

Brilliant and Moving...Giselle meets the challenge!

BY JOY STUDER

Nigel Burgoine and The Ballet Theatre of Toledo have done it again with its latest production of *Giselle*, often considered the "Hamlet" of the ballet world. The setting is a picturesque Rhineland village during the fall grape harvest, and Albrecht and Giselle are in love. It is the telling of a romantic tragedy of a country girl named Giselle and a slightly tarnished yet gallant hero, Loys. Giselle calls for dramatic intensity coupled with pathos, not an easy combination, but the high standard of professionalism that this company has enjoyed since its inception was conveyed right from the principals through to the corp de ballet.

Their performances April 5 and 6 at the Maumee Performing Arts Center further enhanced its reputation as the leading exponent of classical ballet in northwest Ohio and follows equally successful seasons with *Nutcracker* and its world premiere of *Aladdin*.

In the title role of Giselle, Tricia Sundbeck, from the Cincinnati Ballet, and well-known to Toledo audiences, not only fulfilled the technicalities of one of ballet's most difficult roles superbly, but showed depth in her understanding of the dramatic character acting required, and so essential as Giselle sinks into the depths of insanity in the finale to Act One. Jay Goodlett, also from the Cincinnati Ballet, and equally well-known to Toledo ballet lovers, excelled as Albrecht, whom Giselle loves, not knowing he is in reality a nobleman already engaged! His inter-action with Giselle in the first act in their *Pas de Deux* and later with the Wilis, a chorus of ghosts of



Ballet Theatre of Toledo cast members included Emily Hostetler, Isaac Jones and Emily Micsko.

betrayed girls who were betrayed and die before their wedding day, was superb. The lifts were excellent and effortless, uplifting the breath of the audience as well. Jay has that certain on-stage "presence" that comes only to few performers and this is more than matched by his technical ability.

The depth of BTT's talent must be also judged by the performances of the other principals coming from within its own ranks. Chief among these must be Jenny Yonkof, as Myrtha, Queen of the Wilis, who gave such a mature performance that it was difficult to believe she was still a student. Her poise, together with the obvious study she had given to the role would have been the envy of

many more-experienced dancers. The roles of Moyna and Zulma, danced by Emma Wolf and Kelsey Carpenter blended clean classical line with sharp technical detail.

Another delight was the *Pas de Deux* between Mallory Pettee and Tony Dandino. They made every move appear so natural in their peasant dance, and the effervescence of Miss Pettee was particularly contagious to the audience and her fellow performers alike. Dandino appears to be a future star in the making as well.

Minor principal roles were equally fulfilling in their interpretation, including those of Giselle's other admirer, Hilarion, danced by guest artist John Thomas Bell and her

Mother (Lynn Ritter) and the Duke of Courland (guest artist Richard Helldobler) and Bathilde, Albrecht's fiancé, played by the company's Associate Artistic Director, Anne Marie Getz.

Particular mention must be made of the ghost-like Wilis and Giselle in her spirit form. They are the basis for the Second Act. Their discipline and togetherness in their scenes with the principals, was in itself a tribute to Artistic Director and choreographer Nigel Burgoine. The synchronicity of the Wilis across the stage provided a kaleidoscope like view of legs in arabesque.

In a number of scenes there were more than 60 dancers on stage and all knew exactly where they should be and the spontaneous bursts of applause from an appreciate audience certainly verified this. The classical white, flowing tulle costumes were a stunning contrast to the deliberate gray of the scenery, and further enhanced by the superb lighting.

A critic would be remiss not to mention the superb costuming. The color coordination was stunning and captured the gaiety of the First Act and with the Wilis in particular, the somber tones of Act Two. The scenery was vivid, set amongst the lush green of a Bavarian country forest with high rolling hills leading to a castle set on the highest peak in the background. A brightly lit sky of a full-moon curtained by soft clouds, adds to the dramatic, eerie tone of the forest night scene.

Overall *Giselle* is a challenge for any company, not only in its story line and technical difficulties but in its dramatic intensity, and Ballet Theatre of Toledo more than met this challenge.

Photo by Doug Sampson