

Tulsa Ballet dancers part of tribute to the late Freddie Franklin

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Tulsa Ballet principal dancers Youhee Son and Hyonjun Rhee will represent the company Monday at a gala performance in New York City in honor of the late Freddie Franklin.

Franklin, who was a frequent guest artist with Tulsa Ballet through much of its history, died May 4 at age 98.

Son and Rhee will be performing the final pas de deux from the ballet "Gaité Parisienne," which was one of the signature ballets of Tulsa Ballet co-founder Moscelyne Larkin.

Tulsa Ballet is one of only a few companies asked to take part in the event, which will be presented at New York City's LaGuardia High School for the Performing Arts. Other companies involved are American Ballet Theatre, which organized the tribute, Dance Theatre of Harlem, Richmond Ballet and Cincinnati Ballet.

"The companies invited were ones that were closely associated with Freddie," said Tulsa Ballet artistic director Marcello Angelini.

In the case of Tulsa Ballet, Franklin worked with company founders Larkin and Roman Jasinski in the Ballet Russe de Monte Carlo, which led to his frequent visits to Tulsa to stage his own ballets or to perform character roles such as the witch Madge in "La Sylphide."

Angelini said his own friendship with Franklin began long before coming to Tulsa. "To put it shortly," he said, "I am in the United States because of Freddie Franklin, and I'm living and working in Tulsa because of Freddie Franklin."

Franklin, a native of Liverpool, England, began his career as a dancer in 1931 working with Josephine Baker in Paris. In 1938, he joined the Ballet Russe de Monte Carlo and became its premier danseur, creating roles in such ballets as "Gaité Parisienne" and "Rodeo." His on-stage partnership with ballerina Alexandra Danilova was considered one of the greatest in ballet history.

Franklin's awards include both the Capezio and Dance Magazine Awards, the Laurence Olivier Award for the Dance Theatre of Harlem's Creole Giselle and a CBE in Queen Elizabeth's 2004 Birthday Honours.