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Dancing Outside the Box

Jacoby & Pronk 'do their own thing' at the Gala of International Dance Stars

By Julie Mullins

Whatever the style, dance -- like life -- constantly calls for changes and shifts. As summer shifts into the dog days, it's already August and time for the season's splashiest dance treat, a chance to catch top dancers from top companies the world over in a one-night powerhouse program.

Fresh changes are afoot this year for ballet tech cincinnati's annual Gala of International Dance Stars. The evening has a new title: "Ballet Stars" became "Dance Stars," reflecting the choreography's ever-broadening horizons.

Also, btc Producing Artistic Director Marvel Gentry Davis says she believes this show will be the most contemporary yet in the series' seven-year run.

"I wanted to kind of mix it up a little bit, and I think I've hit the jackpot with some great artists who have not appeared in the Gala before," she says. "I think what's really special about this one is we've really tried to search out a little bit into some little companies, independent artists."

The recently formed partnership of Jacoby & Pronk fits both bills: Drew Jacoby and Rubinald "Rubi" Pronk freelance together as performers and are Gala first-timers.

Speaking by telephone from Vail, Colo., where the pair will be performing in the Vail International Dance Festival, Jacoby says she's trying to adjust to the high altitude.

"You get out of breath going down the stairs," she sighs.

Arranging their first Cincinnati stop came easier. Jacoby first heard about the Gala when she was in San Francisco's Lines Ballet, as some company members had performed in the production's prior years.

"I was researching the galas, and this was one of the major ones in the States," she says. "It's such a small world, it's not too hard to get connected in the dance world. If you know a few people, then it's pretty easy."

Yet Davis mentions that she actually had to turn away some performers this year for the first time due to the volume of interested parties. Jacoby contacted Davis and, long story short, the duo was selected for a sought-after slot.

A glance at Jacoby & Pronk's Web site (www.jacobypronk.com) sheds light on why they must have been a shoo-in: impossibly lengthy and sinewy limbs extended in graceful exuberance topped off by chic, unmistakably modern looks. The video clip of "One" -- a piece they'll perform here -- offers a taste of their exceptional abilities to combine technical ballet mastery with contemporary stylistic flair in perfect harmony.

Jacoby & Pronk share a desire to step out of the proverbial box. The two met May 2007 at Complexions Contemporary Ballet in New York City, where they often partnered together and discovered a common longing to do their own thing outside the "big ballet companies."

"I guess it started out as like a freelance project," Jacoby says. "You know, we just kind of wanted to try to see if we could not be in a company and still work. So we went about doing the gala thing and contacting some people to guest and do different festivals. ... It seems like we were our own little mini-company.

"We were really, really great friends, attached at the hip, so it just really worked out."

Still, Jacoby & Pronk aren't completely foregoing company work: Both are principal dancers in the contemporary Morphoses/The Wheeldon Company, the much-talked-about breakaway endeavor of New York City Ballet's former Resident Choreographer Christopher Wheeldon.

How do they balance their own projects with those demands?

Jacoby says Wheeldon is used to working with dancers from large companies (such as New York City Ballet or Royal Ballet) who are involved in side projects more full-time than his own.

"It seems a perfect fit right now," she says. "It's sort of a pick-up company per engagement, and so it actually works really well because it's a few months of stability and sort of company life, but on a smaller scale. Then we are free in the other months to go and do our own thing."

Stylistically, Jacoby says she prefers contemporary ballet to classical and that her body type is more suited to the former. She stands 5-foot-11 before going up on pointe. Instead of the typical classical ballerina body, she has a more athletic build, with a strength that tends to be more physical and powerful.

According to Jacoby, her training aspects haven't differed much between contemporary and classical.

"I think it's a matter of keeping your body healthy," she says. "I mean, it's dance, you know, it's all the same, and if you're taking a ballet class every day it only makes you stronger in contemporary.

"I really thrive off the diversity of repertoire. Its possibilities are endless. You can do way more extreme things. I think it's fresh and new and it's continuing to evolve, and I think that's the way dance should be -- of course, respect to the classics and whatever. But everything else evolves, so why not dance, too?" ©



**Gala virgins: Drew Jacoby (left) and Rubinald Pronk
Dikayl Rimmasch**

ballet tech cincinnati presents the Gala of International Dance Stars at 8 p.m. Saturday at the Aronoff Center's Procter & Gamble Hall. Buy tickets, check out performance times and find nearby bars and restaurants [here](#).

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