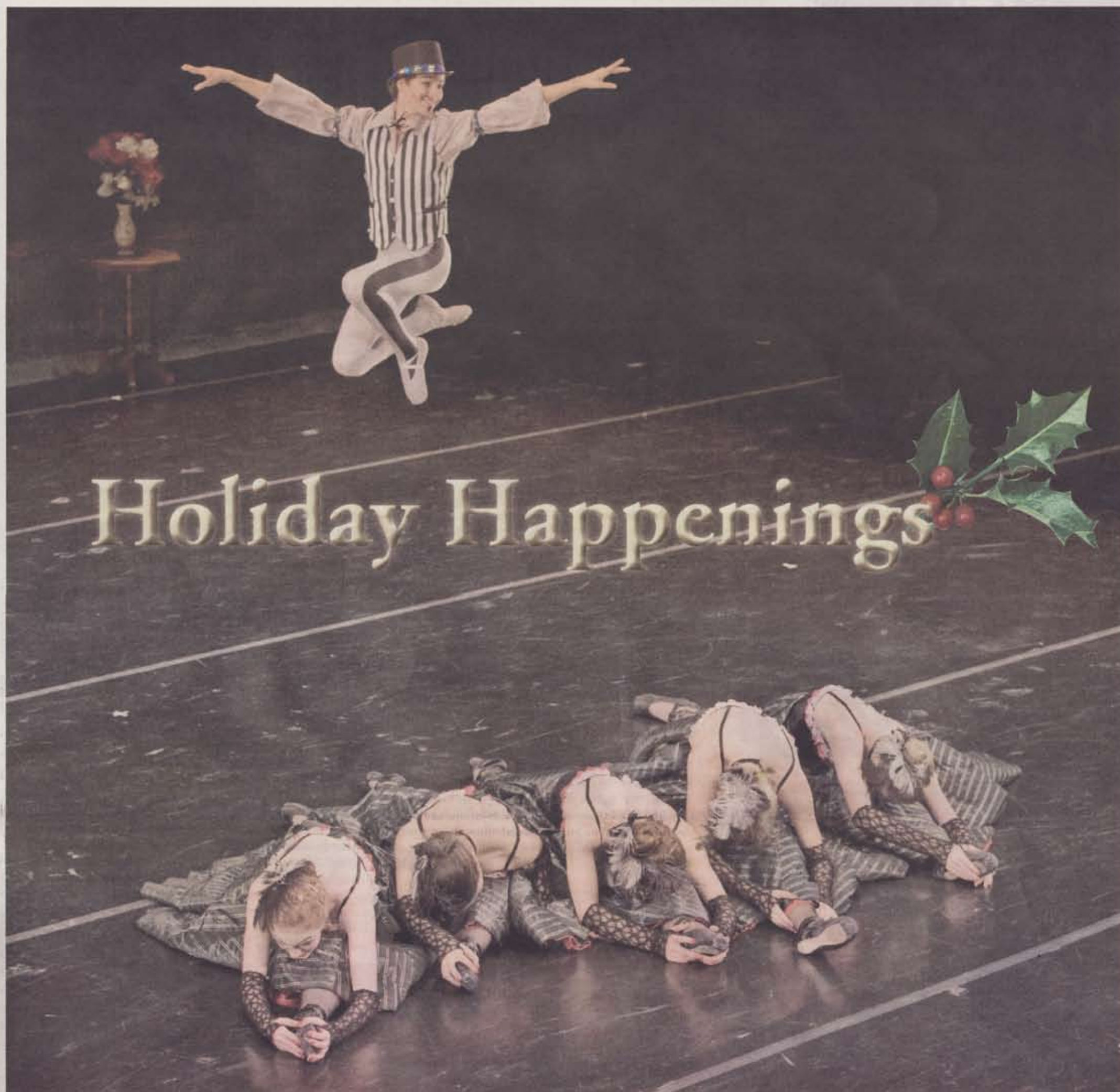


A special pull-out section from *The Southwest Community Connection*



ABOVE: Dancer Skye Stouber, performing as the Cancan Master in The Portland Ballet's production of 'La Boutique Fantasque,' jumps over a line of Cancan Dancers in splits.

Photos courtesy Blain Covert

The Portland Ballet and PSU Symphony collaborate for this year's 'La Boutique Fantasque'

Hillsdale-based The Portland Ballet (TPB) will be returning to the Newmark Theatre this year to present its holiday classic, "La Boutique Fantasque" on Nov. 27 and 28 in a special, first-time collaboration with the Portland State University (PSU) Symphony.

Now in its seventh year, TPB's production of "La Boutique Fantasque" — translated in English as "The Enchanted Toyshop" — has become a tradition for families throughout Portland.

Leonide Massine choreographed Rossini's "La Boutique Fantasque" in 1919 for impresario Serge Diaghilev's "Ballets Russes."

The Portland Ballet's production has been updated specifically for the youth company's dancers by ballet legend John Clifford, former artistic director of Los Angeles Ballet.

This year's presentation of "La Boutique Fantasque" in collaboration

with the PSU Symphony marks the realization of a long-awaited goal.

"It was our dream from the beginning to work with a live student orchestra" says Jim Lane, TPB's managing director. In 2008, after several failed attempts to negotiate an agreement with local orchestras, TPB approached the Portland State University Symphony, which immediately agreed to the partnership.

"I was excited to receive an invitation from The Portland Ballet," says PSU Symphony Conductor Ken Selden. "I love Rossini's music and find 'La Boutique Fantasque' to be a charming and brilliant masterpiece."

The hope was that PSU Symphony would perform with TPB in the 2008 "La Boutique Fantasque" production. However, a major musical hurdle caused the project to be delayed until 2009.

The Newmark Theatre orchestra pit seats 35 musicians, however the ballet score, based on piano compo-

sitions by Rossini and orchestrated by Respighi, calls for an 80-piece orchestra. Fortunately, the music is in the public domain and scaling back the number of musicians did not require formal approval.

Transcribing the modified score for the musicians' use was another matter.

"The cost of transcribing the work was considerable," Lane remembers. "After receiving several bids which were beyond our budget, I sat down with Ken (Seldon) to review the dilemma. He suggested working with Eric Allen — a recent PSU graduate and a highly gifted composer in his own right — who was eager to take on the challenge." Together Seldon and Allen have been working on the arrangement of the score which was completed by the end of August, just in time for the PSU Symphony to begin rehearsals in the fall semester.

With the logistics of preparing the

score resolved, the artistic process begins. It is the expectation of both institutions that this collaboration will do much to further the experience of their students.

"Ballet with live music requires tremendous sensitivity between the musicians in the pit and the activity on stage," Selden notes. "This chemistry between the artists is the essence of live performance and what makes it so captivating for the audience. It is an experience that canned music will never duplicate."

To achieve this level of freedom on stage requires a great deal of behind-the-scenes preparation. Fortunately, both Seldon and Nancy Davis, TPB's artistic director, are experienced with the process.

"What many people don't realize is that most of the rehearsals are conducted separately — the musicians learning the score at the required tempos and the dancers learning the choreography and staging," Davis

said. "Finally, in the last week leading up to the performance, the orchestra and the ballet will rehearse together at the theater. That is the magical moment we've all been waiting for! We are thrilled that this long-sought collaboration has come to fruition both for our dancers and for the community. This production is not-to-be-missed by anyone seeking a first-rate holiday experience this year."

"La Boutique Fantasque" will be presented at the Newmark Theatre, 1111 S.W. Broadway (at Main Street) in downtown Portland. Performances are Friday, Nov. 27, and Saturday, Nov. 28, at 2:30 and 7:30 p.m.

Tickets are \$15 - \$40 for adults, \$10 - \$20 for children or students, and \$12 - \$30 for those 62 and older from TicketMaster, www.ticketmaster.com 1-800-745-3000. Group tickets are available at www.theportlandballet.org or by calling 503-452-8448.