

Tulsa Ballet II to debut as standalone company with 'On Your Radar' performances in September

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For most of the eight years it has been in existence, the work of Tulsa Ballet II - the pre-professional dance company within Tulsa Ballet - has gone more or less unnoticed.

When Tulsa Ballet artistic director Marcello Angelini created TB II in 2005, the idea behind this second company was twofold: to have an ensemble that could perform the ballet's many educational programs and to help train young dancers for the world of professional dance.

But next month, TB II will take the next step in its evolution with a production appropriately titled "On Your Radar," Sept. 6 and 8 at Tulsa Ballet's Studio K, that will be its debut as a standalone company.

And, if things go according to Angelini's plans, this one performance will be the start of a new direction for this second company.

"I can see, in maybe three to five years, TB II (becoming) a truly standalone company within Tulsa Ballet," Angelini said. "It would have its own performance season. And it would become the regional touring company of Tulsa Ballet.

"But first," he said, "we need to see how this first performance goes."

"On Your Radar" will feature a mix of classical and contemporary works: the "Aurora's Wedding" sequence from "The Sleeping Beauty"; "Match Point," a 2005 creation by Tulsa Ballet resident choreographer Ma Cong; and the world premiere of a piece by New York dancer and choreographer Natreia Blake.

Alfonso Martin, the former Tulsa Ballet principal dancer who retired at the end of last season, is now the artistic manager of TB II.

"We have something from the most classical of classical ballets," Martin said, "as well as something that was created specifically for this company. Natreia Blake spent a couple of weeks here working with dancers, seeing what their strengths are, and developing the ballet from that.

"To have a ballet created for you makes dancers feel more comfortable with doing something new," he said. "It's designed to fit what your body can do - and maybe a little more than what you think you can do."

Thirteen dancers make up TB II this season. Seven of them are joining the company this season, selected from some 300 dancers who auditioned for the program. TB II dancers

do not have a full contract as dancers with the main company have, but they earn a monthly stipend to help defray living costs.

"We have a network of about eight of the best dance schools in the country who direct their students to us," Martin said. "So there is a lot of talent in this company. It's my job to get all of that talent focused in the same direction. I know what is expected of a dancer who joins Tulsa Ballet, and I try to be very clear about what is required.

"We are preparing these dancers so that they could be ready to join the main company," he said, "but also so that they could work well with any professional company."

Many of the major dance companies in the world have ensembles such as Tulsa Ballet II.

"When dancers graduate from school, no matter how talented they might be, they still have a great deal to learn about being a professional dancer," Angelini said. "From a company's standpoint, it is not financially sound to pay a dancer for two years to train new dancers in what is expected of dancers in the main company. And for the dancers, it's not good for them, because they will spend most of those two years sitting on the sidelines."

Being in the second company, Angelini said, is akin to a college work-study program for dancers. For TB II company members, it means as many as 24 performances of Tulsa Ballet's education programs for public school students, as well as appearing in some of the main company's productions.

Four members of Tulsa Ballet's corps de ballet - Jaimi Cullen, Brittney Feit, Chelsea Keefer and Andrew Silks - got their start as members of TB II. Several members of the current roster have been cast in roles in Tulsa Ballet's opening production, "Rite of Spring."

Having TB II develop as a standalone company could mean unique opportunities for dancers with the main company.

"If things go well enough to do another TB II performance in the spring," Angelini said, "then I'm planning for that to be an evening of original ballets created by members of the main company. We have a number of dancers wanting to choreograph, and this is the perfect opportunity for that."

Tulsa Ballet II dancers

Mason Anders - San Francisco Ballet School

Silas Campos - TBII; San Francisco Academy of Ballet

Grace Chanslor - Tulsa Ballet CDE

Julian Duque - Central Pennsylvania Youth Ballet

Nikolas Gaifullin - Tulsa Ballet CDE

Jennifer Grace - Dmitri Kulev Classical Ballet Academy

Bobbie Lynn Kandravi - Tulsa Ballet CDE

Lindsay Karchin - ABT Studio Company

Christy Martin - TBI; Texas Ballet Theater

Regina Montgomery - The Rock School for Dance Education

Xavier Nunez - ABT Studio Company

Sarah Steele - Valentina Kozlova's Dance Conservatory

Jason Yeung - The Harid Conservatory