

THEATER

Thirsty dancers take a bite out of 'Dracula' ballet

Michael Finnegan found irony in sinking his teeth into a garlic bagel just as he was about to rehearse the lead role in the Plymouth-Canton Ballet Company's spring production of "Dracula" on Saturday, May 2. After all, vampires avoid garlic at every turn.

The dramatic music set the stage for the eeriness as Finnegan came to life during a Saturday rehearsal at Joanne's Dance Extension in Plymouth. The production is a drastic departure from the company's traditional ballets.

After dancing the Prince in "The Nutcracker" and Franz in "Coppelia," Finnegan's fiendishly taken to skulking behind the black and red cape as he goes about his dirty work. It's a spectacular, almost frightening, sight to watch him leap across the stage in pursuit of his next victim. One of Finnegan's favorite scenes takes place at the end of the ballet when he dies center stage after Mina, played by Kendra Phillips of Westland, drives a stake through his heart.

"It's an awesome part," said Finnegan, co-owner of Dance Classics Studio in Ann Arbor. "When I heard the spring production was going to be Dracula, I knew I had to do it. There's not that many signature roles that are evil."

Set in the 18th century, the ballet spins Bram Stoker's classic tale of the Count who packs up his coffin and moves to London after realizing life has become scarce in Transylvania.

Choreographed by Mark Nash for the Plymouth Canton Company, the original ballet tells the story through the eyes of Mina, Lucy's best friend. Nash, formerly with the Cincinnati Ballet, danced the lead role Dayton Ballet's production. The Plymouth Canton ballet departs in a number of ways from Dayton. Nash replaces most of the avant-garde music from "Dracula" soundtracks from "Interview with a Vampire," "Shine," and "The Age of Innocence."

"I tried to stay closer to the

"Dracula"

What: The Plymouth-Canton Ballet Company scores up an original ballet choreographed by Mark Nash, a former member of the Cincinnati Ballet.

When: 8:30 p.m. and 7:30 p.m. Saturday, May 2.

Where: South Lyon High School Auditorium, 1000 North Lafayette, (at 11 Mile Road and Pontiac Trail), South Lyon.

Tickets: \$10 adults, \$8 children ages 12 and under, (734) 455-4330. Reserved seating. For more information call, (734) 397-8828.

book by Bram Stoker," said Nash. "The Dayton version was more of a love story. I've tried to make Dracula a little more selfish, egotistical, frustrated, manipulative and hungry. It's truest to the book without having dialogue."

The company began rehearsals for "Dracula" during Christmas holidays. Nash was back in town early Saturday morning to clean up the choreography. Finnegan excused himself from the rehearsal early to go to work as a sales representative for Sprint, he said, not because daylight means death to a vampire. John Luther, who plays Lucy's fiancé, filled in for the Prince of Darkness.

"We wanted to do something different, something special during National Dance Week (May 1-8)," said Dawn Greene, company artistic director. "Lucy is the one Dracula bites and there's a big chase to get her back. There's a lot of acting in this which the dancers aren't used to, so it's good for them. For some of them it's difficult to just let go and not feel self-conscious about it."

Pam Lawrie thrives on the challenge of playing Lucy, Dracula's victim. Her roles in "Cinderella" with the Contemporary Ballet Theatre and "Midsummer Night's Dream" with the Metropolitan Ballet Theatre, differ drastically from the role of Lucy, especially the opening of Act II when the young girl comes back from the dead.

"It's different because we're so used to doing everything classical," said Lawrie of Northville. "For Lucy, you're playing a du-

ble role. You have to make people love you so they feel bad when you die. Then you have to make people hate you when you

turn evil."

Multiple personalities seem to run rampant in "Dracula." Tim Smola struggles with the split personality of Renfield, a lunatic escaped from an insane asylum. Smola, who joins the Peter Sparling Dance Co. in Ann Arbor after graduating this spring from the University of Michigan, pantomimes eating with relish the character's strange cuisine as he speaks.

"Renfield's this crazy guy; he eats roaches," said Smola, a Canton resident. "Dracula has control of his mind. But another part of him is good and he tries

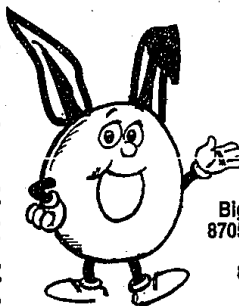
to warn people that Dracula's coming."

The role of Mina's fiancé, Jonathon Harker, destroys everything Dean Sheremet learned over the last eight years about the proper way for a dancer to carry his body. The Plymouth Canton High School junior strove for poise and grace in his roles in "The Nutcracker" and "Coppelia," the same elements he'll use when competing in New York and Las Vegas for the title of Mr. Dance in May. As the unlucky real estate agent sent to Dracula's castle to finalize Count Dracula's purchase of

Carfax Abbey in London, Sheremet slowly becomes weaker as Dracula's three wives feed on his blood.

"I got seduced by all the wives. I'm their meal," said Sheremet, who studied with the Cincinnati Ballet during Easter break. "It's difficult to act because when you're on stage you're supposed to have a presence. And you're acting all weak and frail."

Nicole Reitz pauses to listen as Nash tells the dancers, "in acting you have to telegraph what is going on." Reitz plays the flirtatious and seductive third wife of Dracula.



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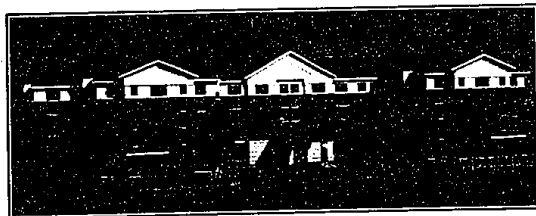
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