

NOUVELLES DU BALLET

Newsletter of Champaign Urbana Ballet

Spring 2010



SEW SENSATIONAL

The devil, and the beauty, lie in the details when creating CU Ballet's elaborate costumes - nearly 50 new ones for next month's *Swan Lake* and hundreds more waiting in the wings.

Damsels dressing for the ball aren't the only ones who appreciate the right costume at the right moment. A glance into CU Ballet's costume shop reveals yard after yard of fabric, costumes, wigs, and more tutus than one can easily count.

At the forefront are lavish court regalia and delicate swan costumes, in black and white, for the company's upcoming production of *Swan Lake*. The volunteers creating the costumes are spending a little more time than a fairy godmother might, but the magic is still there.

Every weekend, the costume shop becomes a gathering place for the company's costumers and, as the needles flash, the visions of Deanna Doty, artistic director, come to life.

For Doty, the design scheme for the production develops gradually, through an ever-evolving process. She draws inspiration

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Photos by Jill Bullington.

FROM THE DESIGN STUDIO

CU Ballet's costume shop is home to costumes from all different ballets and time periods, from the Victorian dream of *The Nutcracker* to Renaissance-inspired *Sleeping Beauty*, and from modern *Cinderella* to medieval *Swan Lake*.

In total, the shop holds over 500 costumes and thousands of interchangeable headpieces, hats, wigs, gloves, jewels, and shoes that the company uses in its productions. Included in the mix are custom patterns, one-of-a-kind fabrics and trims, and supplies to keep an army of "stitchers" busy for many months.

For *Swan Lake*, approximately 85 costumes will be featured and 50 of them (with accompanying accessories like hats and boots) have been newly created for the production.



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from a variety of sources in search of the right elements around which to set the production, and as her own ideas develop, she draws on the ideas of others, like Andy Warfel, the company's production supervisor.

"It's very much a collaboration," Doty said. "It doesn't all stem from my brain; it's very organic."

Inspired by a series of images Warfel brought to the table, the design concept for a new production of *Swan Lake* was born. Doty said the design has a modernistic look that centers around a black, white and gold color scheme, and the costume designs are historically authentic. The fabrics are rich, the colors are vivid and the details are ornate. In order to achieve the colors she wants the dancers to wear on stage, Doty will spend hours hand-dyeing and hand-painting the costumes.

Although Doty develops the designs for the costumes, it is the company's volunteer costumers who perform the magic of taking her design sketches off the paper and giving them life. Leading the charge is Anne deVelder, costume shop manager at Krannert Center for the Performing Arts and a CU Ballet volunteer. She has years of experience working for dance and ballet companies and has recently turned her attention to CU Ballet.

deVelder and her husband, John Dayger, who is volunteering in the costume shop and performing in the ballet as the villainous von Rothbart, attended the company's production of *Sleeping Beauty* in 2007 and realized the talent and professionalism of the dancers. Impressed by the quality of the company, they decided to volunteer their expertise and services.

"We said, 'This is a good company, they're after the right things. They are doing a good job,'" deVelder said.

As opening night quickly approaches, deVelder spends every weekend in the costume shop developing patterns and sharing her knowledge with other volunteers. "My biggest challenge is keeping ahead of people," deVelder said. And rightly so, because the other volunteers depend on her costume patterns before any other progress can be made. She said the costumes they make are designed to suite a variety of performers and to be easily altered and used for different roles and ballets.

Faced with limited time, deVelder, Doty, and Julianna Steitz, CU Ballet's costume mistress, understand that every costume cannot be created from scratch in time for the production, so they make use of costumes that already exist and put effort into revamping them to match the design of the new production.

When creating new costumes, deVelder's experience is much appreciated as she provides her fellow costumers with advice, lessons and tricks of the trade to ensure the costumes are properly designed, properly manufactured and well-suited for the dancer's use.

"We're learning a lot of new ways to do things," Steitz said.

Steitz said deVelder has been instrumental in showing her and the rest of the volunteers different methods of creating costumes, like selecting fabric that will float as the dancer flies through the air or specially attaching buttons so they will not interfere with partnering. Each costume is an extension of the artistry of the dancer wearing it, so it is important that the dancer wears the costume, not the other way around.

"You have to make sure the costume can move with the dancer," Steitz said. "You want fabric that will look good on stage. You want to enhance that dancer, not cover them up. We want to show their beauty."

As CU Ballet adds more and more costumes to its repertoire, the costume shop grows, as does the knowledge of the costumers. "Each time we do a ballet we have the opportunity to take it to the next level," Doty said. "I feel so inspired when I go into the costume shop and see all those costumes there. Ten years ago we had nothing."

As the costumes for *Swan Lake* near completion, deVelder, in true fairy godmother form, said she is thinking of the dancers who will wear the costumes and is investing her time into the production to help enhance the experience for the young members of the company.

"Every performer deserves to look their best," deVelder said. "It's our thank you to them for the time they've putting in."

"This is a good company. They're after the right things."



Anne deVelder. Photo by Valerie Oliviero.



August 27, 2010

Soirée du Ballet:

Dahlia

Make sure that you're on the invite list for the most spectacular party of next season.

CU Ballet's 8th annual Soirée du Ballet celebrates culinary delights; delicious cocktails and bubbly; unique experiences in arts, fashion, entertainment, travel, and wellness; and the epitome of a great night out.

For an invitation, email Julianna at cuballet@gmail.com.

The Friendliest Stores Make Giving Donor-Friendly

Schnucks manager Dan Wheatman and his team have long been valued partners of CU Ballet. In addition to being the premiere sponsor for Tickets for Kids and the source of everyone's favorite ballerina cupcake at *The Nutcracker*, local Schnucks stores have added a new way to support the ballet company.

Register your Schnucks customer card with eScrip, designate "CU Ballet" as your non-profit interest, and Schnucks will donate up to 3% of your future purchases to CU Ballet.

44 households have registered since 2009, and their purchases provided CU Ballet with over \$2,000 in funding.

The easiest way to register your Schnucks customer card:

Email cuballet@gmail.com with your Schnucks customer card number, and we'll handle the registration with eScrip.

Or, you can contact eScrip directly at 800-931-6258 or online at www.escrip.com/schnucks.jsp and mention "CU Ballet."

Thanks to Dan Wheatman and Schnucks, the friendliest stores in town are also among the greatest supporters of ballet. Shop at Schnucks and give to CU Ballet through eScrip and your customer card.



Deanna Doty, artistic director.
Photo by Jason Lindsey.

focus.
focus.
focus.

The problem with multitasking is that it too often leads to mediocrity. Giving a little attention to many things can leave the potential for any one thing or one individual to be half realized.

CU Ballet's artistic director Deanna Doty doesn't have that problem, and the results of her steely focus are consistently extraordinary.

"I'm not a multi-tasker, and never have been. I'm surrounded by effective people who can go in five directions at once, but I work in a different way," says Doty.

As much as she may admire the efficiency of others, Doty herself is admired in the arts community for her ability to produce dancers and ballets of impeccable quality by dedicating her time and attention to details that matter greatly - technique, classical artistry, and character.

"Most of us look at ballet and enjoy the beautiful big picture, but Deanna looks at how the sets and costumes marry, how the corps moves, even the minutest detail - like how a dancer uses a muscle," explains Tracy McCabe, CU Ballet's producer. "That focus means we have layered productions and healthy dancers who perform at their best."

Doty takes that approach to her business, Champaign Ballet Academy, which offers a complement of classes in classical ballet and none of the tumbling, tap, and hip hop into which some studios dip their toes. Doty is resolute on operating an "academy" (not a school or a studio) to provide students with a curriculum-based, conservatory environment in which to nurture their ballet artistry.

"I was trained professionally in ballet and I choose to put my energy and creativity into teaching it with the same passion and knowledge that influenced me," says Doty, who danced professionally before arriving in Champaign.

Because ballet is a varied and changing art form, academy students and company dancers are exposed to diverse styles and challenged by both classical and new techniques - making them well-rounded artists under Doty's artistic direction.

But even with passion and a plan, Doty must adapt constantly to a litany of variables and realities that impact the company, or a production like *Swan Lake*, or even an individual dancer's development.

"Deanna isn't locked into a box or a single way. She has this following of dancers and volunteers who see her vision, but often need her help getting there," says McCabe. "Every day, Deanna is dealing with surprises, solving problems, and keeping critical details on track. She's an extraordinary entrepreneur and leader."

Extraordinary, indeed.



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MOTHER'S DAY MATINEE

Sunday, May 9 at 2:00pm

ALSO BROUGHT TO YOU BY THESE FINE SPONSORS:



Company dancer Erica Johnston poses as the white swan queen Odette.
Photo by Dan Merlo.

