

Published October 17, 2013, 12:00 AM

Familiarity breeds collaboration between composer, Minnesota Ballet

The composer behind a piece of music featured in the Minnesota Ballet's fall production brings a dancer's ear to his score — and a familiarity with the company for which he's writing.

By: [Christa Lawler](#), Duluth News Tribune

The composer behind a piece of music featured in the Minnesota Ballet's fall production brings a dancer's ear to his score — and a familiarity with the company for which he's writing.

Superior-raised Ryan Homsey danced professionally with the company for four years before returning to his first love: making music.

His background in dance gives him insider info on how music and movement come together.

"I think about what I'd like to dance to," Homsey said. "If I'm working on a piece of music, if I'm not compelled to jump out of my seat and start dancing, I don't keep it."

Homsey's score, "Recurrent Stages," is the finale in the ballet's season-opening production "A Fresh Mix," an eclectic program that starts at 7 p.m. Friday and Saturday at Symphony Hall.

The show includes a nod to the 1920s, choreographed by Broadway's Ginger Thatcher, the Kirov Ballet's version of "Le Corsaire," the duet from "Flames of Paris" and "Barber-isms," set to music by Samuel Barber, featuring a medley of dance styles.

Homsey's original composition is presented in three movements with amplified strings and computerized reverb. The accompanied dance, choreographed by the ballet's artistic director, Robert Gardner, is a contemporary piece that looks abstractly at life and the creative process.

From music to dance and back again

First Homsey was a musician. He played piano and was part of a touring accordion group as a kid. He joined the School of the Minnesota Ballet as a teen, later apprenticing and dancing professionally with the company.

"He was musical, tall, a good partner and had great stage presence," Gardner said of Homsey.

As a dancer, Homsey had opportunities to double back to his musical roots. He composed a piece for one of his own performances and another for a pas de deux choreographed by company-mate Nikolaus Wourms.

His plan, however, was to keep dancing — a career in musical theater, maybe land on Broadway.

Homsey was working aboard a Norwegian cruise line, singing and dancing, when he reconsidered his future. He spent late nights tinkering with a piano and thinking about going to college to study music.

"It became clear to me that I couldn't pursue music seriously if it was always on the back burner," he said. "A dancer's life is shorter than a composer's life. I made the transition. I knew that I had to take all the dedication and passion that I'd applied to dance and refocus on music."

Homsey did his undergraduate work at State University of New York in Purchase and got a master's degree in music from New York University Steinhardt.

Now he is back at SUNY Purchase, where he's a lecturer in the studio composition department.

"It's my way of going to New York," he said, "but not as a dancer, as a musician."

Homsey has written all styles of music in his career, including choral, experimental, concert and pieces for theatrical productions.

And now: a piece for his former dance company's fall production.

"I think that I've always wanted to utilize this knowledge base I have in dance," he said. "I felt like my music has a dancer-ly quality to it. It has been such a heartwarming experience to reconnect with the Minnesota Ballet and work with (Gardner) in this new capacity."

The collaboration

Gardner and Homsey ended up working together when the latter received a grant underwritten by the American Composers Forum's Live Music for Dance Minnesota program and NewMusicUSA.

Homsey and Gardner considered where they wanted to go thematically with the collaboration. Then, as he was writing, Homsey sent the music to Gardner, piece by piece.

For Gardner, it's a chance to return to his roots with a piece of contemporary choreography.

Last fall, he choreographed "Jazz Suite," a playful retro-fashioned piece that brought to mind Bond girls, superheroes, shag carpeting and "Soul Train." He said it put him in the mood to make more-contemporary, less-plot-oriented work.

Gardner’s choreography for “Recurrent Stages” centers on the human journey, he said.

“I was really into how an artist gets inspired,” he said. “Where does that come from?”

It features eight dancers for the three-part piece. The first movement shows the repetition of day-to-day living, the second introduces chaos and the final piece shows softer movements highlighting the fulfillment of a goal and ultimate happiness.

Homsey, on laptop, and the Duluth Superior Symphony Orchestra’s Music to You String Quartet will be live in the orchestra pit during the performances.

“It’s based on a minimalist style,” Nicole Craycraft, a violin player, said of the score. “It’s taking patterns that are used repeatedly, instead of listening to luscious lyrical melody, like you might be more used to. It’s more rhythmic. You try to create effect more than a lyrical line. That’s not to say there isn’t some really nice melodies throughout the piece.”

While the string musicians play, Homsey mans a laptop and plays prerecorded bits over the live music.

Craycraft said it’s a tricky piece filled with meter changes. She’s welcoming the chance to perform new music, which she said doesn’t happen often enough.

“It’s always neat to do something new, to be a premiere and be the first one to explore (a piece),” she said. “These new projects are exciting.

“I think he’s a talented young composer and it’s an awesome opportunity for Duluth to have something like this going on.”

Earlier this week, Homsey hadn’t yet seen and heard the final product together.

“I feel like it’s going to be watching something come into existence that is both familiar and strange,” he said. “I’ve always admired (Gardner’s) work and can’t wait to see what he’s done.”

Go see it

What: Minnesota Ballet’s “A Fresh mix”

When: 7 p.m. Friday and Saturday

Where: Symphony Hall, Duluth Entertainment Convention Center

Tickets: Start at \$17; available at the Minnesota Ballet, Ticketmaster outlets including ticketmaster.com and the DECC box office.

Tags: [wave](#), [entertainment](#), [duluth](#), [arts](#), [music](#)

Recommended From Around the Web

- | | |
|--|---|
| Smokin' Jennifer Aniston Struts on the Beach (Hollyscoop) | Hottest Athletes in Bikinis Will Shock You (Rant Lifestyle) |
| Why Do People Oppose Obamacare? The Answer May Surprise You (AARP.org) | The One Smell Women Can't Resist (Nick Mom) |
| Oregon Ducks' New Training Facility Will Blow Your Mind (STACK) | Five High-Paying, Low-Stress Jobs (Monster) |
| 6 Worthless Exercises You Probably Do (ThePostGame) | 10 Bad Habits That Age You (Shape Magazine) |
| 6 Great National Parks You've Never Visited (MiniTime) | 14 Celebrities Who Married Their Fans (Styleblazer) |

Recommended by