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Grand Rapids Ballet: Get to know 'Movemedia II' choreographer Susan Jaffe

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Grand Rapids Ballet's 'Movemedia' contemporary dance series is all about exploring the art of dance.



Photo Courtesy of Grand Rapids Ballet

Susan Jaffe's Career in Ballet and Choreography

Susan Jaffe's career began almost like fairy tale, where her hard work and talent launched her into one of the world's most prestigious ballet companies at a very early age.

Jaffe recalls what it was like when she was given principal roles so early in her career, "It was kind of a shock. I didn't see what they saw. But it was a great opportunity, and I thought that I was either going to make it or not."

She became a critically acclaimed dancer in her 20 years as a principal dancer at ABT. She was known for her excellent technique and her emotional performances.

She retired from ABT in 2003 and one year later co-founded the Princeton Dance & Theatre Studio in Princeton, New Jersey.

Over the years, Jaffe has choreographed contemporary pieces for Princeton University, Texas Christian University, Configurations Dance Theater and Lemon Spongecake Contemporary Ballet.

Jaffe is now Dean of Dance at UNCSA. She also continues to choreograph her own works for UNCSA.

Working with Mikhail Baryshnikov

Susan Jaffe was one of the dancers personally chosen and trained by Mikhail Baryshnikov during his years at artistic director of ABT.

Jaffe talks about Baryshnikov's impact on ABT, "Before Misha arrived, the American Ballet Theatre's corps de ballet was very talented but not very uniform."

She talks about his influence on the ABT dancers, "We did some Baryshnikov and Company tours for the first 5 or 6 years. We would have our own little private jet, and we would go from city to city."

Jaffe's Choreography Style

Jaffe's 20 years as a principal dancer for ABT, her experiences with classical and contemporary dance, and her years of choreographic work have created a unique style.

"I have a classical based technique. But I like to create my own shapes. In class, I tell people, I don't want ballet, but you still have to stand up, point your feet and stretch your legs."

Jaffe describes her creative process, "For me, the music inspires me to create. Movement starts to form in my mind. I like to work with the music rather than against it."

'Movemedia II' Choreography

Jaffe's piece for Grand Rapids Ballet's 'Movemedia II' is called "Weather One." It is set to the music, "Weather One," by Michael Gordon.

She describes her piece, "Weather One is a classical suite with a quartet, a trio, a duet and a soloist. Each part of the dance represents a different part of the weather."

'Movemedia II' Show Times and Ticket Information

"Movemedia II" opens tonight at 7:30 p.m. the Peter Martin Wege Theatre, located at 341 Ellsworth Ave. SW, Grand Rapids.

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