Dartmouth dancer dances as fairy godmother in Ballet Jorgen's Cinderella

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Dartmouth native Hannah Mae Cruddas dances the role of the Lead Fairy in Ballet Jorgen's Cinderella at the Rebecca Cohn Auditorium Friday and Saturday. (KAMAL DAID)

Hannah Mae Cruddas was 10 when she saw Ballet Jorgen's Cinderella at the Rebecca Cohn Auditorium.

Now, at 21, she is dancing in Cinderella, Friday and Saturday at 7:30 p.m., with Symphony Nova Scotia as part of the company's Atlantic tour.

Cruddas, a member of Ballet Jorgen's corps de ballets, is the Lead Fairy, the fairy godmother role in artistic director Bengt Jorgen's original interpretation.

"It's not so much Disney-oriented," she says. "It's a story of Cinderella's struggle to find empowerment under the thumb of her wicked stepfamily. It shows a journey in the development of her character."

Cinderella "already has that spunk and magic within her" but doesn't realize her own beauty or strength.

"My job is to pull it out of her a little bit."

This is the fifth show the Dartmouth-born ballet dancer has performed on the Cohn stage.

In her third season with Ballet Jorgen, she has performed in Swan Lake and appeared last year as Lady Capulet in Romeo and Juliet at the Cohn.

At Christmastime, she realized a dream when she starred as Clara in Symphony Nova Scotia's annual production of the Nutcracker.

"It was wonderful; it was amazing. I loved being able to come back and work on a show with the same people I worked with as a kid.

Cruddas started dancing when she was three and knew by age 10 she wanted to be a professional ballerina. She trained with the Maritime Conservatory of Performing Arts School of Dance

and the Leica Hardy School of Dance before joining Canada's National Ballet School in Toronto in 2009.

Now she's teaching repertoire and ballet class, and she works with the four dancers selected by Ballet Jorgen in the local participant program to perform in each community.

When she was 12, she was the local participant in the world premiere of Ballet Jorgen's Anastasia, with the symphony at the Spatz Theatre.

"I was one of the first kids to be in that show because they opened it in Halifax. It was incredible."

She also took master classes in Halifax with Jorgen and Tara Butler.

"I always looked up to her as who I wanted to become as a person and a dancer. Right now, she's my landlady."

Cruddas loves Ballet Jorgen's mandate to teach widely and make performances affordable in communities small and large, urban and rural, throughout Canada.

"I think dance is made to be shared with the masses; it's not supposed to be for the chosen few.

"I hope I can stay with them as long as possible. I love the works and Bengt as a choreographer and director."

Cruddas describes the company as a "big family."

"I hope all of us can inspire more love of dance. That's ultimately my goal — to bring joy to people through dance."

Dance is "harder and harder by the day, but I love it," says Cruddas.

"Otherwise, I don't think I'd feel I was growing enough, and I love being able to develop as a dancer."

In spite of some scary ice floes on the ferry ride from Newfoundland to Nova Scotia, she is fond of the company's relentless touring schedule and has just been out west for six weeks.

"I've gotten to see so much of Canada I wouldn't have seen before, so many small, quaint beautiful towns I'd never heard of, and people are so appreciative of the ballet because it's rare for them to see dance."

Cruddas has lived in Toronto for six years, two as a student with the National Ballet School and four on her own.

"I've been so lucky in the connections I've made with Ballet Jorgen. It made my time as a growing professional in Toronto easier and more safe."

Her brother, Josh Cruddas, a graduate of Dalhousie University's theatre school, is also living in Toronto, working as an actor and film composer.

"I don't get so much homesick, but I miss everyone here," says Cruddas.

"When I come back, I feel I can breathe a sigh of relief and I feel so comfortable. It'll always be home here."

She will be back home again May 13, also at the Cohn, to perform the A Day in the Life duet with Ballet Jorgen dancer Adrian Juarez for Rhapsody Quintet's benefit in support of the Sunshine Room at the Queen Elizabeth II Health Sciences Centre, featuring a presentation of the Beatles' Sgt. Pepper's Lonely Hearts Club Band album.

Ballet Jörgen performs Cinderella

Canada's Ballet Jörgen performs Cinderella on Friday and Saturday, 7:30 p.m., at the Rebecca Cohn Auditorium, Halifax.

The ballet features over 16 dancers including Nova Scotian Hannah Mae

Cruddas and Symphony Nova Scotia's full orchestra playing Prokofiev's

score conducted by

American conductor Arthur Post.

Choreographer Bengt Jorgen's tale includes wicked stepsisters, fairies, a miraculous trip to the ball and a whirlwind fantasy romance as well as elements going back to the story's earliest beginnings in Egypt.

Each performance features four young local dancers, chosen as part of Canada's Ballet Jörgen's Local Participant Program.

Classes are also being held at Coastal Dance, the Maritime Conservatory and Maritime Dance Academy with Halifax Dance hosting 10 master classes on Sunday.

Tickets range from $35 to $69 (HST included) at 902-494-3820 or visit symphonynovascotia.ca.

There is a matinee for local schools Friday, 10:30 a.m., with tickets at $12.75 per show (494-6406).

Cruddas also performs May 13, 7:30 p.m., at the Cohn in With a Little Help From Our Friends, a Rhapsody Quintet benefit for the Sunshine Room at the Queen Elizabeth II Health Sciences Centre in Halifax. The performance also features Reeny Smith, Asia, Ben Caplan, the Stanfields and others.

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