

Enjoying the Art Form

by Brent Legault

What do you know about opera? Oh sure, you've seen flowers sprout up from Elmer Fudd's scalp and you can probably belt out an off-key rendition of "Kill da wabbit, kill da wabbit!" You may even remember Mighty Mouse calling out "Here I come to save the day!" But, what do you really know about opera?

Paul Spencer Adkins, an artist-in-residence at UNLV,

wants to let you know that opera does not belong solely to the world of animated mice, nor, at the other extreme, is it the property of pointy-nosed snobs wearing tuxedos and furs, lighting their cigars with \$100 bills or holding petite, diamond-encrusted binoculars.

"Opera," Adkins said, "has always been for the common person—love, sex, money, and death. No different than your common soap opera."

Great. So why does opera have so much trouble being accepted by the "average Joe" in the United States?

One problem Adkins discussed is the lack of shared vernacular. "(If) you sing a couple arias, in a foreign language, don't expect people to say, 'Wow, that's great!' They may say, 'Whoa, that's a really nice voice.' But nothing has been communicated," Adkins said.

According to Adkins, another boundary that sepa-

rates opera from the popular world is the lack of operatic history in this country. "The European tradition is so many years old," Adkins said. "And (the United States) is only 200. In that sense, we are new; and we have to grow up."

If you were lucky enough to catch Adkins' "informance" Thursday you would know the answers to many opera-type questions, such as: "What is an 'informance'?"

Adkins said an informance is "a way to make people feel a part of the experience, not to perform at people." It also gives the performer a chance to educate

the audience, translate the lyrics, give a brief history about the creation of a particular aria and set up the scene.

Adkins has a broad musical background.

Although he spent eight years in rigid and formal musical training, his roots and his early influences are the same as many of us "common folk".

He incorporates and adapts popular and gospel songs, contemporary arias written in English, and even nursery rhymes into opera. He does an incredible operatic rendition of *Old Mother Hubbard*.

Dancers dreams delivered from different avenues

by Tricia Romano

Two ballet dancers from opposite paths will perform on stage tonight at the Artemus W. Ham Concert Hall in *Balletmet*, a professional dance troupe which mixes the beauty of classical ballet with contemporary dance. One dancer knew ballet would be in her life, the other stumbled upon his career completely by accident.

Melissa Downey has never known anything but ballet. Hers is the classic romance story of many. It is the daydream of most little girls to someday dance on the tips of their toes, gracefully expressing their souls. Downey's fairytale has come true.

Her only desire in life has been to dance. She has danced with persistence for 15 years, and at the ripe old age of 19, can consider herself a veteran. She endures the daily, rigorous schedule needed to be a professional ballerina.

She is up as early as 7:30 a.m., eats her breakfast which usually consists of fruit, and prepares for class. After an hour and a half long dance class, Downey heads to rehearsal—all six hours of it. Sometimes her schedule varies, it may last the full six hours, with five minute breaks at the top of every hour, or rehearsal may just last two hours. Either way,

the feet are feeling it at the end of the day.

Detractors may cause doubt and fear with their strict requirements of size, age or other human anomalies that may restrict a dancer from getting a certain part, however Downey's motivation keeps her from dancer burn out.

"I wanted it," said Downey. "It didn't matter what anyone told me. I was going to do it."

At the other end of the spectrum is 29-year-old Scott Brown. Becoming a dancer never have crossed Brown's mind. He took a ballet class in college to earn what he thought would be some easy physical education credits. What he got, was a change that shifted his life dramatically.

Brown had been going to school for an engineering degree but literally danced out of the place. He has now been dancing for 10 years, and he too endures a dancer's life, for better or for worse.

"Because of our work, we all eat very healthy," Brown said. "There is very little alcohol, very little indulgence."

Not that there is much time in his schedule for such a lifestyle. Brown and the other dancers value their free time greatly. They relish in the peace of a quiet night at home.

Brown and his colleagues spend a good six hours a day

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on their feet. Getting paid for it is only half the reward. To perform, to express feelings out to the audience when dancing, and doing it because it is love of the art form, these are the reasons a dancer remains in the business, he said.

The average lifetime of a dancers' career varies. Downey hopes to be dancing until she is 30 or 35, as does Brown. The difference is that Downey will have been dancing for all but four years of her life, and, as for Brown, he figures he has four more years left in ballet. That is, four good years, "I do plan on literally walking away from it."

So it goes, that most ballet careers end sometime in the early to mid 30s. Most people would be at a loss. Everything they have known for the last 10 years of their life is gone, what is there to do? Ballet dancers usually go on to other careers. Some may go on to teaching or be regraphing ballet, not entirely leaving behind the life.

At 19, Downey's career is still young, she has yet to



Melissa Downey and Scott Brown perform in 'Balletmet.'

consider what her next career will be. For the time being, Downey said she does not want to even think about the time in her life when she will be unable to perform. Brown realizes the time is closer than it seems and a career as a physical therapist seems possible. He can help people with injuries just

like the ones he had, he said.

And how, pray, do those dancing feet hold up after all the years of leaping, tip toeing and spinning?

"Well, I'm never gonna win an award for how beautiful they look," Brown said.