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## Varone choreographs a return as star

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Doug Varone has played a key role in more Denver productions than any other outside choreographer the past six years, but even arts devotees probably aren't readily familiar with his name.

Because he worked under the auspices of Opera Colorado and the Colorado Ballet, it was easy for him to get lost in the credits - something unlikely to happen with his return Saturday evening.

This time, the spotlight will shine squarely on him, when his much-lauded New York company, Doug Varone and Dancers, appears at the Newman Center for the Performing Arts as part of the Newman Center Presents series.

It will be the first time his company, celebrating its 20th anniversary during the 2006-07 season, has appeared in Denver - a startling fact considering its respected place in the dance world and its many appearances in other Colorado cities.

"We work within a particular style and particular point of view," Varone, 50, said from his weekend home near Woodstock, N.Y., "and I try to bring that to the other fields that I work in, whether it's the opera company (or) whether it's the ballet company.

"So it feels as if the tie-in with Doug Varone and Dancers coming to Denver makes sense after these all years."

In his previous visits to Denver, Varone served as director and choreographer for two Opera Colorado productions, beginning in 2001 with Christoph Willibald Gluck's "Orpheus and Eurydice," and he choreographed a piece for the Colorado Ballet in 2003.

The ballet commission, "Pounds and Stomps," used the 1960s music of the Yardbirds. A Post critic described it as a nonstop romp:

"The 15 dancers in body-hugging period garb take full advantage of this highly physical choreography to strut their stuff, sailing with breakneck speed and easily delivering the self-aware coolness and swagger that this sometimes stylized choreography demands."

This time, Denver audiences will get to see the third and perhaps most important facet of Varone's creativity - choreography created specifically for his carefully chosen, nine-member company.

The ensemble will present three works premiered in 2004 and 2006 - "Castles," "Boats Leaving" and "Lux." Varone believes they fit together and complement each other well, showcasing three different sides of him as a choreographer.

"I feel really strongly about this program," he said. "It's the program we brought to our Joyce (Theater) season (in New York City) last year, which was highly successful. 'Castles' has been an enormous hit for us, and it's been pretty much on every program since it was created."

**This troupe has legs**

After performing with the Limón Dance Company and Lar Lubovitch Dance Company, the Syosset, N.Y., native founded his own company in 1986.

Through extensive touring and involving his dancers in many of his cross-disciplinary ventures, Varone has managed to hold the ensemble together - a significant accomplishment in the topsy-turvy, often cash-starved dance world.

Along the way, he has earned a Guggenheim Fellowship, OBIE Award and New York Dance and Performance Award for sustained achievement in choreography, and worked extensively in opera, theater and even film, creating the choreography for Patrick Swayze's "One Last Dance."

"The act of creating is the act of learning, and I feel really fortunate that I've had a lot of opportunities to create and make mistakes," he said. "I think I have found a voice that I speak with choreographically and physically, and that has had the chance to continue to grow."

Some of the theatricality so integral to his stage productions everywhere from New York's Metropolitan Opera to the Yale Repertory Theater, can be seen in the choreography for his own company.

"Even in the work that has a more movement-based sensibility as opposed to a dramatic sensibility, there's always something going on," Varone said. "All the works I do always have a hidden edge to them."

"I feel like that's what makes me a really good director in terms of the theater work that I do - that I understand not just how to move people around but the reasons why."

He cited "Lux," a 2006 work for eight dancers set to Philip Glass' "The Light."

"It's an extraordinarily physical work, but there is something else going on underneath the surface," Varone said. "I feel like my creative mind never gets put to rest when my physical mind takes over."

But it is not always clear what that "something" is, and, as far as Varone is concerned, it doesn't have to be.

"That's the beauty of the form," he said. "There's no right or wrong. Whatever you see and whatever you get from the work is what the work is."

Unlike some choreographers who put an emphasis on glossy physicality or daredevil acrobatics, Varone is searching for something that speaks to what it means to be human - a word that comes up frequently in descriptions of his work.

"I think what's really important for me is that there's a sense of humanness in the work and a sense of humanness in the way the dancers move," he said.

"I always really stress that there is a blur between what's pedestrian and what is dancerly and that, for me, a really beautiful dancer is someone who knows how to jump back and forth between those two, who has an extraordinary technical sensibility but knows how to put that somehow away and be a person underneath that."

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