

Transitions: Retirements, Ma Cong

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Tulsa Ballet's mixed bill in March was bittersweet for local dance fans, as principal Ma Cong danced his last two ballets – the Phlegmatic lead in Balanchine's *The Four Temperaments* and in the ensemble of Kudelka's *there, below*.

Yet Cong is not leaving dance – or even Tulsa Ballet. He continues as the company's resident choreographer as he pursues an increasingly international choreographic career that led to his being named a “25 to Watch” in 2006.

Cong's athleticism, fluid grace, and obvious joy onstage made him one of the company's most popular dancers, as well as an in-demand guest artist.

Standout roles included Escamillo in Amedeo Amodio's *Carmen*, Puck in Wheeldon's *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, and the Businessman in Young Soon Hue's *This is Your Life*, as well as several Nacho Duato ballets.

Cong's decision is “definitely the end of an era for the company,” says artistic director Marcello Angelini. “His ability to command the stage and the attention of the audience was immediately apparent.”

However, Cong says, “I realized all the energy I was putting into performing I could be channeling into my choreography. It wasn't an easy decision, but I believe it's the right one.”

A native of YuXi, China, Cong studied at the Beijing Dance Academy, then joined the National Ballet of China, rising to first soloist. He joined Tulsa Ballet in 1999 and was promoted to principal in 2003 – the same year he began choreographing.

Cong has created 10 ballets for Tulsa Ballet, as well as works for the Joffrey Ballet, Smuin Ballet, Houston Ballet, BalletMet Columbus, and Richmond Ballet, which last year performed Cong's *Ershter Vals* at London's Royal Opera House. His works are scheduled for the upcoming seasons of Louisville Ballet and Australia's Queensland Ballet.



Cong in The Nutcracker. Photo: Rosalie O'Connor, Courtesy Tulsa Ballet