

## OREGON PERFORMING ARTS

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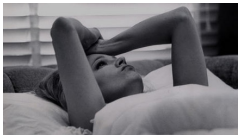
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### "Winter Wonderettes":

Opens 7:30 Friday, New Stage

### "Stingray Sam":

8 p.m. Saturday, The Woods

### Celilo:

9 p.m. Saturday, Mississippi

### Mike Coykendall

9:30 p.m. Saturday, Laurelthirst Public House

### Skip vonKuske's "The

Guest List": 7 p.m.

Monday, McMenamin's Edgefield Winery

### Lewi Longmire Band:

9:30 p.m. Wednesday, Laurelthirst Public House

### Turkey Day Kung Fu

Fest: 7 p.m. Thursday, Clinton St. Theater

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## Review: Portland Ballet's 'Boutique' caters to children, adults

By Special to The Oregonian

November 28, 2009, 12:50PM



Blaine Covert

The Portland Ballet's annual holiday production of John Clifford's *La Boutique Fantasque*.

Rossini's music, reworked by composer Eric Allen for the **Portland State University orchestra**; Michael Mazzola's expert lighting and some promising young dancers animated Portland Ballet's opening performance of "La Boutique Fantasque" on Friday afternoon at the Newmark Theater, delighting equally the audience of adults and children.

"Boutique," originally created by Leonid Massine in 1919 for the Ballets Russes and revised for **Portland Ballet** by John Clifford, is no more a children's ballet than "The Nutcracker." It offers many opportunities to demonstrate technique, through a series of divertissements (national dances), making it a short, sweet vehicle for student dancers.

Despite a couple of tumbles in the first act, the felicitous marriage of dancing and music throughout made this seventh season of "Boutique" the best one yet.

Live music, of course, makes all the difference, energizing the dancers to perform with an on-the-spot clarity and spontaneity that can be lacking when the music is recorded. The Portland Ballet dancers had the opportunity to rehearse with the PSU orchestra, and the musicians, thanks to Ken Selden's thoughtful conducting, showed considerable sensitivity to their needs.

And those needs were many -- Clifford's "Boutique" requires clear mime, adagio (slow) and allegro (fast) dancing, comedy and the musicality he learned as a principal dancer at New York City Ballet and as George Balanchine's choreographic disciple.

Into this "Boutique," he has packed references to Balanchine's works (the Soldier Commander's solo, including her costume, is a short take on Mr. B's

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"Stars and Stripes") and those of others, such as Kenneth MacMillan's balcony pas de deux from "Romeo and Juliet" for the reconciliation duet performed by the toy shop's quarrelsome proprietor and his patient wife.

There is a wide range of skill in this company, the performing arm of the Portland Ballet Academy, but all are extremely well trained by artistic director and founder Nancy Davis and her experienced staff.

Davis was herself trained at Balanchine's School of American Ballet, where she was a favorite of Alexandra Danilova. Danilova, incidentally, danced in Massine's version of \*Boutique\* in Portland in the early 1930s.

The boys receive extremely good schooling from former Oregon Ballet Theatre principal Alexandrous Ballard, who joined them as the Cossack Soldier in the Metrushka doll variation, as well as from Academy principal Jason Davis. From both men they learn stage presence and panache, as well as precise technique.

Many of the students are destined for professional careers. Some cast members have been admitted to summer programs at the School of American Ballet as well as the schools of Pacific Northwest Ballet, Houston Ballet, San Francisco Ballet and Miami City Ballet.

If the proof of the training is in the performing, particularly impressive on Friday afternoon were Tarantella leader Skye Stouber, Pinocchio in earlier productions, who dances with an assurance beyond his years, and Caroline MacDonald.

In the second divertissement, Henry Cotton showed his usual promise. The dancers who were portraying playing cards, mindful no doubt of the earlier tumbles, displayed their good technique, but cautiously.

Finn Hennell, clearly very young indeed, as this year's Pinocchio, projected a lot of boyish impudence, as he acted as the emcee of the divertissements. But he was really outstanding as a comic accessory to the Giselle doll's variation, performed with fleet technique by Rusne Kuzmickas, clearly destined for a professional career. This is also true of Jane Esterline as the Toy Soldier Commander, whose crisp attack and precise *port de bras* elicited cheers from at least one audience member.

Guest artist Josh Murry, an apprentice with Body Vox and a native Oregonian, did a fine job as the weary, stressed shopkeeper and 17-year-old Kelsey Trif an eloquently exhausted performance as his beleaguered wife. Both can act as well as dance, and Trif is particularly musical. So was 15-year-old Maggie Rupp as the Blue Fairy, who arranges this ballet's happily-ever-after ending.

As integral to the professional look of this production, with its backdrop based on painter Andre Derain's original design, are Mazzola's lights, which never distract from the dancing but always enhance the mood from sad to joyful. The lavish costumes were created by Mary Huhlbach and Jane Staugas Bray.

Less than pleasing are the dance of the toy poodles (which made the small children in the audience ecstatic) and the unbelievably coy can-can dance. This "Boutique" is basically in the Ballets Russes tradition, a fully produced work intended to entertain.

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