



on the cover

*Photo by: Glenn Goettler*

## ***'Love Stories'***

### **3 BALLETS THAT RUN AN EMOTIONAL GAMUT**

**By Marshall Williams**

Special to The Sun

THE MYSTIC BALLET CONTINUES TO GROW AND EXPAND both as a school and as a professional company, as it prepares for a production of three ballets choreographed by its young star choreographer, Sergei Vanaev, formerly of the Bolshoi Ballet.

Vanaev will present the world premiere of a new work, "Death and the Maiden," based on the music of Franz Schubert, as well as a local premiere of "Sonata," danced to music of Ludwig van Beethoven, and a reprise of his daringly contemporary take on Stravinsky's already daring "Rite of Spring."

The three ballets, presented under the umbrella title "Love Stories," will be given at the Mashantucket Pequot Museum on Saturday, Feb. 14 at 1 and 4 p.m.

It should be a decidedly different Valentine's Day date.

"Death and the Maiden" tells the story of "a woman who falls in love with death," says Goren Subotic, the founder and manager of Mystic Ballet.

"It is not cynical," Subotic says of the work, which takes its cue from the passionately wrought music of Franz Schubert. "The maiden stands for all of us, and we are all scared of death, but what would happen if we fell in love with death instead? After all we find heaven after death; we have access to another life perhaps. So this dance becomes an expression of our own thoughts and fears."

"It is not a revolution against life, or a call for suicide," adds the choreographer, Sergei Vanaev, who is now creating a new ballet every year for Mystic Ballet.

And, since this work is intended for an evening of ballet titled "Love Stories," it also becomes something beautiful. "Finally, what we see visually is a pas de deux between a beautiful man and beautiful girl," says the choreographer. "When you see this metaphysical story told as a beautiful dance, it makes it more exotic, more intensive — it becomes a relationship that is inescapable."

"Sonata," which Subotic describes as "a simple story of human relationships," was also conceived and choreographed by Vanaev. Says Subotic, "it shows the details of thirty years in the lives of two people."

Vanaev's production of "Sonata" is danced to music from the Pathetique Sonata of Beethoven, and features pairs of dancers showing different stages in the lives of a man and a woman. "I leave it open," Vanaev says, "with no real 'story,' but something where people can just recognize emotional situations in their own lives."

The final work on this Saturday's program is "The Rite of Spring," with music composed in 1913 by Igor Stravinsky for a work first commissioned by the great impresario Serge Diaghilev of the Ballets Russes. It shocked its audiences then, and in that tradition, Vanaev has given the now-classic work a fresh and startling new interpretation with offbeat imagery and wild rebellion.

"This piece is about a priest who demands sacrifice from a young girl," says Subotic, "and for the first time someone rebels against him. And in this production, when you rebel against the priest you also are making a revolution against all of the people, and this gives it its incredible power."

Adds Vanaev. "I made up a new story around this, that there's this main guy, the strong one who

becomes a rebel.” This rebel says, becomes sympathetic with the girl about to be sacrificed, and so he turns against both the priest and the people who are expecting the sacrifice.

Vanaev calls this “Rite of Spring” a love story, because the hero of the story is not afraid to declare a love for the girl which is stronger than his love for society as he’s known it. “This guy is ready to give up his role in society, and the spiritual construction of society, because he loves this girl, because he is ready to take this amazing step. It is a definite manifestation of love; it is saying that there is something about love that really does exist.

We’re not just animals, we are something more than that; we are somewhere between animals and angels.”

Sergei Vanaev was born in 1967 just outside Moscow, and at ten years old he entered the Ballet Academy of the Bolshoi Theater, where he graduated with honors in 1985. For six years he was a soloist with the Moscow Classical Ballet, and later with several ballet companies in Germany. He began choreographing his own works in 2002, and he is now artistic director of the State Theatre of Bremerhaven, as well as with the Mystic Ballet.

Vanaev and Subotic have expanded the professional company of Mystic Ballet this year, and they now have nine full-time soloists who hail from Brazil, Germany, Mongolia and Japan as well as the United States.

In an effort to bring in as large an audience as possible, Subotic has inaugurated a “Pay What You Wish” policy for Saturday’s performances. “The worst fear I have is to see empty seats,” he says. “If you have a full house, then the performers become elevated above their own expectations.

With the economy the way it is, I hope that everyone who wants to see ballet will come to the performance, no matter what they can afford. I think it’s an investment in the future.”

The Mystic Ballet production of “Love Stories” will be given in the auditorium of the Mashantucket Pequot Museum, 110 Pequot Trail (off Rte. 2), Mashantucket, on Saturday, Feb. 14 at 1 and 4 p.m.

For tickets and information call (860) 536-3671 or go to [www.mysticballet.org](http://www.mysticballet.org) ■