

## Gala experiment

Indianapolis City Ballet performance is built on a dream



By Jay Harvey

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Indianapolis City Ballet ruffled a few feathers last spring when it announced a plan to restore professional ballet to the city.

Attempts to fill the gap left by the demise of Ballet Internationale Indianapolis four years ago have resulted in new companies, often attached to ballet schools, giving performances with various degrees of professional standing among the dancers.

Indianapolis City Ballet proposes to set up a troupe of 10 to 14 professionals whose only mandate here would be to dance, not teach.

An inaugural gala performance Saturday at the Murat Theatre will test the waters, gauging the level of interest in supporting such a company here. If the signs look good, Indianapolis City Ballet would present its first season in 2010-11.

Robert Hesse, ICB chairman, said: "I call myself a cautious risk-taker: I do it slowly and carefully." Accordingly, he started with major fundraising; the goal of \$150,000 was met last May. The second goal is to raise \$50,000 in donor-package tickets to the gala and link that to \$50,000 worth of general-admission tickets in the \$25-\$65 range.

"There are 2,700 seats in that hall," Hesse said. "Now, I'm not delusional. We can't do that many, but we can sell 1,500 to 2,000, and that's where we're headed." The gala is designed to pay for itself, not put money in ICB's bank account.

On the artistic side, John Meehan, an Australian dancer-choreographer with extensive executive experience, said he has assembled the gala cast with both dancers and repertoire in mind. He wanted to make the program "more contemporary and neoclassical," he said. "Often, the emphasis in galas is on virtuosity and classical repertoire."

The gala's stylistic emphasis is meant to represent the kind of company ICB will be.



Alicia Amatriain and Jason Reilly, who will perform during the gala, are principal dancers with the Stuttgart Ballet. - Photo provided by Stuttgart Ballet



Julie Kent will perform two pas de deux pieces with David Hallberg. - Photo provided by Roy Round

Meehan's main task, after securing the 11 national and international dancers, was figuring out "how it fits together as a program. It's like a sampler, so the question becomes, how exciting is it going to be? The good thing is that you'll get a lot more variety than in any one evening of Indianapolis City Ballet," Meehan said. "But no piece has a very complex theatrical shape; it has to make its point pretty quickly."

All of the pieces in the gala program are known to the dancers in the combinations in which they will be presented, with one exception: David Hochoy, artistic director of Dance Kaleidoscope, was invited to reset his modern-dance piece "Fascinatin' Rhythm" as a ballet for New York dancers Joaquin De Luz, Tiler Peck and Sarah Lane. Hochoy traveled to New York in June to teach the work to the dancers.



Dancer Sarah Lane and choreographer David Hochoy rehearsed "Fascinatin' Rhythm" in New York. - Photo provided by Kevin R. Hesse

Meehan hired American Ballet Theatre principal dancers David Hallberg and Julie Kent to dance the pas de deux from "Manon" and "Romeo and Juliet."

"I was thrilled that so many were available," said Meehan of the dancers for the gala.

Kent is known to Indiana ballet fans for her work at Indiana University, dating to 1995, when she was hired as guest artist for the IU production of "Nutcracker." She continued to be featured in that annual production through 2002. In Spring Ballet programs, she staged Act 2 of "Swan Lake" in 2003 and Act 3 of "Sleeping Beauty" in 2004. She was featured again as a guest artist in Jerome Robbins' "Other Dances" in 2006.

"IU is a wonderfully idyllic American college campus, and it has a lot of very talented young people," Kent said by phone from her home in New York. "It's obviously very strong in dance and has been for some time. I always looked forward to my time in Bloomington."

From the reception she had there and her high regard for IU ballet training, Kent thinks the prospects for ICB are good.

"There's definitely enough interest there for Indianapolis to support its own company. It's far enough away from Chicago, and doesn't have enough access to something it seems to want and has really strong interest in.

"(But) it takes a huge commitment from a few to start it. Then from there, I feel strongly the community would support it again."

Kent said using a gala to herald a new company is particularly exciting.

"You have guests from all over the world to do their forte; it inspires the audience there to keep going and to commit to it. You are going to see a broad range of things. If you're not into tutus and tiaras, you'll see something more contemporary. You'll be exposed to something you didn't know existed. Your humanity will be opened to something very moving and very memorable."