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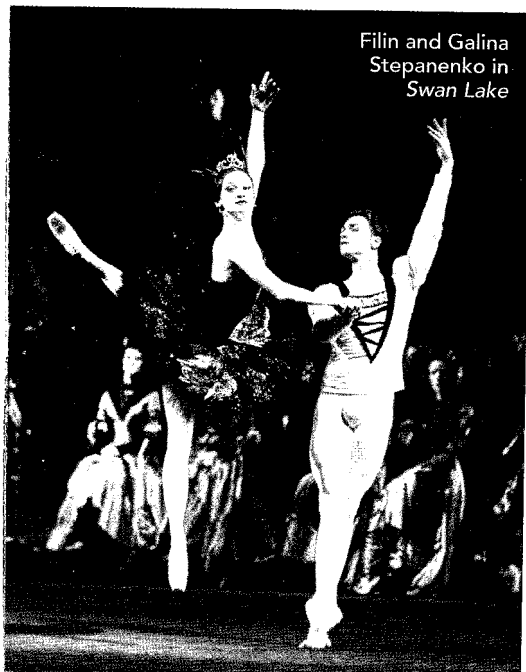
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The Aftermath of the Bolshoi Acid Attack

When Bolshoi artistic director **Sergei Filin** was verbally threatened by a disgruntled dancer last December, he had no way of foreseeing the nightmare that would follow. His email was hacked, his tires slashed, and on January 17 his face was doused with sulfuric acid, leaving him writhing in pain just outside his home. Shock rippled through the Bolshoi, Moscow, and the international ballet world.

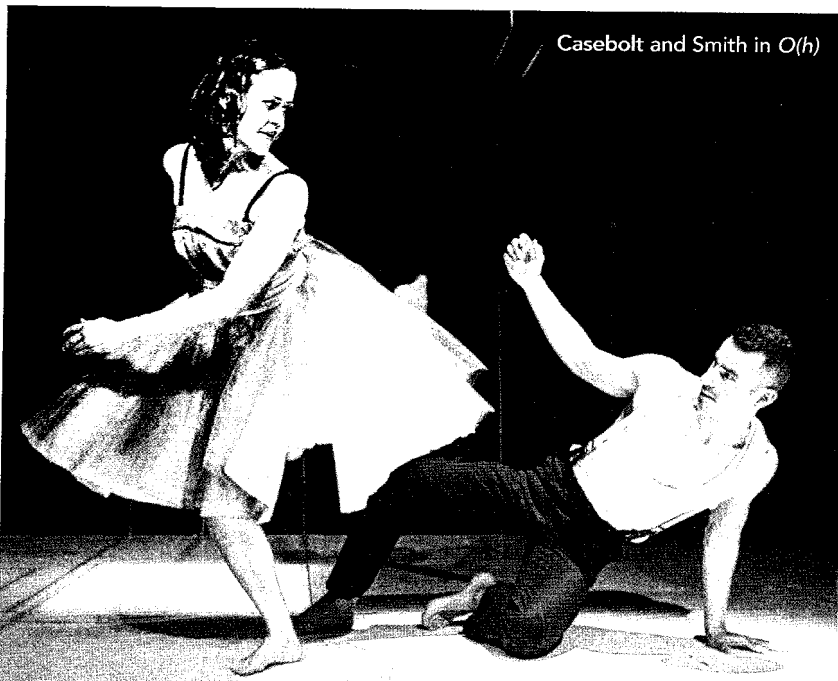
Rumors flew. General director **Anatoly Iksanov** accused principal dancer **Nikolai Tsiskaridze**, who had long been an outspoken critic of the Bolshoi's leadership, of fomenting an atmosphere that made this brutal act possible. Tsiskaridze countered, bizarrely, by claiming that he himself was a victim of a witch hunt—and eventually suing the theater.

On March 5 the Moscow police arrested leading soloist **Pavel Dmitrichenko**, 29. He confessed to hiring an ex-convict to carry out an attack on Filin—although



Filin and Galina Stepanenko in *Swan Lake*

he claims he only asked the man to “knock him around.” What was Dmitrichenko’s complaint? He demanded that both he and his girlfriend, the promising **Anzhelina Vorontsova**, be given top roles that were deemed by Filin outside their abilities. The answer was no. He also accused the



Casebolt and Smith in *O(h)*

Quick / Q&A

Liz Casebolt and Joel Smith



The choreographers on their unique dance partnership

The L.A.-based duo Casebolt and Smith combine talking, singing, and full-throttle dancing with a freshness that can delight or startle an audience—or make them laugh. Their latest work, O(h), with a fair amount of good-natured ribbing of modern dance, will be performed at the Walking Distance Dance Festival in San Francisco May 31–June 1 and in Toronto and Winnipeg next month. Contributing editor Victoria Looseleaf spoke to the pair by phone in January.

How do speech and dance relate for you?

Liz Casebolt: They each clarify the other. There are connections that can be found and read, but not literal illustrations of the movement. Layering also speaks to our process. We’ll purposely try to complicate something for ourselves. We’ll do this very physical, dance-y movement phrase and have a chatty conversation on top of that—a set movement phrase and an improvised conversation.

Joel Smith: In one of our improv structures, I give Liz the lyrics to a song and Liz has to give me the movement. It’s literal in the sense that she’s going to use the words to motivate her movement material. My direction to her is on how to sing it. Her direction to me is on how to dance it. So there are two kinds of text being used—a song being sung while somebody’s dancing, and

the conversation back and forth that illustrates how we build a dance.

Is the back-and-forth conversation designed to make the work more accessible?

Smith: It’s a way to help the audience into our work. They see the process and they also see the product. But we do it in a manner that it still feels all part of the performance—humorous, cheeky, campy, ironic at times.

We have several works that intentionally include the audience. We speak to them directly and we’re OK when they talk back. We can respond to any feedback: a response, question, or statement. But we know how to move forward.

We don’t want contemporary dance audiences leaving going, “I don’t understand that.” »

» Bolshoi of corruption in the system of granting money to dancers.

Some at the Bolshoi, including Iksanov and Filin, feel sure that Dmitrichenko did not act alone. Many Bolshoi performers signed an open letter to President Putin to demand a reinvestigation. “Deep down,” says Larissa Saveliev, former Bolshoi dancer and founder/director of Youth America Grand Prix, “the dancers don’t believe that one of them could have done it.”

Meanwhile, a committee has been

formed, Soviet-style, to assist in making artistic decisions.

As for Filin’s condition, he may have permanent blindness in one eye, and the other is regaining limited vision after many operations. While in Germany recovering, he’s been on the phone daily with Galina Stepanenko, the recently retired principal who stepped in as interim director—making her the Bolshoi’s first female leader. Filin hopes to join the company when they tour to London in July. —Wendy Perron

» Do you put words together in a similar way to putting steps together?

Casebolt: The words are written and set, but as far as the structure Joel’s talking about, we keep it very conversational, sometimes speaking to each other onstage and sometimes speaking to the audience.

Smith: We have a script that is built out of our rehearsal process, maintaining Liz and Joel the whole time. But it has to have the quality of happening in the moment.

What are some of the challenges of speaking and dancing?

Casebolt: There’s the physical challenge of dancing and trying to have a calm, relaxed conversational tone. There’s also the stamina issue.

Smith: Another challenge is that since we want it to be conversational, we have to make sure what we say doesn’t feel scripted. Actors deal with that all the time. When you add the layer of dancing it has to feel in the moment.

Casebolt: We’ve given ourselves permission to improv in the moment, so there’s also this element of responding—“Oh, he said that differently.” Allowing that change in the moment keeps it fresh.

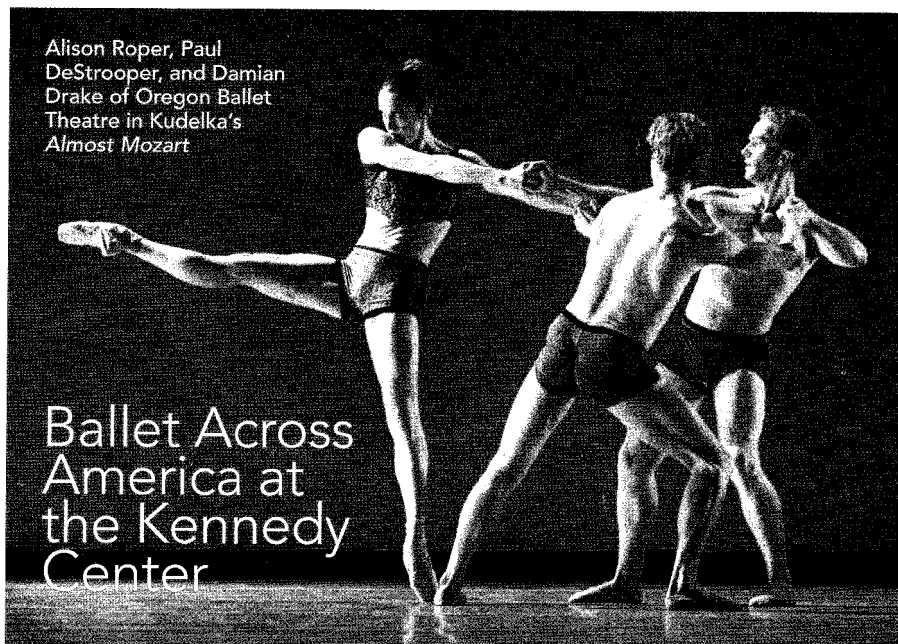
Have you studied acting?

Smith: Liz and I aren’t taking acting classes because we’re not trying to be anyone other than ourselves. To remain being Liz and Joel and to illuminate our relationship onstage and still do it as if we haven’t rehearsed it a thousand times—that’s the challenge. Knowing we don’t have to be in character makes it easier. A lot of people say how true it feels to them, that we’re just being ourselves. Different facets of our personalities come out that we are able to access onstage. At times we appear to be kids who are surprised when the other person says something funny. Other times we’re more professorial—we have all this knowledge to share.

Casebolt: Sometimes we’re just questioning or wondering, breaking something down to be able to respond inside a set structure.

Do you find that there are expectations for a male/female duo?

Smith: We use the work as an opportunity to challenge conventional genders. So many [onstage] relationships closet the male—we don’t do that. We use our gender and sexuality dynamic to our advantage. We have no interest in creating another heterosexual duet. □



Alison Roper, Paul DeStrooper, and Damian Drake of Oregon Ballet Theatre in Kudelka’s *Almost Mozart*

Ballet Across America at the Kennedy Center

In the five years since the Kennedy Center launched its Ballet Across America celebration, the focus has shifted from larger companies to those smaller in size, but large in impact. In this year’s edition, six of the nine companies have fewer than 30 dancers on their rosters.

The larger companies have chosen masterworks that take advantage of their size: **Boston Ballet** performs Balanchine’s modernist *Symphony in Three Movements*, **Pennsylvania Ballet** his iconic *The Four Temperaments*, and **Sarasota Ballet** Ashton’s delightful *Les Patineurs*. But the smaller companies’ offerings show that there is plenty of new work being made across the nation.

Along with Sarasota, new to the festival are **Ballet Austin**, the revamped **Dance Theatre of Harlem**, and

Richmond Ballet, making its Kennedy Center debut. The choreography ranges from that by company directors (Stephen Mills at BA), associate directors (Sasha Janes for **North Carolina Dance Theatre**) and resident choreographers (Robert Garland at DTH) to dancemakers with ties to other small companies, expanding the festival’s reach further. Ma Cong, who recently retired from Tulsa Ballet to focus on choreography (see “Transitions,” p. 90), made *Ershter Vals*, Richmond’s offering; and *Wunderland* by Edwaard Liang, recently tapped to lead BalletMet Columbus, will be danced by **The Washington Ballet**. **Oregon Ballet Theatre** performs *Almost Mozart* by James Kudelka, who has been leading BalletMet as an artistic consultant in the interim. Having so many smaller troupes showcased is something to applaud. —Kina Poon