

**An historic collaboration: State Street Ballet
+ conductor Nir Kabaretti and the Santa
Barbara Symphony = a sublime full-length
*Giselle***

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For the first time in the history of collaborations between these two major organizations, the Santa Barbara Symphony was in the Granada Theatre's orchestra pit for State Street Ballet's season opening performances on October 21 and 22 of Adolphe Adam's full-length romantic pantomime ballet from 1841 *Giselle*, one of a handful of the most famous and virtuoso ballets in the repertory.

Music and Artistic Director of the Symphony **Nir Kabaretti** was at the helm in the pit, and the professional dancers of State Street Ballet under new Artistic Director **Megan Philipp** knew it. The company was more than up to the task, achieving a high level of artistry and execution, confident the maestro would have their back. The Granada Theatre was sold out for both weekend performances.

The *Giselle* performance on October 22nd was music and dance heaven, top to bottom. A delicate soufflé of great beauty requiring stamina as well as virtuosity. The entire company was inspired. The principal soloist's bravura dancing and the corps de ballet's precise articulation took everything up a notch from the company's already high bar.

Professional confidence, both in the pit and on stage gave the performance a magical shimmer. Studious attention to mid-nineteenth century stylized mime, to say nothing of the stunning classical ballet technique on display was matched by music making from the pit besotted in emotional power and thrall.

This gorgeous conflation of two great organizations into one spectacularly focused artistic realization of Adam's masterpiece powered a magical aura in the room, a nimbus that everybody felt on stage and throughout the house. Fireworks, balletic and orchestral was the order of the day. Set design, lighting and staging were also of extraordinary professionalism and subtlety. This production of *Giselle* will remain in audience memory for a long time – the very goal of live performance art.

No stranger to Europe's great opera houses - Vienna, Madrid, Milan, Florence, Rome, and most recently the Royal Swedish Opera in Stockholm - maestro Kabaratti has conducted ballet as well as opera in these houses and others around the world frequently. *Giselle* has been in his repertoire for several years, and it showed. His ease with the responsibility, his confident expertise in executing Adam's huge two-and-a-half-hour narrative arc of dance, music and drama was thrilling to watch and hear on the 22nd.

Buoyed from working with such an experienced ballet conductor, the dancer's artistic self-confidence became beautifully empowered. The result on stage was more than usually exciting, often spectacular. The company's expertise in executing this historic model of virtuoso classical ballet was

clearly enhanced by the company's trust in the conductor in the pit. Risks were taken, heights were achieved.

It takes two to tango, and State Street Ballet Artistic Director Megan Philipp crafted a superb curation of Adam's masterpiece. Attention to choreographic detail was as breathtaking as Kabaretti's conducting. State Street Ballet has refreshed itself in recent years, hiring exciting new talent and shaping its solo and ensemble discipline to a high standard. *Giselle* was the perfect season-opening showpiece for the company.

The original 1841 choreography for *Giselle* was created by Jean Coralli and Jules Perrot. A slew of choreographers like Marius Petipa have tinkered with the original choreography since - high compliment. Over the years, *Giselle* has remained solid – the marvelous arc of its original Coralli/Perrot structure essentially unchanged.

The performance on the 22nd was gorgeous in execution thanks to skillful staging by **Marina Fliagina**, **Chauncey Parsons**, and **Megan Philipp**. Skill, flair, and the discipline of years of acquaintance with the work by the three colleagues paid off in superlatives. **Nicole Thompson's** costume design was exactly what the music told us to imagine, abetted by **Samantha Jelinek's** obliging lighting design, and the functional sets of **Rolf Freeman**, and **Inland Pacific Ballet**.

State Street Ballet's principal cast were powerful acting dancers, their individual technique superb. Credibility in acting out one of the craziest stories in ballet history disarmed and was moving. Sometimes stunning to the eye, always a perfection of detailed

classical ballet movement, virtuoso performances were turned in by all the principals to mind-boggling effect and audience delight. The nearly lost art of mid-nineteenth century mime was masterfully achieved by all with true Period elegance.

Breaking out Blasis's *Traité élémentaire, théorique et pratique de l'art de la danse* (1820) to describe in detail the encyclopedic footwork on display in *Giselle* would be exhausting. Suffice to say, **Nerea Barrondo** was one of the most touching and believable *Giselle*'s in this viewer's memory stretching over several decades seeing the ballet in much larger cities. Her acting, demur and without affectation, her dancing delicate, fragile, deeply moving.

A finer Count Albrecht than State Street Ballet's **Ryan Lenkey** would be hard to find. His stature on stage, his understanding of his character as *Giselle*'s almost lover, his mastery of the art of nineteenth century mime, and most importantly his believability made him a great Count Albrecht, and a solid asset for State Street Ballet. Lenkey has mastered the role.

Noam Tsivkin has been with the company since 2016 and created a character of high energy and determined resistance in his role as Hilarion, *Giselle*'s true love. Superb virtuoso dancing from Tsivkin was often breathtaking. **Denise Grimm** (Berthe), **Tanner Blee** (Duke of Courtland), **Kaia Abraham** (Bathilde), and **Sergei Domrachev** as Wilfred honored the provenance of *Giselle* with amazing character studies and solid dance virtuosity. Ditto **Marika Kobayashi** and **Harold Mendez** (Peasant Pas de deux), and a truly impressive State Street Ballet corps de ballet.

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