



OREGON ARTSWATCH

OREGON'S ARTS & CULTURE NEWS

DANCE

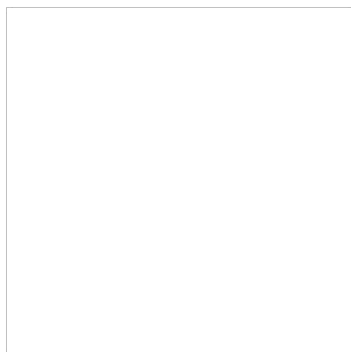
DanceWatch Weekly: Kevin Irving on Man/Woman

As the ballet world's treatment of women receives overdue scrutiny, Oregon Ballet Theatre's new program highlights gender stereotypes

APRIL 12, 2018 // DANCE // JAMUNA CHIARINI

Man/Woman, Oregon Ballet Theatre's program of five ballets that juxtapose all-female ballets and all-male ballets to explore gender stereotypes, opens tonight.

The program includes *The Dying Swan*, a solo for a female dancer by [Michel Fokine](#); a new commissioned work called *Fluidity Of Steel* by Brooklyn-based [Darrell Grand Moultrie](#) for all men; *Left Unsaid* by Oregon Ballet Theatre resident choreographer [Nicolo Fonte](#) for both men and women; *Drifted in a Deeper Land* for all men by former Oregon Ballet Theatre artistic director James Canfield; and *Falling Angels* for all women by [Jifi Kylián](#).



OBT dancer Kelsie Nobriga rehearsing Jifi-Kylián's Falling Angels for MAN/WOMAN April 12-24. Photo by Yi-Yin.

I have been wondering out loud in previous DanceWatch columns about whether or not classical ballet can catch up with contemporary values and be something that future generations will want to support. Classical ballet is historically a racist, hierarchical, patriarchal system, that has narrowly defined dancers by their skin color, body types, gender, age, perpetuates stereotypical narratives, and, ironically, the majority of ballet choreographers and artistic directors are men, even though women make up the majority of the artists in the industry.

Ballet culture has improved considerably since its early days, but it still has a bit of a ways to go. When Oregon Ballet Theatre announced on Facebook last season that it was presenting a program of five dances choreographed by five men that would explore gender stereotypes, I was stunned and wondered out loud in the comments section how it was possible for men to choreograph dances about a woman's experience. And, where were the women choreographers in this conversation to boot? Well, it turns out that they are gathered in OBT's next program in [May](#).

When I spoke with OBT artistic director [Kevin Irving](#) this past week at OBT's studios, he said that it was important to him to address the problematic issues within classical ballet narratives that perpetuate stereotypes, but also to find a way to maintain the heritage of classical ballet.



OBT dancers rehearsing Darrell Grand Moultrie's world premiere, Fluidity Of Steel, one of five ballets presented in Oregon Ballet Theatre's MAN/WOMAN, April 12 - 24, 2018 at the Neumark Theatre. Photo by Yi Yin.

"The base of classical ballet includes a lot of beauty, a lot of fine, wonderful, enjoyable work but some are really problematic works that can be seen as perpetuating stereotypes that are not so applicable to the world we live in," Irving said. "I'm conscious of our responsibility to not ignore it."

Irving began thinking about putting this program together two years ago in response to the Bathroom Bill legislation being considered in North Carolina that dictated bathroom usage based on a person's assigned gender at birth.

Since then, the conversation about the treatment of women in the society as a whole, in the arts, and in ballet has exploded, embracing many more issues and points of view than Irving could address in one program. "We're not the entire conversation," he said. "We can only be a contribution to the conversation, incomplete, but hopefully insightful and maybe even revelatory in some ways."

"I think an argument can be made that gender roles in classical ballet can be as restrictive for men as they are for women," he continued. "Even if the experience of being a dancer, in my opinion, is typically harder for a woman than it is for a man...I wanted the audience to have an experience of what was it like to see these representations unchallenged and then challenged."





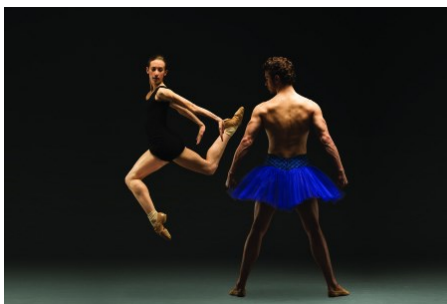
OBT dancers rehearsing Nicolo Fonte's *Left Unsaid* for MAN/WOMAN
April 12-24. Photo by Yi-Yin.

Man/Woman begins with *The Dying Swan*, a solo made famous by ballerina Anna Pavlova that depicts the last moments of a swan's life. Instead of seeing the ballerina (performed by OBT dancers Jacqueline Straughan, Ansa Capizzi, Jessica Lind, and Eva Burton) as a weak, frail, dying figure, Irving wants to shine light on the "the amount of strength, determination, triumph against the odds, and sheer force of will that it takes to be that dying swan." "I think that's an interesting story, that duality of the dying swan, which on the surface seems pitiable but yet it's anything but for the people who have to perform it."

Offering a contrasting view of the female dancer, *Falling Angels* choreographed in 1989 for Nederlands Dans Theater by Jiri Kylián, explores the human obsession with perfection and closes the program. This contemporary work for eight women is a driving, rhythmic piece to a Steve Reich score that was inspired by the percussion rituals of Ghana.

Next is a world premier by Moultrie for seven male dancers that explores an alternative view of maledom questioning the ways society allows men to express emotions and show physical affection. This work developed from a trio of men in tutus from his previous work for the company, *Instinctual Confidence*, back in 2015.

Continuing the male perspective, *Drifted in a Deeper Land*, choreographed by OBT founding artistic director James Canfield in 1990, highlights the feelings of helplessness, loss, and frustration felt during the height of the AIDS epidemic. Irving felt that it was important to embed a connection to the company's history within the program.



OBT's Emily Parker and Avery Reiner. Photo by Christopher Peddecord.

Left Unsaid by Nicolo Fonte, one of Fonte's most popular works was inspired by Philip Pullman's trilogy *His Dark Materials* and is the only piece in the program for both men and women. The ballet focuses on the dualities present in all of us, that pull us in opposing directions. The work originally premiered on Oregon Ballet Theatre in 2009.

Man/Woman looks to be a strong program with fantastic dancing and some poignant messages. But, if you're still hankering for women choreographers you won't have to wait long. *Closer*, OBT's final program of the season, brings back Helen Simoneau's *Departures* from last summer's Choreography XX program and presents new works by company dancers Katherine Monogue, Makino Hayashi, and Peter Franc from May 23-June 3.

Performances this week

Contact Dance Film Festival

Presented by BodyVox and Northwest Film Center
7:00 pm April 12, NY Export: Opus Jazz and Never Stand Still: Dancing at Jacob's Pillow, Northwest Film Center's Whitsell Auditorium, 1219 SW Park Ave
9:00 pm April 14, NY Export: Opus Jazz & Never Stand Still: Dancing at Jacob's Pillow, Northwest Film Center's Whitsell Auditorium, 1219 SW Park Ave
7:30 pm April 12 and 14, Dancing Over Borders, BodyVox Dance Center, 1201 NW 17th Ave.
7:30 pm April 13, Dance@30fps, Bodyvox Dance Center, 1201 NW 17th Ave.
4 pm, April 14, Dance@30fps, Bodyvox Dance Center, 1201 NW 17th Ave.

Teaming up with the Northwest Film Center, BodyVox artistic director Jamey Hampton and long-time collaborator Mitchell Rose have curated a festival of dance films that cover the gamut in voices, topics, and disciplines from around the world.

The festival includes three programs. The first is a double bill featuring *NY Export: Opus Jazz*, a remake of a 1958 Jerome Robbins' ballet to the jazz score of Robert Prince, and *Never Stand Still: Dancing at Jacob's Pillow*, a documentary about the history of Jacob's Pillow narrated by choreographer Bill T. Jones. The program screens at Northwest Film Center's Whitsell Auditorium.

The second program, to be screened at the BodyVox Dance Center, is called *Dancing Over Borders* and is a collection of short films "ranging from absurdly humorous to raw and human" to representing "reality altered through the unexpected." The program includes *Persecuta* by The Lombard Twins; *Ghost Story* by Sarah Elgart; *The Yellow Room* by Kitty McNamee, and many more.

The third program titled *Dance@30fps*, organized by filmmaker Mitchell Rose, is a collection of works born of the marriage between dancer and filmmaker. The program includes *Stronger* by Wilkie Branson (England); *Alt i Alt* by Torbjørn Skårild (Norway); *Outside In* by Tove Skeidsvoll & Petrus Sjövik (Sweden); *Off Ground* by Boudewijn Koole (Netherlands); *Me-Story of a Performance* by Jopstu Ramu (Finland); *Home Alone* by Adi Halfin (Israel); *Little Ease* by Matt Tarr (USA); and *Maze* by Eve McConnachie (Scotland).

Man/Woman

Oregon Ballet Theatre
Choreography by Mikhail Fokine, Darrell Grand Moultrie, Nicolo Fonte, James Canfield, and Jiri Kylián
April 12-21
Newmark Theatre, 1111 SW Broadway
See above.

My Turn: A Claire Underwood Story

TriptheDark Dance Company, Ellen Margolis, and Diana Schultz
April 13-28
Chapel Theatre, 4107 SE Harrison St., Milwaukie
In collaboration with Portland playwright Ellen Margolis, TriptheDark Dance Company combines

dance, theatre, and puppetry to discuss communication breakdowns in politics. Through the fictional character Claire Underwood from the Netflix series *House of Cards*, *My Turn*, reveals Congress's struggle to work together to defeat corruption.

My Turn will be performed in the newly renovated, two-story, 4,554 square foot Chapel Theatre in Milwaukie, Oregon.

Peer Gynt with Orchestra Next

Eugene Ballet Company, directed by Toni Pimple

Apr 14-25

Hult Center for the Performing Arts, 1 Eugene Center, Eugene

Eugene Ballet's artistic director Toni Pimple, has extracted the essence of Henrik Ibsen's play, *Peer Gynt*, and created a new ballet in collaboration with Orchestra Next that tells the story of a selfish and lazy young man, his misadventures, and redemption. Gary Ferrington previewed and chronicled the tremendous amount of creativity and work that went into the making of the ballet for Oregon ArtsWatch. You can read about that [here](#).

Oregon Bird Sketches

Agnieszka Laska Dancers

April 14-15

St Mary's Academy, 1615 SW 5th Ave.

Agnieszka Laska Dancers, directed by Polish choreographer Agnieszka Laska, celebrates its 15th anniversary with *Oregon Bird Sketches*, an evening of modern dance and live music. Music composed by Jack Gabel, Henryk Mikolaj Gorecki, Witold Lutoslawski, Zygmunt Konieczny will be performed live by Resonance Ensemble, pianist Steve Lewis, pianist Paul Safar, and soprano Nancy Wood.

Original Bad Unkl Sistas

Anastazia Aranaga and Mizu Desierto

Presented by Water in the Desert

8 pm April 18

The Headwaters Theatre, 55 NE Farragut St. #4

This improvised duet by Portland dance-theatre artist, co-founder and artistic director of Water in the Desert, Mizu Desierto, alongside long-time collaborator, founder and artistic director of Bad Unkl Sista, Anastazia Aranaga, will follow a minimal structure, take imaginative pathways, and will be full of surprises. This performance is part of Butoh College 2018, and Desierto and Aranaga will also offer a workshop titled Original//Freedom "will be full of unknowns, delicate presence, deep stillness, rampant chaos, visceral intimacy & care."

Upcoming Performances

April

April 19-28, [Early](#), push/FOLD, choreographed and directed by Samuel Hobbs

April 20-21, [In layers](#), choreography by Jana Kristi Zahler

April 22, [Anastazia Aranga and Mizu Desierto: student performance/offering](#), Presented by Water in the Desert

April 24-25, [Alvin Ailey American Dance Theater](#), presented by White Bird

April 24-25, [The Wind and the Wild](#), BodyVox and Chamber Music Northwest

April 25, [Degenerate Art Ensemble/Haruko "Crow" Nishimura + Joshua Kohl](#), Presented by Water in the Desert

APRIL 29, [Degenerate Art Ensemble: Student Performance/Offering](#), Presented by Water in the Desert

May

May 4-5, [Let Alone](#), Heidi Duckler Dance Theatre/Northwest (HDDT/NW)

May 4-5, [Current/Classic](#), The Portland Ballet

May 10-12, [New work premiere](#), Rainbow Dance Theatre, Western Oregon University, Monmouth

May 10-19, [Rain & Roses \(world premiere\)](#), BodyVox

May 11-13, [Compose](#), PDX Contemporary Ballet

May 11-13, [Alice in Wonderland](#), Ballet Fantastique, Eugene

May 14, [Noontime Showcase: OBT2](#), Presented by Portland5

May 16, [Ballet Hispánico](#), presented by White Bird

May 17-20, [CRANE](#), The Holding Project, directed by Amy Leona Havin

May 23-June 3, [Closer](#), original works by the dancers of Oregon Ballet Theatre

June

June 8-10, [Up Close](#), The Portland Ballet

June 10, [Coppelia](#), Bolshoi Ballet in Cinema Live from Moscow

June 14-16, [World Premiere – Ihsan Rustem, MemoryHouse – Sarah Slipper](#), NW Dance Project

June 15-17, [New Expressive Works Residency Performance](#)

June 24, [Salem World Beat](#), Rainbow Dance Theatre, Salem



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2 Responses.

1. Mike Cranmer says:

[April 13, 2018 at 9:30 pm](#)

I love OBT.

I think as Oregonians we can compete with the best.

Portland can not afford to slowdown its arts program.....

Jamuna Chiarini says:

[April 16, 2018 at 4:23 pm](#)

I agree on all of your points 100%.

Comments are closed.

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