

a leap forward

Jacobs School of Music presents fall ballet

The purple curtains of IU's Musical Arts Center opened again Oct. 1, 2021. Dancers leapt, spun and did piques across the stage to violins and piano. For the first time in a year, applause rose from the seats of the MAC. IU Jacobs School of Music's fall ballet, "A Leap Forward," premiered Oct. 1, 2021. The ballet brought together four pieces of choreography in styles ranging from neoclassical to modern pas de deux.

"We always try and parallel the work that we do to the work in the professional world of dance," Jacobs's ballet department chair Sarah Wroth said.

The first piece, titled "In Creases," originally premiered in 2012 at the New York City Ballet and was choreographed by Justin Peck. Dressed in all white, dancers moved in and out of clean lines, with each's arms creating a different formation simultaneously. The piece was dynamic and energetic as the dancers responded to each others' motions like they were connected.

Wroth also ballet-mastered for "In Creases," meaning she rehearsed the piece. An IU Ballet alumna, she said she was inspired by how stager Michael Breeden, who taught dancers Peck's choreography, kept a positive atmosphere in the studio.

"Inside the studio with 'In Creases' I got the opportunity to see so many dancers who needed encouragement pushed in such a beautiful way, and they just triumphed," Wroth said. "Everyone that worked on that ballet grew."

She said the dancers grew more aware of their movement quality, turning "In Creases" from edgy contemporary to the neoclassical piece it was intended to be.

The second piece, "Chaconne," was originally choreographed by Sasha Janes, an associate professor at Jacobs, for the Charlotte Ballet in North Carolina. Opening with a spotlight hitting the violinist on the side of the stage, the piece paired dramatic motion and near-violent physicality, with dancers grabbing their arms to stop their movement and hands slapping together. Dancers seeming to appear out of a split curtain background brought the eerie nature of the piece to a peak.

IU senior Jack Grohmann performed in "Chaconne" and "In Creases." In "Chaconne" rehearsal, he said everyone learned portions of the piece, even after Janes had cast it.

Grohmann's part in "Chaconne" included a solo that transitioned into a duet. While everyone had approximately the same amount of time onstage in the piece, he said his time was challenging because of the duration.

"The solo in 'Chaconne' that was one of the hardest things stamina-wise I've ever done, and it went straight into a duet," Grohmann said laughing. "After that, I was kinda dead backstage."

The third piece was a pas de deux, which is a duet featuring a

male and female dancer, titled "Für Alina." Two dancers leaned on each other, mirrored each other's movements and pushed each other down.

The two's acting and reacting brought meaning to the space between notes to create what the program refers to as "a passionate conversation about loss and longing."

"Für Alina" ballet master

Carla Körbes said the piece is about the relationship between life and death, with one dancer acting as a ghost and the other as someone who can't let go.

"I kept telling them when you lose something, such as a pet or a person you love, you still remember their structure, the way they smell," Körbes said. "The ballet's about that, about retracing something you can't physically retrace anymore."

She said the rehearsals challenged the dancers because the music was so slow. They had to develop their emotional, artistic self and couldn't hide in the choreography, she said. The partnering and technical aspects were challenging as well.

The final piece of the night was a set of classical variations, "Donizetti Variations," originally choreographed by George Balanchine in 1960. The piece was a celebration of the 100-year anniversary of Italy's unification. Dancers dressed in peasant-style costumes made the set of variations a lighthearted tribute.

The performers came together in different groupings, from traditional duets to uneven combinations of men and women, to create an undeniably energetic and exciting classical piece.

By Nadia Scharf



Two dancers perform during a dress rehearsal of "A Leap Forward" on Sept. 29, 2021, in the Musical Arts Center. The ballet was performed in four parts.
Photo by Izzy Myszak