artists like so many Seiskaya alumni before them. Brava Valia!

Michelle Isabelle-Stark is a professional freelance writer who has written several reviews and articles about ballet.

*White Swan pas de deux*. Ms. Scutari conveyed the vulnerability and beauty of Odette with graceful arms and fluid upper body movements, partnered with strength by Mr. Meyers who movingly projected the great passion of Siegfried.

*Kazachok*, a character dance miniature performed by an exuberant corps of young dancers, introduced a light interlude in Act I. Always a crowd pleaser, it is a fast-paced ensemble piece with alternating linear and circular formations that inspire joyful clapping from the audience.

The *Grande Pas Classique*, a sublime study in the formal steps, poses and gestures of ballet, was danced with precision and grace by



Guest artists Lauren Menger and Roger Fonnegra delivered a blistering performance of a contemporary pas de deux.