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Sac Ballet still firmly on its toes

jcarnes@sacbee.com

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When the Sacramento Ballet notified its subscribers Jan. 21 and the public at large Jan. 22 that it was canceling the remaining programs in its 2008-09 season, many thought the company was out of business.

In fact, the dancers are performing more than they would have in the regular season – but in other venues.

The Mondavi Center at the University of California, Davis, will produce a performance April 5 in its 200-seat Studio Theatre, which it has donated to the company for the evening. Among dances on that program will be the premiere of a work by Amy Seiwert, a former Sacramento Ballet dancer who is now resident choreographer with San Francisco's Smuin Ballet Protege Program.

But there are plenty more opportunities to see the company. For the next three Second Saturday art events in Sacramento, dancers will be at various art galleries as "living sculptures," slowly creating movement and talking to visitors about the dance troupe.

And the ballet will present three Red-Hot Valentine performances this week in its 100-seat studio, 1631 K St., Sacramento.

Each is a scaled-down version of the company's planned "Noches Caliente" program (which would have been performed in the 2,400-seat Community Center Theater). The program features excerpts from Septime Webre's "Juanita y Alicia" and Michael Smuin's "Frankie & Johnny" (the former celebrating the choreographer's Cuban heritage, the latter set in a Havana nightclub), plus the entire "Boléro," Ron Cunningham's sensual sensation, first performed here in 1997.

Macho antagonism and sexual tension abound as Gabriel Williams and Richard Porter and a corps of 10 women dance jazz and flamenco overtones to Ravel's steamy score.

Another highlight of the program as it was performed last Saturday was the pas de deux and coda from Marius Petipa's "Don Quixote," a high point of classical choreography. Danced by Stefan Calka and Kirsten Bloom, it was elegant in its turns and energetic in its leaps and spins. It was an impressive display of athleticism in the creation of beauty.

There are three remaining opportunities to see the program.

- Tonight is College Night. Student ID is required for admission, which is \$10 per person. The program begins at 7 p.m. and will be followed, about 8 p.m., by a salsa lesson conducted by ballroom dancers Chelsea Weilstein and Michael Eric Koptke.
- Friday night, the performance is open to all and will begin at 6 p.m. The same program will be presented, followed by a salsa dance lesson with the ballet company dancers. Tickets are \$20.
- Saturday – Valentine's Day – is billed as "an early-evening Valentine's event." The performance, same as above, will begin at 5 p.m., followed by a salsa lesson from Weilstein and Koptke. Tickets are \$20.

More 'Beer & Ballet'

On Feb. 21, the company will present two encore performances of its popular "Beer & Ballet" program, at 6 and 8:30 p.m. Tickets are \$25 for the in-studio performances. The program includes reprises of a couple of past favorites: Ilana Goldman's "Perhaps," choreographed to music by Cake and danced by Nikki Trerise and Williams; and Williams' delightful "Dune Buggy," set to music by the Presidents of the United States of America and performed by Goldman, Trerise, Timothy Coleman and Heidi Zolker.

The program also includes the first movement of "Concerto Borocco," choreographed by George Balanchine to music by Johan Sebastian Bach; "Acceleration," a combination of gymnastics, hip-hop, African-inspired movement and pure swagger as danced by John Speed Orr to choreography by company member Darwin Black; and "Eris Moon," by first-time choreographer Bloom, to music by Clannad, a beautiful duet danced by Ilana Goldman and Porter, who are perfectly matched in height and strength.

Tickets are to go on sale March 2 for "Modern Masters, Abbreviated," to be staged in the ballet studio March 20-22 and March 26-29. Choreographers whose new dances will be presented include Molly Lynch, Calka, Nicole Haskins, Sunchai Muy and Nolan T'Sani. Muy, a former member of the company who returned this season after a three-year absence, will present a reworking of his "Untamed Prodigies," which he debuted five years ago.

"Beer & Ballet 2" – with new dances created and performed by company members – is scheduled in the studio on April 4, 11 and 18. Performances will be at 6 p.m. April 4 and 11, and at 6 and 8 p.m. April 18. Tickets are \$25.

The dancers have established their own Web site – www.saveoursacballet.com – to solicit contributions to the company and to advertise performances and special events.

To purchase tickets to any of the performances now on sale, call (916) 552-5800, ext. 2 between 10 a.m. and 2 p.m. Monday through Thursday, and between 1 and 5 p.m. Friday.

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