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San Francisco Ballet celebrates 'The Joy of Dance'

— Maria Kochetkova and Angelo Greco in Tomasson's 'Haffner Symphony' © Erik Tomasson

San Francisco Ballet opened its 2017 season in celebratory style this week, with a program entitled ***The Joy of Dance***. A triple bill, it features three diverse works – by Artistic Director and Principal Choreographer Helgi Tomasson, by Czech choreographer Jiří Bubeníček and by New York City Ballet's Justin Peck.

The program opener is Tomasson's ***Haffner Symphony***, written to mark the Mozart Centennial in 1991. With an outdoor setting, against the backdrop of a colonnade of trees, it's a sparkling, lively ballet in the classical style. Appropriately, Helgi Tomasson selected Mozart's Symphony No 35 for the score – a work which was commissioned in 1782 by a prominent Salzburg family, the Haffners, to celebrate a joyful occasion – the elevation to the nobility of Sigmund Haffner the Younger, a friend and contemporary of Mozart.

— Dores André, Wei Wang and Joseph Walsh in Bubeníček's 'Fragile Vessels' © Erik Tomasson

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With ***Fragile Vessels***, San Francisco Ballet celebrates not only a world premiere, but the first ballet created for the Company by Jiří Bubeníček. The choreographer is one half of a unique partnership with his twin brother Otto, which has certainly made its mark on the world of ballet and design. Both brothers initially joined Hamburg Ballet – where their careers evolved under the guidance of Director and Chief Choreographer John Neumeier – and both became acclaimed international guest soloists. They have since followed parallel artistic paths – Jiří as a choreographer and Otto as a designer, composer and artistic advisor – and their company, Les Ballets Bubeníček, has toured internationally with guest artists from companies such as the Mariinsky, the Paris Opera, the Hamburg and Berlin State ballets.

Fragile Vessels is set to Rachmaninoff's Second Piano Concerto – a universally adored work, rich with choreographic

potential – creatively exploited by Bubeníček, who brings a new vocabulary of possibilities to the *pas de deux*. Neo-classical in style, the ballet follows the three movements of the concerto, each taking a different theme – love, separation and forgiveness – and played out against a spectacular set design, by Otto Bubeníček, reminiscent of the sails of an elegant barque.

— San Francisco Ballet in Peck's 'In The Countenance Of Kings' © Erik Tomasson

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This celebration of dance closes with ***In the Countenance of Kings***, a work by Justin Peck – principal dancer and resident choreographer of New York City Ballet. Commissioned by San Francisco Ballet, ***In the Countenance of Kings*** had its world premiere during the Company's 2016 season, and turned out to be a runaway success. Obviously written with the strength and style of San Francisco Ballet in mind, this work proved to be a smart, stylish and fun combination of classic and contemporary dance – pacy and entertaining.

Dores André – who dances the role of Quantus – describes Peck's ballet as “expressive and dynamic, with a sense of fullness, energy, optimism and freedom”, adding “It's incredibly relevant.” She says that the dancers are enjoying it even more than they did last year – “... there is less thinking, but instead more exploring and expanding the possibilities of the piece.”

High-octane and almost athletic, ***In the Countenance of Kings*** is set to a fabulous, jazzy, almost Broadway-style score by contemporary New York composer Sufjan Stevens – an exhilarating movement from his work entitled ***The BQE***, which was written in 2007 to a commission from the Brooklyn Academy of Music, and inspired by Interstate 278, the Brooklyn-Queens Expressway. And judging by their performance, conductor Martin West and the San Francisco Ballet Orchestra are enjoying this work every bit as much as are the dancers!

San Francisco Ballet presents ***The Joy of Dance*** at the War Memorial Opera House, alternating with Program 2, until February 4. For more information and for tickets, visit the [San Francisco Ballet website](#) .

[Helgi Tomasson](#)

[Les Ballets Bubeníček](#)

[Justin Peck](#)

[Sufjan Stevens](#)

Sources:

San Francisco Ballet program notes by Cheryl A Ossola

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