

Engaging play sets children's minds in motion

By JASON HARDY
Staff Reporter

A giant banana cream pie, a flying school bus and a group of shrunken elementary children are just a few of the amazing things that are appearing in Lincoln this weekend.

At 7 p.m. Friday and 2 p.m. Saturday, characters from the PBS cartoon Scholastic's Magic School Bus will be live and in color at the Lied Center for Performing Arts. Scholastic's Magic School Bus - Live! is a spinoff of the animated PBS series that began in 1994 and has grown in popularity since.

The live show focuses on Ms. Frizzle, a redheaded science teacher, who takes her students on

a wacky adventure in science and fun via, what else, a magic school bus.

In the live performance, "Arnold's Favorite Field Trip," the cast of seven finds themselves shrunken and trapped in a pantry.

Together, Ms. Frizzle, her students and Liz the Lizard, their pet, build a bridge over a banana cream pie to escape.

The show is intended for children ages four to 10 who get the chance to interact with the adult cast and solve problems.

Gillian Crane, who plays Ms. Frizzle, said a lively audience was important for the show's success.

"We use a lot of audience participation to solve the problems that we create during the show," Crane said.

She said the show had no problems in getting kids excited either. "I've never experienced such

an involved audience in a theater production," she said. Getting into the character of a

shrunken science teacher ordinarily would be difficult, but an audience full of crazed kids made all the difference, she said.

"They scream out some of the most amazing things that inspire you to get into that role and be that character for them," Crane said.

She said the facial expressions of the kids in the first few rows let her know how real the story was.

"They really believe that the banana cream supreme pie is the

size of an elephant," Crane said.

The show's incredible visual effects are backed

by nine songs by Peter Luyre, creator of the TV show's theme song. Crane says the kids usually "scream along with every song."

Doug Kinsley, the show's company manager, said the production's main focus was to teach children positive lessons while they thought they were only having fun.

Scholastic's Magic School Bus - Live! is the first in a series of specially priced, family-oriented shows at the Lied Center. The

series is intended to give children a chance to see professional theater for a reasonable price, said Norah Goebel-George, director of marketing and media relations for the Lied Center.

"The protocol for children coming here is to have a good time," she said.

Crane said by the end of the show she could always tell the kids enjoyed it.

"Sometimes when we leave the theater, we'll see the kids singing the songs," Crane said. "That really makes it for me."

Prices for the performances are \$9 for adults, \$4 for children and \$4.50 for college students. Call the Lied Center box office at 472-4747 for reservations.

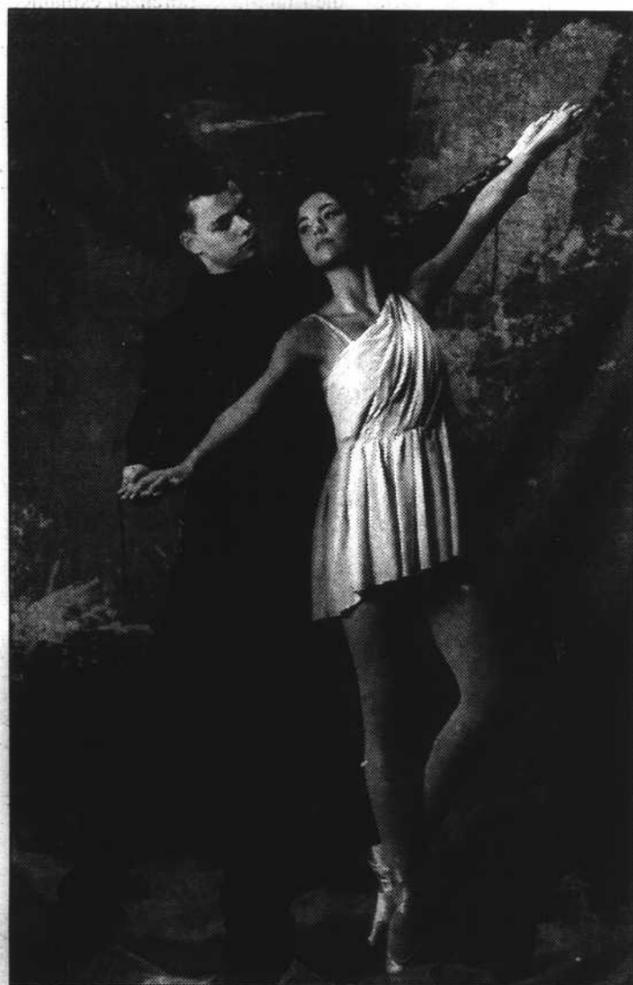


PHOTO COURTESY OF ANDREW BARAN
BALLET OMAHA, partnering with Dayton Ballet from Dayton, Ohio, opens its season tonight with "Fire & Dance."

Dancers showcase diverse talents

By LIZA HOLTMEIER
Senior Reporter

The all-American girl meets a Samurai's geisha during Ballet Omaha's opening performance this weekend.

Ballet Omaha, in partnership with the Dayton Ballet from Dayton, Ohio, presents "Fire & Dance" Friday, Saturday and Sunday at the Orpheum Theater, 409 S. 16th St., in Omaha. The program features four contemporary ballet pieces choreographed by various Dayton Ballet members and associates.

It begins with the premiere of "Dance Bytes." Choreographed by Dermot Burke, Dayton Ballet's executive and artistic director, the piece explores the fast pace of entertainment today. It features more than 20 musical selections, ranging from romantic to frenetic, said Derrick Wilder, Ballet Omaha's managing director.

"The piece seems to be controlled by a remote control," Wilder said. "The speed is always changing. It's a very athletic piece."

Burke said the piece dealt with the question of instant gratification vs. satisfaction.

"We have a world of entertainment at our fingertips," Burke said. "Do you stay involved, intrigued and participate, or do you surf and change the channel?"

The piece's movement ranges from neoclassical ballet to ballroom dancing

to rhythm and blues. Each scene lasts less than a minute and represents a different television channel.

Following "Dance Bytes" will be "Bushido," choreographed by former Dayton Ballet dancer Jon Rodriguez. Set to traditional Japanese music translated for flute and harp, this duet depicts a Samurai warrior as he remembers his love for his geisha.

Beth Common, director of resource development and marketing for the Dayton Ballet, said the piece may be the program's most classical work.

"It draws heavily on Eastern influences like tai chi and martial arts, but the romantic tone and breathtaking lifts make it seem more classical," Common said.

The third piece will be "Our Town," choreographed by Phillip Jerry with music by Aaron Copeland. The ballet is based on Thornton Wilder's play of the same name. It follows the life of Emily, who falls in love with George and realizes the everyday events in life make it so wonderful.

Common said the company's decision to perform this ballet stemmed from the group's desire to present works relevant to American audiences.

"We're very big on dance for everyone," Common said. "There is nothing elitist about this piece. It's not something that will make husbands say, 'Oh, man! Snoozy time at the ballet!'"

Along with the American story and music, the movement is based on a more American form of classical ballet

—one with grand, sweeping movement.

Dayton Ballet performs this piece as a memorial to Jerry, who died in 1996, six months after the ballet's New York premiere.

The final piece will be "Fluctuating Hemlines" choreographed by American Repertory Ballet member Septime Webre. Webre, a longtime associate of the Dayton Ballet, choreographed the version of "Romeo and Juliet" that Dayton Ballet presented in Omaha last year.

"Fluctuating Hemlines" begins with dancers clad in 1960s costumes at a high-society cocktail hour. With elaborate curtseys and "air kisses," they portray the effects of social constraints. Soon, the characters begin to reveal their inner selves, shedding the bouffant wigs, dresses and blazers for the freedom of unitards.

"The piece asks how much of what we are is fashion and social façade," Common said. "It deals with what happens when we start shedding that façade."

Set to an all-percussion score, the piece uses daring, athletic choreography. As the score increases in intensity, so does the movement's energy.

The performance runs Friday and Saturday at 8 p.m. and Sunday at 2 p.m. Adult tickets are \$29.50, \$25 and \$18. Tickets for seniors and children aged 12 and under are \$19.50, \$17.50 and \$12. Call the Ballet Omaha box office at (402) 346-7332 for reservations.