

[The Trocks: Ballet That Doesn't Take Itself Seriously](#)



Written by Brian Patrick Thornton

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On Saturday, Jan. 29, the best drag show in Cleveland won't be on the stage at Bounce. Rather, it will be in PlayhouseSquare's Ohio Theatre.

And it won't be some queen from Lorain lip-synching to the latest Britney. Instead, it will be a corps of highly trained dancers, performing the original choreography of some of the greatest ballet and modern dancers.

Oh, and you won't need to tip them. So leave your moist and wrinkled singles at home and prepare for **Les Ballets Trockadero de Monte Carlo**, the acclaimed New York-based troupe that's arriving for one night courtesy of **DanceCleveland**.

We chatted with Balletmaster **Paul Ghiselin** about this all-gay comedy dance company.

Ghiselin, hailing currently from Bushwick, Brooklyn, began his dance career right here in the Rustbelt with Akron's Ohio Ballet. But 15 years ago he auditioned for Trockadero, where he's been ever since.

Today, as balletmaster, "I'm a bit older to be doing the hard-hitting stuff," he says. "And my responsibilities with the company are training the new dancers, teaching them the [repertory]."

That repertory involves a serious devotion to making audiences laugh.

"We parody, we satire ballet. We kind of model ourselves after a rusty old ballet touring company from Russia," Ghiselin says. "All of the guys have two alter egos: one female, one male. We have these made-up names. My stage name as the female is Ida Nevasayneva."

In lambasting the classics, the company performs the real choreography — *Swan Lake* "with a twist," for example. The men, as women, are on point. And they hire authentic Russian ballerinas as coaches.

When Ghiselin began in '95, it took him almost a year to adapt to the difficult task of dancing on his toes. Today, "the dancers come quite well-trained," he says. "It's not like in the old days when male dancers couldn't train on point."



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“The Trocks” arrived in 1974, rising out of the 1969 Stonewall riots and a general drag movement that swept New York, Ghiselin says. Men playing women’s roles in Greek tragedies in loft spaces so far off the Great White Way, “I can’t even call it Off-Broadway,” he says. “It was off-off-off-Broadway ... And that was the beginning of Trockadero. And now we’re performing in the best theaters in the world. This past year we did 136 performances.”

And are all of the performers gay?

“Well, I don’t want to out anybody, but yes,” he says with a lilt. “We have had straight men in the company, but they don’t last long.”

Why is that? “I just don’t think it’s a thing that a straight man gets into,” Ghiselin says. “Putting on the point shoes every day. Putting on eyelashes every day. Having to get into eyelashes and tiaras ... It’s just not a straight man’s aesthetic.”

Yet the ballet master is quick to point out that it takes a tough man to do the difficult job of dancing with Trockadero.

“The guys in this company are very into what they do,” he says. “They care about their dancing. All of them do a lot of homework. They watch the ballerinas. They go to concerts. So you have a group who are very into what they do ... They’re very serious about making fun of it.”

For the Jan. 29 engagement, the company is bringing its most recent New York performance.

The evening starts with the second act of *Swan Lake*, “a send up of the traditional. It’s based on the Royal Ballet of London’s choreography, which you really don’t see any more. But it was restaged 40 years ago, when the company first started. It’s based on the classical. It’s a lot of fun; a lot of humor is built into it.”

That’s followed by *Patterns in Space*, based on choreographer Merce Cunningham’s work. And the evening concludes with *Raymondo’s Wedding*, “which is a very Imperial Russian piece. The choreography is very grand,” Ghiselin says.

And expect to laugh. Trockadero’s audience crosses all categories, he says. There will be your standard dance fans, but also those who normally wouldn’t go to see dance. The usual reaction?

“They’ll say we’ve ruined *Swan Lake* for them because [now] they’ll see it and laugh.”

Be prepared to be ruined.