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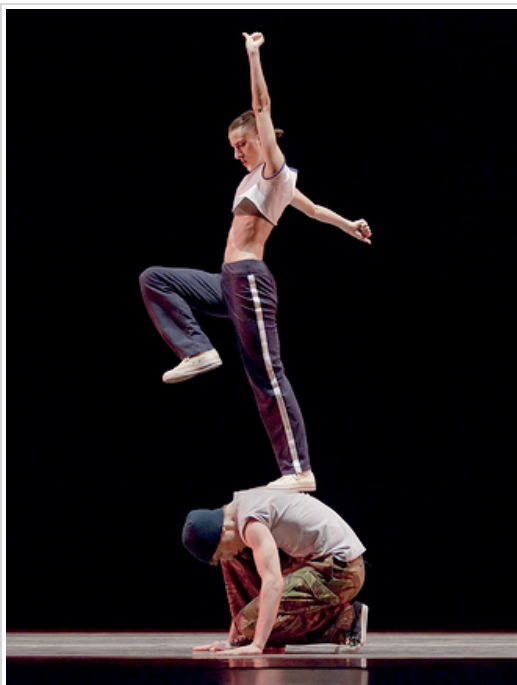
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LIVE REVIEW: Oregon Ballet Theatre Emerald Retrospective

11:32 AM October 11th, 2009 by Heather Wisner

Culture / Dance | [Email This Post](#) |



Oregon Ballet Theatre principal dancer Anne Mueller and company artist Lucas Threefoot in Trey McIntyre's *Speak*, featured in OBT's 20th Anniversary *Emerald Retrospective* program, October 10-17 at Portland's Keller Auditorium. Photo by Blaine Truitt Covert.

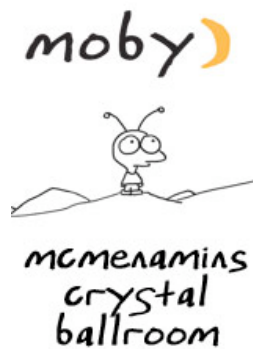
Twenty years after its birth – and four months after its [near-death experience](#) and [recent internal shake up](#)—Oregon Ballet Theatre has kicked off its '09-10 season with the Emerald Retrospective program. The Keller Auditorium was mostly full on opening night, as it was in June, when OBT brought in the local and national dance cavalry for its United We Dance benefit, which attracted enough attention and cash to stave off financial collapse.

This retrospective serves as a kind of family album, beginning with a film montage tracing OBT's history through photos, press clippings and performance snippets. The program's first half is devoted to *Emeralds*, one third of George Balanchine's 1967 plotless ballet *Jewels*. *Emeralds* is a dance party set in a ballroom whose castle has gone missing — it has none of the shape-shifting sorcery of story ballets, just lyrical movement patterns and a stately mood set by costume designer Karinska's lush green tutus and sparkling gems. OBT handles this mostly genteel affair well, particularly Yuka lino, who stretches out certain counts just long enough to keep things interesting.

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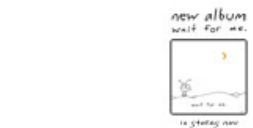
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The dancers of Oregon Ballet Theatre performing George Balanchine's *Emeralds*, featured in OBT's 20th-Anniversary *Emerald Retrospective* program, October 10-17 at Portland's Keller Auditorium. Photo by Blaine Tuiti Covert.

Emeralds is an obvious tie-in for an 'emerald' anniversary, but it's also a signifier of the company's stylistic shift since artistic director Christopher Stowell took over from OBT founding fathers James Canfield and Dennis Spaight. **Stowell has steered clear of Canfield's flash in favor of classic and neoclassic work, making some intriguing choices along the way.**

Second-half highlights include *A Certain Depth of Heart*, *Also Love*, an emotionally charged duet by modern choreographer Bebe Miller, framed by blood-red fabric and a light dusting of snow or feathers. With *Speak*, to the Bloodhound Gang's "Shut Up," choreographer Trey McIntyre and performers Anne Mueller and Lucas Threefoot nicely sidestep the pitfalls of pairing ballet with hip-hop in a duet that's energized and fresh, not stiff or cutesy. An excerpt from Julia Adam's *Il Nodo*, with its Pierrot-like costumes, black backdrop and yellow and black balloons, feels timeless. And James Kudelka's *Almost Mozart* shows off the taut musculature of contemporary ballet.

The program shows where OBT has been, with works by the late Spaight, and where it may go, with a well-drilled ensemble piece by OBT students, plus an excerpt from Stowell's visually pleasing *A Midsummer Night's Dream*. There have been **big changes in OBT's administration lately**, which may alter the company's financial direction (at the moment, two pianists for one piece are the only live music). But Stowell's ability to choose and create solid work bodes well for the future.

OBT's 20th Anniversary Retrospective show takes place at the [Keller Auditorium](#), 222 SW Clay St., 248-4335. 2 pm Sunday Oct. 11. 7:30 pm Friday, Oct. 16. 2 pm and 7:30 pm Saturday, Oct. 17. Call 222-5538 or visit [obt.org](#) for tickets.

Photos courtesy of OBT. [WW](#)

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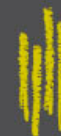


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