



## Paul Boos: A one-man band for Ballet Vero

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By Michelle Genz

When the curtain rises on Ballet Vero Beach's performance of the great choreographer George Balanchine's "Valse-Fantaisie" next weekend, former Balanchine dancer Paul Boos will have had a hand in every step, on and off stage.

He will not only have rehearsed the dancers, but overseen the lighting, the music, even the costumes, making sure everything is "correct," he says.

Boos is an official Balanchine “répétiteur” a rehearsal director and style coach certified by the Balanchine Trust, which oversees the rights and performances of all Balanchine ballets.

Ballet Vero Beach, a company only in its second year, applied and was awarded the rights to perform “Valse-Fantaisie,” and Boos was picked as répétiteur. In August, Boos flew from New York to Omaha where Ballet Vero Beach dancers double as company members of Ballet Nebraska.

The former New York City Ballet dancer remembers the first time he danced for the legendary choreographer, who is credited with bringing ballet to America.

It was 1977, and Paul was 17. The son of a South Dakota sheriff who danced the jitterbug with such abandon he was thrown out of dance halls. Boos was passionate about ballet, and he left - by himself- for New York at 15, to study ballet. After two top academies took him on scholarship, he was accepted at the eminent School of American Ballet, the feeder school of New York City Ballet.

Now graduation loomed. Balanchine was choreographing a ballet using him and a fellow student for a ballet in a Juilliard opera production.

For two weeks, Balanchine himself forcefully molded Boos into the dancer he wanted him to be, testing the novice's limits not only mentally, but physically.

At the end of the sessions, he returned to his school and was shown a note: Paul Boos, report to company class. Balanchine had invited him to join the company “I was quite shocked,” Boos recalls.

That “baptism by fire,” as Boos called it, was an initiation into an almost faith-like dedication to Balanchine’s artistic vision.

Boos also danced extensively under Jerome Robbins. “Jerry was much more specific, very demanding. It was his way or no way. With Balanchine, he really developed individuals. He wanted to see what each of us could do, and what our special qualities were.”

When Boos left the company after 13 years, moving to Europe to teach with the Royal Danish Ballet, he offered to serve as an ambassador for the Balanchine Trust in any way he could, he says. He became a répétiteur in 1992 and has since staged Balanchine ballets at the Paris Opera, the Bolshoi, La Scala, and the Joffrey.

Today Boos is one of only 30+ Balanchine répétiteurs in the world; of those, seven are men. Most are former dancers who worked under Balanchine, though increasingly, others are being certified, those who have danced with dedicated Balanchine companies.

Of those companies, none is considered truer to Balanchine than Miami City Ballet, which performs its season at West Palm Beach’s Kravis Center. Its founder and three-decade-long artistic director, Edward Villella, was a star Balanchine dancer and considered the greatest American-born male dancer in the history of ballet. Two years ago, when he stepped down, his post was handed to Lourdes Lopez, a Balanchine disciple who has continued the Balanchine tradition with the company.

Balanchine died in 1983. Several years earlier; fearful that his ballets would become the property of a brother in the Soviet Union, and therefore fall to the Soviet government, Balanchine had a will written leaving his 100 or so ballets to various friends and dancers.

Most went to three women: his former wife and dancer, Tanaquil LeClercq; his dear friend, ballerina Karin von Aroldingen; and his longtime friend and assistant, Barbara Horgan.

It was Horgan who had the works copyrighted on the advice of her lawyer, and the three women came together to form the Balanchine Trust in 1986, to license the ballets and to ensure that the quality of their performance was true to their creator.

When Boos first arrives at a company's studio to set a dance, he does what Balanchine did with him-though not as harshly. "You have to have personal knowledge of Balanchine's esthetic," he says.

"I look to see what the abilities of the dancers are," he says. He says dancers outside of New York City Ballet are not trained on a daily basis in the same technique.

"We move with speed and clarity. I find that the repertory is just incredibly bright," he says.

"It's something quite specific that we do," he adds. "Not all companies have that ease; they don't all dance with this kind of energy, this kind of speed."

The piece, "Valse-Fantaisie," was selected for Ballet Vero Beach by the Trust, Boos says, based on the level and number of dancers available.

"It's a vetting piece," he says, "it's something to see how a company handles. Do they have the chops, can they do this?"

Ballet Vero Beach's artistic director, Adam Schnell requested Boos as répétiteur; the two former dancers know each socially, having met in New York.

Boos will be in the house next Friday night, hoping to see a performance and reaction from the audience - that will mean more Balanchine repertory in the company's future.

"Adam has really invested so much of his heart and soul into this. I just will do everything I can to help if possible," says Boos.