BALLET REVIEW

Elegance in anguish

Boston Ballet's *Romeo and Juliet* is a captivating retelling of Shakespeare's tragedy

By Angelique Nehmzow and Grace Young

Romeo and Juliet
Boston Ballet Company
November 3–13, 2011
Boston Opera House

The curtains rise and we see a young girl teasing her nurse, pushing her this way and that, pulling at her dress, running circles around her. The girl turns shy when her mother walks in, but then can barely contain her excitement when she is given a lovely new dress to wear to her first big party.

Boston Ballet's presentation of *Romeo and Juliet* is a powerful and sensitive telling of the familiar Shakespearean tale. To render the tragic story, this production beautifully combines Sergei Prokofiev's score with John Cranko's choreography and sumptuous costumes with impressive lighting and sets.

Set in 15th-century Verona, Italy, the plot follows the forbidden love between the daughter of Lord Capulet and the son of Lord Montague, whose families are bitter rivals. Juliet is betrothed to Count Paris, but falls in love with Romeo at a party and then secretly marries him. All would be well if the story ended there, but Juliet's cousin Tybalt looks to quarrel with Romeo. Romeo refuses to duel, so his friend Mercutio takes his stead and is killed when Romeo tries to intervene. In remorse, Romeo then fights Tybalt, takes his life, and is banished from the city. Before he goes, however, he spends his final night with Juliet.

The following morning, when Juliet learns that she is to marry Count Paris the next day, she enlists Friar Laurence, who previously wed her and Romeo, to help her out of her predicament. To buy her time, he gives her a concoction, which makes her fall unconscious and appear dead. He sends a letter to Romeo, telling him this deathlike state is only temporary, but the letter is never received. Believing his true love dead, Romeo rushes to Juliet's tomb and kills himself in his grief. Awakening with Romeo dead beside her, Juliet follows suit.

It is striking how a story filled with so much violence and anguish can be told through an art form as delicate and graceful as ballet. Yet this is skillfully achieved, as the elegance of the dancers' movements complements the passion and energy of the characters they portray.

One particularly memorable scene is the masked ball, where dancers, resplendent in gilded headdresses and glitzy masks, with gold peeking from their flowing robes, waltz to Prokofiev's imperious music. In this scene, the lovers first set eyes on one another and we clearly see Juliet drawn away from her betrothed towards Romeo, her petite figure balanced delicately on tiptoes, her feet moving like the fluttering of eyelashes.

In another poignant scene, Romeo goes to Juliet's balcony in the moonlight to declare his love. Before leaving, he hangs on her balcony and pulls himself up to kiss her through the stone railings. Later, as the events take a graver turn, Juliet drinks Friar Laurence's elixir and drags herself onto her bed, her outstretched hand trembling wretchedly.

> **As the curtains lower, you are left a little mournful, a little startled, and in awe.**

Surprisingly, the deaths of Mercutio and Tybalt, killed amidst a crowd of villagers during their duel, are more dramatically depicted than those of the lovers. In other versions of the ballet, the deaths of the two lovers overwhelm the third act, with Romeo prolonging a dance with Juliet's limp body. In this version, the ending is so brief that the audience feels jolted by the swiftness of the dancer's actions. The lovers die together in a few graceful movements, leaving the stage absolutely still.

As the curtains lower, you are left a little mournful, a little startled, and in awe of the tumult of emotion expertly conveyed by the company's dancers. As the lights turn up in the opera house, it feels as if you've just put down a great book or finished an epic movie. It makes for a rich evening of entertainment, and a refreshing getaway from campus bustle to romantic and tense 15th-century Verona.

INTERVIEW

Sylvia Deaton

The Tech talks with Boston Ballet dancer

By Angelique Nehmzow
STAFF WRITER

Sylvia Deaton, 20, has been dancing since she could walk, and knew she wanted to be a professional dancer from a very young age. At age six, she began taking ballet, jazz and tap classes, and was soon participating in dance competitions and winning regional and national titles. She was inspired by Broadway shows and local ballet performances her family would bring her to, and would practice the moves at home, using her sister as a male partner and rows of stuffed animals as her audience.

She dreamed of performing for a packed house, and when she was 14 she moved to Boston to be a scholarship student in Boston Ballet School's Trainee Program. Thereafter, she was a member of Boston Ballet II, Boston Ballet's apprentice program; last year was her first year in the corps de ballet with the main company. She has had the opportunity to travel with the company, and last year she performed on an open-air stage in the gardens of the palatial Alhambra in Granada, Spain.

Deaton, from Salvisa, Ky., spoke to *The Tech* about being a dancer and her experiences performing with the Boston Ballet Company. Deaton is currently working on *Romeo and Juliet*.

The Tech: What do you enjoy most about dancing?

Sylvia Deaton: Performing! I live to be onstage! Nothing brings me more joy than the adrenaline before a show and the satisfaction of hearing the audience's reaction. I feel invincible onstage and my single hope is that the audience can live vicariously through my performance and feel the same way.

TT: What do you find to be the most difficult aspect of being a dancer?

SD: The most difficult aspect of being a dancer is the maintenance I have to allow my body. As my instrument, I have to treat my body with great care. Like any athlete, I deal with aches, pains, and sore muscles daily. Luckily, here at Boston Ballet we have an incredible team of physical therapists who take extremely good care of us. I also stick my feet and calves in a bucket of ice and take a bath in Epsom salt every night so I feel ready to work the next morning.

TT: What is your favorite ballet? That you have performed in and/or otherwise.

SD: I love them all! However, the piece I found most challenging and rewarding was *Falling Angels* by Jiri Kylián. It is set to Steve Reich's "Drumming Pt. 1" and must be counted from the very beginning. If one person loses count it is very obvious. One of the most physically demanding pieces I've done, it takes a lot of strength in the legs for the grounded energetic movement.

TT: What is your role in *Romeo and Juliet*? What do you like or dislike about the role?

SD: One of the things I love about this show is the versatility of roles I perform. I go from an angry housewife scolding my husband in scene one, to an elegant ball guest, to a goofy clown in the second market, to an eager and excited bridesmaid bringing lilies to Juliet for her wedding. I love all my roles because each allows me to be someone different.

TT: How do you learn the dances? How much do you practice, and how far in advance before the premiere?

SD: Boston Ballet brings in individuals known as stagers to set our productions. They teach us the choreography and we practice the material for around two to three months in advance. We rehearse six hours a day Monday through Friday. Throughout the workday, we have designated hours to rehearse different scenes within the production. The principals and soloists rehearse variations and pas de deuxs separately and the corps de ballet rehearses the group scenes. Closer to the premiere, we put everything together in combined rehearsals. The week before opening night we move to the opera house for technical and dress rehearsals.

TT: What is your favorite scene in the production and why?

SD: My favorite moment is during the death scene at the end of the ballet. After Romeo has stabbed himself thinking Juliet as dead, Juliet wakes from her sleeping potion. The combination of seeing her begin to breath and hearing the heart-wrenching Prokofiev music sends chills down my spine and I cry at every show without fail.

TT: Do you have a dancer you admire most?

SD: I have profound admiration for my fellow artists and artistic staff at Boston Ballet. Their integrity and passion for this art form is inspiring. I learn new things from them everyday and to be in each of their presence is a true honor.

TT: What do you think you might go on to do after your dancing career?

SD: The age at which dancers retire varies from person to person. I hope I will have a long, healthy dancing career. However, after I retire I will still work in a dance-related field. I'm interested in teaching and community outreach programs. To be given the gift of dance from birth, I feel it is my mission to share its beauty with the next generation of young artists.

Solution to Techdoku 9000

from page 8

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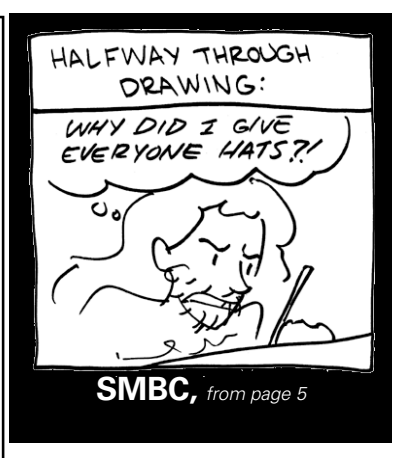

SMBC, from page 5

Solution to Sudoku II

from page 8

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8	6	4	9	2	5	1	3	7
9	7	2	3	1	4	5	6	8

Solution to Crossword II

from page 6

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E	L	I	A	N	■	R	A	I	N	D	R	O	P	S
F	O	L	K	S	T	O	L	D	M	E	I	■	■	■
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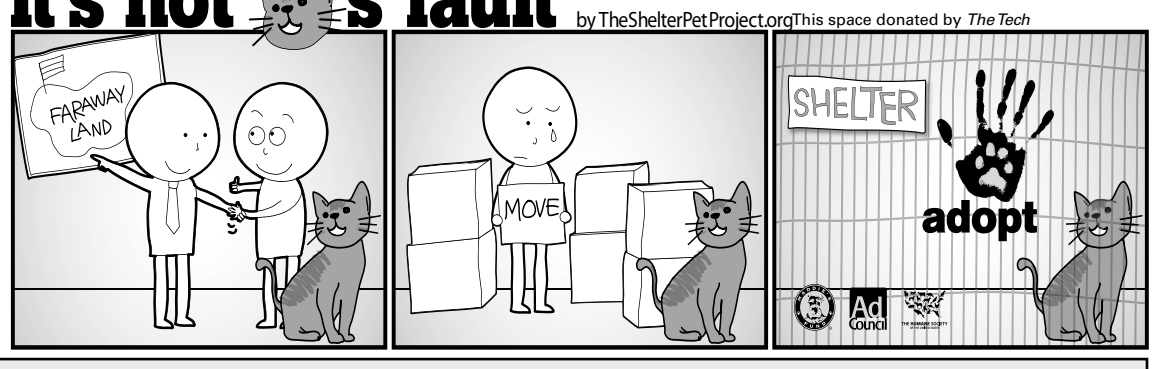

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