

**QUICK Q&A**

Marcelo Gomes

ABT's most passionate male star adds choreography to his list of talents.



Whether a love-struck prince or an evil sorcerer, Marcelo Gomes transforms into characters of all kinds. The depth and sincerity of the Brazilian-born star, who brings out the best in nearly the entire roster of female principals at American Ballet Theatre, are matched by his explosive technique and refined musicality. Lately, he's broken into making his own ballets. This month, he ascends the throne (again) as one of five men in "Kings of the Dance: Opus 3." The third installment of Sergei Danilian's popular evening, co-produced by Segerstrom Center for the Arts, premiered last year in Moscow, and now comes to New York City Center. Gomes will not only dance in a solo by Jorma Elo and a group work by Mauro Bigonzetti, but was commissioned to make the finale, which he will perform with Guillaume Côté, David Hallberg, Denis Matvienko, and Ivan Vasiliev. He spoke to associate editor Kina Poon in November.

How did you become interested in making work? I started getting the itch a couple of years ago. I've always listened to music and fooled around putting steps to it. Maybe five years ago, Ethan Stiefel asked me to come to Martha's Vineyard and make a piece ▶▶

Right: Marie-Laure Briane, Courtesy IBM/C. Left: Gene Schiavone, Courtesy Ardani

A Winning Hand

Les Ballets de Monte-Carlo returns to the U.S.

Jean-Christophe Maillot is a lucky man. In 1993, Monte Carlo handed him a gift most choreographers can only dream of: a full company of classically trained dancers, with the freedom to shape it as he wished. Two decades and 30 creations on, Les Ballets de Monte-Carlo is bringing his unique brand of neoclassical choreography to the U.S. this February.

Les Ballets hasn't been to New York since 2003, but with about 60 performances abroad and only 20 or so in Monte Carlo every season, the company is used to being on the road. Its 48 dancers are an international group, with one former Pacific Northwest Ballet principal among them: Noeleni Pantastico, who fell in love with Maillot's choreography when PNB performed his *Roméo et Juliette*. She joined in 2008 and relishes the pace. "The atmosphere is very relaxed," she says. "Jean-Christophe is constantly refreshing the pieces we dance. It's never the same."

Pantastico has also had time to absorb the Frenchman's sleek, visually inventive style, a blend of ballet technique and contemporary inspiration. "He's very particular," she says. "I had to stop perform-

ing so much to the audience and be really thoughtful about the intention behind every step." The company dances works by other choreographers, including Balanchine and Forsythe, but Maillot creates at least one new piece every season. His stylish, cohesive ensemble is a testament to the benefits of working closely with one choreographer, and Pantastico now blends in beautifully with the group.

The program for this U.S. tour offers a chance to see different sides of his work. *Cinderella*, which will be shown at Segerstrom Center for the Arts in Costa Mesa, is a pared-down narrative ballet in the same vein as *Roméo et Juliette*. "There's always a little twist and turn with Jean-Christophe, a new back story," says Pantastico, who dances Cinderella and one of the stepsisters. Les Ballets will also perform two shorter works at the Joyce in New York: *Altro Canto*, a strikingly spiritual work set to music by Monteverdi and others, and *Opus 40*. The former is one of Pantastico's favorite ballets, and she is proud to finally dance her new repertoire in the U.S.: "I hope the audience will appreciate his work as much as I do." —*Laura Cappelle*

Diavolo in Transit

The company takes on new spaces (and structures).

Jacques Heim never met a block, pegboard, or wheel he didn't like. Artistic director of the risk-intensive troupe Diavolo Dance Theater, Heim, 47, has been using custom-made structures in his choreography since founding the Los

Angeles-based company in 1992. Props have included a 5,000-pound, 16-foot rotating aluminum wheel (*Humachina*); a 17-foot-long rocking boat (*Trajectoire*); and a large vertical pegboard resembling an oversized S&M device (*D2R*). ▶▶