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## BRINGING 'NAPOLI' TO LIFE

Jason Vondersmith Wednesday, October 03, 2018

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**Oregon Ballet Theatre presents August Bournonville's full-length classic, which was developed in 1842 and has remained traditional in Danish ballet**



COURTESY: YLYNOBT - Oregon Ballet Theatre company artist Jessica Lind was schooled in Bournonville ballet three years ago, and returns for 'Napoli.'

**It'll be a historic opening show when the Oregon Ballet Theatre performers dance and jump and spin in the production "Napoli," Oct. 6-13 at Keller Auditorium.**

It's the first full-length ballet built in Portland since James Canfield made "Nutcracker" in 1993, and it's especially significant considering OBT has been given the opportunity to be the first United States company to produce the ballet by 19th-century Danish master choreographer August Bournonville.

"The fact that this is completely made in Portland is pretty remarkable," says Kevin Irving, OBT artistic director and close associate with Danish instructor Frank Andersen and other experts in Bournonville ballet.

"It suits the company, and suits the audience as well. It's completely classical in terms of having a simple story and easy recognized classical base. It's not princesses and swans, but it's a cast of characters — lemonade seller, pasta maker, fisherman, laborers, people who populate the world that make things. It's a nice parallel to Portland."

Oregon Ballet Theatre staged "Napoli Act 3" three years ago, but sought out the entire production and Andersen and fellow Bournonville experts Eva Kloborg and Dinna Bjorn for guidance and instruction. They have been in Portland preparing the very large contingent of OBT performers for "Napoli," which tells the love story and marriage of young Italian girl Teresina and fisherman Gennaro.

There have been some 170 costumes and sets for three acts made, and 70-80 people perform on stage at one point. It's a big production, involving two OBT companies, students and extras.

"The reception we had in 2015 was pretty nice," Andersen says. "We were very happy with how it was taken by the audience and dancers. They really understood what we were trying to achieve, and that is an enormous plus in a work situation. I see they're really helping each other. I like the atmosphere here."

Irving and Andersen knew each other when Irving worked at the Goteborg Ballet in Sweden, and then Irving worked under Andersen as rehearsal director at the Royal Danish Ballet, one of the oldest ballet companies in the world.



COURTESY: YLYNOBT - Instructors from Denmark — Frank Andersen (above), Dinna Bjorn and Eva Kloborg — have been working with OBT dancers to prepare for the ballet.

**"Feeling very much like Danish dancing ambassadors," Andersen and colleagues travel the world teaching Bournonville dance, which is distinctive for its petit allegro — or small jumps — and fleet and quick footwork and pirouettes that land with exactness, "all executed with disarming innocence, ease and sincere joy," an OBT news release states. "More so than other classical ballets, Bournonville's are true offerings from dancer to viewer, carrying a heartfelt selflessness rarely seen on modern stages."**

There are more well-known choreographers — Petipa, Ivanov, Balanchine — but "Danish

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style" and Bournonville are equally highly regarded.

"Napoli" has never been out of the entire repertory of Danish Ballet in Copenhagen," Andersen says. "Maybe it's gone for 3-5 years, but people remember exactly how it was, it's passed on from generation to generation."

He compares it to "Swan Lake" for U.S. companies.

"Every company doing 'Napoli' is doing it the same way," he adds. It has evolved, of course, from its creation in 1842, with the advent of en pointe — dancing on toes — and spotting.

"We are not a museum, but a living tradition," Andersen says. "We are evolving, we are not static. It is in flashes a modern production."

Andersen says it took him 10 years to learn how to dance Bournonville style. So, OBT dancers have been schooled through the process. Five dancers went to Copenhagen before the first production in 2015 to learn more about Bournonville, and two remain from the immersion, Katherine Monogue and Jessica Lind.

"It's super exciting," Lind says. "To pull all three acts together, it's a lot.

"Because there are so many people involved and we're doing three acts, and it's the Bournonville style that we haven't done on a day-to-day basis ... it's a lot of petit allegro and specific head and arm placement. It's a lot of jumping. I think my calves have doubled in size."



COURTESY: YI-YIN/OBT - There's a lot of jumping in Danish-style ballet. So, OBT's Peter Franc and others will be busy in 'Napoli.'

**She's one dancer that uses softer shoes because of the jumping, and it can be stressful doing en pointe.**

"We do exercise every day in class, but to have all the dancing in the ballet be that specific kind of jumping, it takes its toll on our feet and legs," adds Lind, who says the activity level with "Napoli" compares to anything OBT has done in the past.

Act 1 has about a nine-minute stretch of nothing but jumping and movement, involving scores of people.

Irving does compare it to learning a foreign language, and then using the foreign language to write and orate a poem.

"Because inflection matters — the way you hold your head and your arms, all of it's precise because it was developed in isolation without a lot of outside influence on Danish ballet for years," Irving says.

Irving believes that subscribers and other OBT fans will enjoy the company's dalliance with Bournonville and "Napoli."

"With this ballet, in particular, the overriding message is to connect to people around you and that it's exhilarating fun to be part of a community," he says.

"Napoli," supported by the OBT Orchestra, stages Oct. 6-13 at Keller Auditorium, 222 S.W. Clay St. Show times are: 7:30 p.m. Saturday, Oct. 6; 2 p.m. Sunday, Oct. 7; 7:30 p.m. Thursday-Saturday, Oct. 11-13. There'll be pre-performance discussions. For tickets, see [www.obt.org](http://www.obt.org).

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This article brought to you courtesy of Stan Robinson of Pacific West Roofing, Portland Tribune Roofing Insider.

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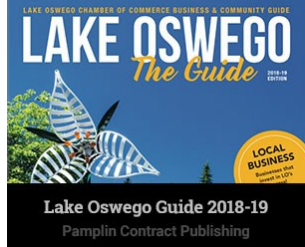
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