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# ARTS & ENTERTAINMENT

## Margaret Wingrove dance group: still dazzling after all these years —and still forsaking their toe shoes

By JAN SHAW

My Lord. If they can do this in a gray, industrial practice room, what can they do on a stage? The thought is elicited by the Margaret Wingrove Dance Co. which, at the moment, is rehearsing in T-shirts and sweats in a nondescript rehearsal room stuck in a side alley of Mountain View.

The group has just rehearsed two dances. One is an almost classical "Romeo and Juliet," but without toe shoes; the other is a piece that speaks to the spirituality in all of us, "Rivers of Living Water." Also without toe shoes.

And there in the vast, stark room, with no costumes and no spotlights, is this incredibly moving dance.

"Good," says Margaret Wingrove, artistic director and founder, smiling at the reaction. "That's what it's supposed to do."

Ms. Wingrove calls her choreography "contemporary." Reviewers say it melds classical ballet and modern dance. To the average layperson, it is beautiful, powerful dance done barefoot.

In the 11 years since Margaret Wingrove founded her company, critics have continually poured on the praise:

"Emotional, mesmerizing"—Los Angeles Times.

"Popular, exciting"—Metro.

"Strong, compelling ... with striking dancers and real choreographic talent"—San Jose Mercury News.

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Watching dancers Annette Williams and Co-director Mark Howarton perform "Romeo and Juliet," Ms. Wingrove says she "composed the work to do something beautiful in modern dance, as beautiful barefoot as the classic 'Romeo and Juliet' ballets."

Ms. Wingrove began dancing ballet in Chicago, where she grew up. When she was 12, her mother died and her dancing lessons ended until she moved to Washington to live

with an aunt.

One of her fellow ballet students in Washington was Robert Joffrey. Later, she danced for a company Mr. Joffrey formed in Seattle, before he moved to New York and created the Joffrey Ballet.

Then came a hiatus. Ms. Wingrove married. Moved to California. Had three children—sons John and Rob and daughter Lynn. But then she enrolled in San Jose State University, and there returned to dance, eventually graduating with a major in the subject.

After graduation, she formed the Margaret Wingrove Dance Co.

At the time, eight or nine small dance companies were performing in the area. Of these, only Ms. Wingrove's company is still on its feet.

"The group has always been stable because we've never had a deficit, which is practically unheard of for an arts organization," Ms. Wingrove said. "We can do that because we are building slowly, building a foundation. We don't 'over-budget.' We don't spend money we don't have—just like in real life."

The object of her creativity, she said, is a "celebration of the human of the human spirit."

One of Ms. Wingrove's most fulfilling creations, she told one reviewer, was "Shatterings," a dance about her son John, who died three years ago of AIDS at age 24. The work has received remarkable reviews.

Los Angeles Times critic Eileen Sondak called it "emotionally draining," going on to say: "Her five-part dance drama was a moving tribute to friends and family of AIDS sufferers, not just the people afflicted with the vicious killer. And Wingrove got her message across without any heavy-handed imagery or sappy sentimentality."

Ms. Wingrove's 11 years with her non-profit company have not been easy. There has been the constant search for a place to perform, a place to rehearse, a place to do paperwork, to say nothing of the search for a steady audience and money.

All of these are the classic trappings of a struggling arts group. But where other companies have died, this one is still alive.

Two years ago, the city of San Jose even found a permanent home for the group at the 200-seat Stage Theater. Now the company actually knows where it is going to perform for a whole season.

This month, it performed March 4-7; its May dates are May 27-30. The performances are held at 8 p.m. Thursday through Saturday and 2:30 and 7:30 p.m. Sunday.



Margaret Wingrove Dance Co. has abundance of talent and, fortunately, no deficits.

A permanent home also means season ticket holders, now up to about 200.

The company's popularity, however, also has prompted it to tour more, and, if it can raise the money, this summer it hopes to travel to Lyon, France, where it has been invited to perform.

Obtaining funds for the group's \$150,000-a-year budget is never easy, Ms. Wingrove said, but it gets done through fund-raisers and grants; box office receipts; and the efforts of its boards of directors and trustees.

"The group is wonderful," said Komag Inc.'s Pat Cross, currently president of the dance company's board of directors. "They are enormously talented as individuals. They are open to new things, they have wonderful teamwork and there are no prima donnas."

One of the new things to which the group has been open is performing with San Jose Taiko, a local Japanese drumming group. Moreover, since it was founded it has performed more than 60 new pieces, most choreographed by Ms. Wingrove or one of her dancers.

"Margaret (Wingrove) herself is an enormous talent," Mr. Cross said. "She gives the dancers a chance to be creative and do some of the choreography, giving them an opportunity to grow in their field."

To be sure, Ms. Wingrove holds her own group in high esteem. "This is a wonderful dance company that could just as well be in New York or San Francisco," she said.

Jan Shaw is a free-lance writer based in Los Altos.