

## All-male Les Ballets Trockadero de Monte Carlo brings its ballet parodies to PlayHouse Square

Published: Friday, January 28, 2011, 6:00 AM



By **Donald Rosenberg, The Plain Dealer**

And you think Natalie Portman has it rough in "Black Swan"?

What about the dauntless dancers of Les Ballets Trockadero de Monte Carlo, who must endure the agonies of pointe shoes, wear tight tutus and make sure their eyelashes don't fall off midspin?

Hold the pirouettes. Doesn't Portman experience the same rigors in Darren Aronofsky's whacked-out movie? Yes, but she's very obviously a woman. The Trocks, as the dancers in the New York troupe are known, always have been champions of testosterone.

As will be readily apparent when the celebrated male troupe makes its first stop in Cleveland in several decades for a program of dance favorites with more than a few twists.

The performance Saturday at the Ohio Theatre, a presentation of DanceCleveland and Cuyahoga Community College, is likely to enlighten even as it convulses. The Trockadero's affectionate and often uproarious parodies of ballet and modern dance are offered by performers thoroughly versed in the art.

"A lot of people think it's a big drag show, and it really isn't," says Trockadero dancer Paul Ghiselin, the company's ballet master and a former member of Ohio Ballet. "We are doing the wigs and eyelashes and pretty makeup. But it's more about dancing.

"Everybody in the company is a dancer first. We're not trying to fool anybody that we're being like women. Some of the guys are more dainty. But you'll see a chestful of hair popping out of the tutus."

Ghiselin is on a roll.

"And men have a very different power just because of the nature of the male body. Our lines aren't as light as women's. We've got chunkier legs and chunkier torsos, so there's an athleticism that's interesting. The humor comes

### PREVIEW

#### Les Ballets Trockadero de Monte Carlo

**What:** The male troupe performs its distinctive versions of "Swan Lake" Act 2 (choreography after Lev Ivanov), "Patterns in Space" (after Merce Cunningham), "Le Grand Pas de Quatre" (after Jules Perrot) and "Raymonda's Wedding" (after Marius Petipa).

**When:** 8 p.m. Saturday.

**Where:** Ohio Theatre, Playhouse Square, 1501 Euclid Ave., Cleveland.

**Tickets:** Standing-room only, \$10. Go to [playhousesquare.org](http://playhousesquare.org) or call 216-241-6000.



Sascha Vaughan

Les Ballets Trockadero de Monte Carlo dancer Paul Ghiselin, a former member of Ohio Ballet, often performs as Ida Nevasayneva with the celebrated male troupe.

from the inherent nature of men trying to do what women do."

Along these lines, it's not uncommon for a Trocks pas de deux to feature a "dainty" *danseur* trying to lift a tall, virile-looking ballerina -- or mallerina, as this unusual species has been called.

Or to find Ghiselin, in dazzling tutu, performing his signature role, "The Dying Swan," with white feathers flying every which way.

"My tutu has a life all its own," he says. "If that tutu could talk! It has to be stuffed every night. You name it, it's happened. I inhaled [a feather] once. I've had to spit them out in the middle. They get caught in my eyelashes."

Ghiselin, 49, was a 14-year member of Ohio Ballet when he auditioned in 1995 for the Trockadero company, which was founded in 1974 by a group of ballet enthusiasts who fashioned the name after the renowned Ballet Russe de Monte Carlo. Last year, the Trocks gave more than 130 performances throughout the United States and abroad.

Upon taking his Trockadero audition, sitting in on company class and watching rehearsal, Ghiselin was "blown away" by the level of the dancers, including their mastery of the grand Russian style, and the camaraderie.

Ghiselin, who was admired for his vivacious performances with Ohio Ballet, approached its artistic director, Heinz Poll, with trepidation when he decided to become a Trock.

"Heinz's eyes just lit up, and he said, 'Paul, that would be perfect for you,' " says Ghiselin. "I was always the class clown. He liked to give me character-type roles. It was actually a pretty good transition."

Before leaving Ohio Ballet, Ghiselin received tips on dancing *en pointe* from the company's female members.

"It's like learning how to dance all over again," says Ghiselin, who hails from Virginia. "Women practice to dance *en pointe*, so they learn to dance with pointe shoes. Men are trying to dance without them. It took me a year before I felt like I knew what I was doing, or was at least comfortable with what I was doing."

Tory Dobrin, the Trockadero's artistic director, had a similar, if less painful, experience when he joined the company in 1980. The Los Angeles native danced with Dallas Ballet before moving to New York, where he first performed with Lee Theodore's American Dance Machine and at Radio City Music Hall.

Dobrin had taken pointe classes in Dallas, so he wasn't surprised by the sensation of donning the shoes Trockadero-style.

"It wasn't really an issue," he says. "It only becomes an issue when you have to be in pointe shoes for hours on end."

But pointe shoes are only one aspect of the company's love affair with ballet. The Trocks have more than 50 works in their repertoire, many of them staples of classical and romantic ballet, such as "Nutcracker," "Don Quixote" and "Gaité Parisienne."

The dancers always begin with the original choreography, if available, which then is tweaked to add the idiosyncrasies for which the Trocks are so feted.

Setting the original choreography is "important because it gives it a kind of legitimacy and makes it interesting for us as dancers," says Dobrin. "We try to keep the rehearsal process relaxed. The guys in Trockadero tend to be funny. Things unfold as we shape the material."

The guys in tights and tutus are listed in the program with outlandish male and female names, mostly in Russian, concocted largely by Dobrin. They include -- pronounce them slowly -- Ida Nevasayneva (Ghiselin's female guise; his male incarnation is Velour Pilleaux), Nina Enimenimynimova, Innokenti Smoktumuchsky and, the newest, Marina Plezegetovstageskaya.

The last is a tribute to Maya Plisetskaya, the great Russian dancer who was a longtime principal with the Bolshoi Ballet. Plisetskaya has seen the



Sascha Vaughan

Christopher Iam, right, dances the White Lady in Les Ballets Trockadero de Monte Carlo's version of "Raymonda's Wedding," which will be on Saturday's program at the Ohio Theatre in Playhouse Square.

Trocks twice at gala events, once in Italy featuring Ghiselin as "The Dying Swan," the Russian ballerina's most renowned solo.

"She came after the show and said, 'I absolutely adore what you do,' " says Ghiselin. "She gave me a big hug, and she was fabulous."

Adds Dobrin: "She has a sense of humor, so that's nice. Some people don't."

Still, the Trocks stand out well beyond balletic high jinks.

"A show of nothing but making fun of dance gets tedious," Ghiselin says. "You need to balance that with good dancing if you're going to be taken seriously. We take company class, a lot of training, go to the gym and rehearse these classics like anybody else -- except it's man-on-man ballet."

**To reach this Plain Dealer reporter:** [drosenberg@plaind.com](mailto:drosenberg@plaind.com), 216-999-4269

© 2011 cleveland.com. All rights reserved.