

Guests Add Warmth To Sunny 'Coppelia' (dance review) Dance Magazine, August 2001

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GUESTS ADD WARMTH TO SUNNY 'COPPELIA'

INLAND PACIFIC BALLET BRIDGES AUDITORIUM, THE CLAREMONT COLLEGES CLAREMONT, CALIFORNIA MAY 5-13, 2001

Victoria Koenig and Kevin Myers, artistic director and associate director, respectively, of Inland Pacific Ballet, have devised a specific and purposeful game plan for growing their small classical company, based about forty miles east of downtown Los Angeles. It calls, in part, for the addition of a different full-length ballet to the repertoire every other spring. Right on schedule, Inland Pacific unveiled its new Coppelia in May, two years after the company premiere of Giselle.

The most important reason for adding Coppelia now was to take advantage of the talents of Stanley Holden, a respected Los Angeles teacher and former principal character dancer with The Royal Ballet. He directed the ballet for Inland Pacific and also appeared as Dr. Coppelius during the two weekend performances. Holden got his greatest accolades for his portrayal of the Widow Simone, which he originated in Sir Frederick Ashton's *La Fille mal gardee*.

Holden turned to the Royal's version of Coppelia for Inland Pacific, relying on a BBC television special from 1964 for raw steps. Holden tweaked and refined each scene, revising whole sections, such as the mazurka and czardas, which had been altered for television. Add in guest artists Jordi Riber (recently signed to Alberta Ballet) and San Francisco Ballet's Tina LeBlanc--who was making her debut in the role of Swanilda--and Koenig and Myers felt nervous but confident that they had a winner. (Ribera partnered former Houston Ballet soloist Patricia Tomlinson as Swanilda during the May 12-13 performances at Los Angeles's Luckman Fine Arts Complex.)

Their hopes were well founded. This was a sunny, polished, and stylish Coppelia, marvelously assured for a company of only six professionals, six apprentices, and assorted students from the large school. Daniel C. Nyiri designed Technicolor, pop-up-storybook-style sets. A faint resemblance between Coppelia's house and a trailer was a minor distraction. The traditional costumes, credited to Koenig and Jean Nolden, were tastefully opulent, belying the ballet's small budget.

Holden, 73, was a hoot every time he was onstage. The ballet's humor is broad, full of sight gags and slapstick. His Dr. Coppelius was a quirky but harmless eccentric with an excitable manner. Holden played him stooped, his mouth slightly ajar, but with vigor. He stood out in every scene but never overpowered the other dancers. Holden is a generous performer.

The highlight was the second act, and Holden's impeccably timed exchanges with LeBlanc. Her strengths, in turn, shone through in this Coppelia, with its lightning petit allegro segments and pointe solos. She reveled in Swanilda's girlish antics and extensive miming.

LeBlanc and Ribera suited one another. His Franz was an incorrigible flirt, but not completely empty-headed or cold-hearted. He has a lovely line and clean style, with arching leaps. Every gesture carried sincere meaning.

Inland Pacific's own dancers rose to the ballet's challenges. The Dance of the Hours showed an effort at nailing down details and just needs more polishing and refinement. Likewise, Samantha Mason needed to smooth out the phrasing in the Prayer solo. Kelly Lamoureux gave a luxuriously sophisticated and lyric portrayal as Dawn.

The folk dances were a bit bouncy, rather than earthbound, but done with exuberant energy. The entire production was marked with a vibrant enthusiasm, a perfect reflection of Leo Delibes's score.

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