Legacy News

SAN FRANCISCO BALLET ENDOWMENT
ENSURING THE FUTURE OF DANCE

Tina LeBlanc in Tomasson/Possokhov's Don Quixote.

© Erik Tomasson

FALL 2010
Since its creation in 1933, San Francisco Ballet has continually received accolades as a company at the forefront of dance and has boasted one of the most diverse repertoires in the dance world. Fortunately, its rich history of nearly eight decades has been preserved by San Francisco’s Museum of Performance & Design. Founded in 1947 as the San Francisco Dance Archives by Russell Hartley, a former SF Ballet dancer and costume designer, the collection was originally intended to preserve Hartley’s own designs, which were commissioned for SF Ballet by then Artistic Director Willam Christensen. Over the years, the Museum has expanded to include works by other designers and from other art forms, even as it continues as the SF Ballet archive. Today, it houses one of the largest and most diverse performing arts collections in the world, with more than 3.5 million artifacts from the Bay Area and beyond, dating from 1849 to the present, all available for enjoyment and use by the public and researchers alike.

THE COLLECTION
Serving as the official archives for SF Ballet, San Francisco Opera, the Stern Grove Festival, and many others, the Museum of Performance & Design collects a wide array of materials provided by each institution to document performances and activities. The Museum also holds collections donated by individuals within the arts community, including the personal papers of modern dancer Anna Halprin and of Lew Christensen, SF Ballet’s director from 1952 to 1984. While the focus is primarily on the Bay Area’s diverse performing arts scene, acquisitions from international artists who have participated in Bay Area arts or have a local following enhance the world renown of the collection.

Inside the Museum, a labyrinth of specialized boxes and shelves of photographs, theater programs, audio recordings, videos, and other materials fills the rooms surrounding the main exhibition space. An exceptional acquisition from the Center to Preserve Music Culture (formerly the Bay Area Music Archives) recently added over two thousand audio recordings of live Bay Area concerts, while a donation from Bob Johnson, an individual collector, added more than 60,000 pages of sheet music—items that greatly expand the Museum’s role as a resource for the study of contemporary performing arts.

Most of the collection is easily accessible within the Museum, but some items—primarily fabric pieces such as costumes—must be preserved in a special climate-controlled storage area located off-site. Although costumes can be difficult to maintain, the Museum is committed to including them in the collection, as they are a significant aspect of the performing arts and enhance the Museum’s ability to curate exciting, multi-dimensional exhibits.

For SF Ballet, perhaps some of the most meaningful items within the collection are recordings from the Museum’s Legacy Oral History Program, now in its third decade. This unique program documents the voices of Bay Area artists in disciplines ranging from dance and theater to costume...
and set design as they share their perspectives and histories. The collection features more than seventy artists to date and includes SF Ballet’s Richard LeBlond, Tom Ruud, and Michael Smuin, with Evelyn Cisneros and Jocelyn Vollmar soon to be added.

Access to such a rich assortment of items allows the creation of in-depth, illuminating exhibits such as the Museum’s 2008 celebration of the Ballet’s 75th anniversary, Art & Artifice: 75 years of Design at San Francisco Ballet. Curators brought the Ballet’s vibrant history to life through videos, costumes, set designs, and displays of photos and print materials. Rare costumes from Michel Fokine’s 1937 production of Le Coq D’Or for Ballets Russes illustrated the artistic styles that influenced SF Ballet’s early years; Hartley’s designs and Antonio Sotomayor’s eight caricatures for the 1944 U.S. premiere of Nutcracker highlighted the birth of this holiday tradition; and videos of ballets from past decades demonstrated the evolution of the company and contemporary choreography.

The Museum has recently partnered with the Dance Heritage Coalition on a project that will bring its incredible collection to people outside of the Bay Area and improve preservation of fragile material. A grant to the Dance Heritage Coalition from the Mellon Foundation has provided the technology needed to digitize the Museum's dance video collection and create a “secure media network” so that those items can be shared by dance archives and organizations—and visitors to those institutions—across the country. Many museums will ultimately add their own collections to this network, but the Museum of Performance & Design has taken the lead in creating it.

THE MUSEUM’S ROLE IN THE COMMUNITY

Some first-time visitors may be surprised to learn the extent of the Museum’s collection, but the Museum is so renowned that it draws researchers from all over the globe. Museum staff responds to more than 2,000 inquiries a year from researchers wishing to review papers or find answers to questions.

In addition, the Museum is regularly asked to lend pieces to museums in the U.S. and abroad. Recent exhibits at the Museum of Ludwig in Germany and the Museum of Contemporary Art in Lyon, France, featured items from the Anna Halprin collection.

The Museum’s international reach and reputation helps attract notable contributions of material that would not otherwise come to San Francisco. For instance, when Museum curator Brad Rosenstein created an exhibition about various adaptations of the Madame Butterfly story, the Museum came to the attention of Eiko Ishioka, whose Tony-nominated stage and costume designs appeared in the Broadway musical M. Butterfly. Needing a home for some of her works, she decided to give the Museum her M. Butterfly designs as well as her Academy Award-winning costume designs from Francis Ford Coppola’s film Bram Stoker’s Dracula and copies of costumes that she created for the opening ceremonies of the 2008 Beijing Summer Olympics.

The Museum celebrated its sixtieth anniversary in 2008 by changing its name from the San Francisco Performing Arts Library & Museum to the Museum of Performance & Design. This signifies a shift from its role primarily as an archive to an institution dedicated to producing exhibits that share artistic histories and experiences with the public. The collection will, of course, continue to grow and fulfill a vital function in preserving all aspects of performance and design in the Bay Area. But the Museum’s trustees and managers determined it important to create an environment that will engage the community and educate visitors about the significant role of performing arts in the Bay Area and beyond.

The expansion of the Museum’s mission, the addition of the secure media network project, and the continued collection of archival materials mean that the staff must also grow to handle increased demands. David Humphrey, the Museum’s director, and Kirsten Tanaka, for many years the Museum’s only full-time archivist, are working to find a part-time archivist to catalogue items that SF Ballet turns over to the Museum. This will allow the Ballet’s official archives to
remains up to date while Dr. Humphrey and Ms. Tanaka work on overarching projects. Dr. Humphrey notes that “the Museum and the San Francisco Ballet have had a close working relationship for over 60 years” and that the Museum looks forward to adding a Ballet-specific archivist and to working with the Ballet “to preserve the past and document the future of one of America’s truly outstanding dance companies.”

Since its inception, the Museum of Performance & Design has celebrated the vibrant culture of San Francisco and the Bay Area as well as successfully captured the diverse array of arts available in the community. Thanks to the Museum and its dedicated staff, the valuable heritage of San Francisco Ballet has been, and continues to be, documented and preserved.

Visitors to the Museum of Performance & Design may view exhibits and, by scheduling ahead, peruse archived materials, including media such as the Legacy Oral History Program recordings, photos, and season programs from the Ballet. The Museum is located on the fourth floor of the War Memorial Veterans Building at 401 Van Ness Avenue, next to the War Memorial Opera House. Information about hours and upcoming exhibits can be found at www.mpdssf.org.

The Museum of Performance & Design and San Francisco Ballet maintain their standards of excellence thanks to generous donors and patrons. If you own material that may be of interest to the Museum, please contact Kirsten Tanaka at 415.255.4800 or email kirstent@mpdsf.org.

San Francisco Ballet has broadened its outstanding international reputation by performing in venues throughout the world. From its early tours to Southeast Asia and Egypt to its August 2010 tour to Copenhagen, the Ballet has shared its virtuosity, honed its skills, and created new fans. The Ballet is honored to thank the thoughtful patrons who have created endowed funds that provide ongoing support for Company tours. Their generosity helps the Ballet continue this important and enriching tradition.

**FUNDS OF $1 MILLION AND ABOVE**
The Hellman Family Touring Fund  
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**Sharing SF Ballet Abroad**

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Capturing SF Ballet

The Museum of Performance & Design highlighted SF Ballet’s recent years during its early 2010 exhibit “Captured: Erik Tomasson Photographs San Francisco Ballet,” featuring striking works by the Ballet’s official photographer. As the son of two dancers, Helgi and Marlene Tomasson, he has an eye for the art form and a knack for showing its beauty both on the stage and in the studio. The exhibit drew enthusiastic audiences, and many visitors were eager for the opportunity to examine Tomasson’s work and purchase their own limited edition prints of his large-scale photographs, such as Yuan Yuan Tan in Helgi Tomasson’s Chi-Lin (right). More of his SF Ballet photographs can be seen at eriktomasson.com.

The Museum’s “Captured” exhibit also served as the setting for select Ballet events, including a party honoring Patrons of the 2010 San Francisco Ballet Gala in celebration of Helgi Tomasson’s Silver Anniversary as the Ballet’s artistic director and principal choreographer. A similar party will be held this January for all who purchase Patron or Benefactor tickets to the 2011 Opening Night Gala celebration, La Belle Époque. The event includes an elegant dinner in City Hall, a stellar performance in the War Memorial Opera House, and a fun-filled post-performance party. For information on attending the Gala and all of the celebratory events surrounding this special occasion, please visit sfballet.org/gala or contact Marissa Phillips, special events associate, at 415.865.6620 or miphillips@sfballet.org.
Susan Levine’s first memory of ballet is not as elegant as she had hoped it would be. As a young girl in Grand Forks, North Dakota, Susan was dropped off at ballet class by her mother only to realize that her mother had not, in fact, purchased her the required pink ballet slippers. Instead, she had brought Susan her red corduroy slippers with pom-poms, figuring she would not take to the activity. Needless to say, Susan did not stay in that class very long.

Today, however, Susan finds it ironic that one of her most “active cultural activities” is attending and supporting San Francisco Ballet. As newcomers to San Francisco in March of 2005, Susan and her husband, Jim Lauer, immediately got involved with the Ballet. Coming from Washington D.C., Susan and Jim had been heavily involved in politics. Jim is a political pollster and Susan has served in the U.S. government multiple times, first as Deputy Assistant Secretary for International Development at the U.S. Treasury Department, then as senior vice president at the Overseas Private Investment Corporation, and she was appointed by President Clinton to be a Commissioner for the White House Fellows Program. In addition, both Susan and Jim were great supporters of the performing arts. As avid attendees of productions hosted by The Kennedy Center, they were looking to get involved in the arts in San Francisco as well.

“Jim and I have always been involved in a number of different artistic performance endeavors,” notes Susan. Having been on the board of The Studio Theater in D.C., Susan was enthusiastic about going to the Ballet and sharing their mutual love of dance. They especially appreciated how easy it was to become involved with a community of people who held the same interests: “By going to the Ballet, you start to naturally develop friendships that revolve around the Ballet and those often go beyond.”

Regarding the repertoire, Susan says she is “indiscriminate in taste.” What really distinguishes the Company, however, is the versatility of their programs. “There’s always something. If it’s a new ballet, choreographed by Mark Morris or Christopher Wheeldon, that’s fun and fresh and new. But if it’s Helgi choreographing, or bringing back a Balanchine, I think you have a love for what’s been around for a long time. What I love about this Ballet is that you have both—very modern, and very traditional. Helgi does a wonderful job of identifying great dancers from around the world who have very individual personalities.”

One thing that strikes Susan as unique to San Francisco Ballet is its incorporation of the corps de ballet into the program. Unlike other companies, the non-principals play an integral role in each production. It was this kind of distinction that encouraged Susan and Jim to become members of the Chairman’s Council, as well as to support the Ballet’s endowment by creating the Susan B. Levine and James W. Lauer Fund. Ultimately, Susan’s reason for donating is simple: “You don’t have to be a huge donor to make an impact,” she said. “I appreciate how important development is. I do it because I understand the importance of unrestricted funds for non-profits. I can contribute in a way that I am able to and feel that is it a meaningful part of my cultural and philanthropic life.”

Special thanks to SF Ballet intern Hillary Clark for the donor profile and for assistance with the main article.
This summer I had the chance to meet a woman who studied at the SF Ballet School in the 1960s. She had moved from the Bay Area many years ago, but was in town and wanted to see the place where she spent so many hours and made so many memories. That wasn’t entirely possible; the Ballet and its School built and moved into the current headquarters in 1982, and the Eighteenth Avenue building where they once resided no longer exists. When she stopped by the “new” ballet building, recently renamed the Chris Hellman Center for Dance, I was delighted to show her where today’s students train and Company members rehearse. The facility offers amenities that today seem necessary for any dance company but that would have been a luxury when she was a student: studios with high ceilings, student locker rooms, access to fitness equipment and physical therapy.

The Chris Hellman Center for Dance is a reflection of the Ballet—both have evolved over the decades to become the best in the business. Fundamentally, the Ballet remains unchanged: students still spend their hours in class; the dancers still entertain audiences at home and on tour; and the Ballet is still known as a company at the forefront of dance, always introducing new works to the world. But through hard work, artistic vision, and the support of loyal patrons, the Ballet has come to thrive with unprecedented financial and artistic success. Its continued evolution, as well as the preservation of its rich heritage, will endure through the generous support of donors committed to the future of the art form. San Francisco Ballet is deeply grateful to both its current donors and to those forward-thinking individuals who include gifts to the Ballet in their wills and other estate plans. You are truly the stars of the Ballet!

BUILDING A LEGACY

There is great speculation about when the federal government will clarify estate tax rules so that people will know what taxes might be owed on their assets at death. Some have postponed the creation or amendment of their estate plans due to the current uncertainty. No matter how or when this matter is resolved, it is important that you have legal documents in place to designate how your assets should be distributed after you die—regardless of whether your assets will be subject to estate taxes. Without these documents, the probate court will use a prescribed formula to decide who among your relatives will receive your assets. The court will not give assets to a dear friend or a favorite charity. Only you can do that.

Making decisions about the future of your assets also provides an opportunity to consider your personal legacy. San Francisco Ballet patrons from earlier decades established legacies that helped transform the Ballet from the fledgling company seen in the archives at the Museum of Performance & Design to an institution that is today world renowned and critically acclaimed. You, too, can have an enduring impact on the Ballet. When you prepare documents designating how your assets should ultimately be distributed, include a gift to San Francisco Ballet. If you already have your documents in place, a simple amendment will allow you to add the Ballet. No matter the size of your gift, there are many options available, allowing you to create a legacy gift that both matches your financial plans and provides meaningful support to San Francisco Ballet. Please call Allison Groves, planned giving manager, at 415.865.6617 or visit sfballet.org/legacy for more information.

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San Francisco Ballet in Fokine's Petrouchka (© Erik Tomasson)

WHAT'S INSIDE
Preserving the SF Ballet Legacy