

Moscow Double Date for Doug Varone, Dancers

BY ZSOFIA BUDAI / SPECIAL TO THE MOSCOW TIMES

Nine years after their last visit to Moscow, New York City-based contemporary dance company Doug Varone and Dancers will arrive this week to give two performances in Moscow.

Varone, the company's artistic director, said in an interview before leaving for Moscow that he is excited about introducing three of the company's most recent pieces to theater and dance aficionados. Founded in 1986 by Varone -- an award-winning choreographer and director who has worked in theater, opera, film, television and fashion in addition to dance -- the company has been hailed by critics as "among the most compelling in the contemporary repertory."

The company was well-received by Russian audiences on previous visits -- they also visited St. Petersburg in 2005 -- and they were looking forward to their return, said Varone in an e-mail interview from New York.

"There is such a great tradition of music and dance in Russia, and that is ingrained in the culture. The work that I create is both theatrical and highly musical, so it was a combination that seemed to spark the audiences' senses in very generous ways," he said, adding that he feels very strongly about his current group of dancers and their ability to make a similarly powerful impression on Muscovites during the current tour.

Varone's company was initially invited to teach and perform only at a dance festival in Krasnoyarsk, but when the American Embassy learned about this cultural affairs officer Jeffrey Sexton decided to bring the dancers to Moscow as well, sponsoring them through an embassy grant and the U.S. Department of State's Performing Arts Initiative. "The company fills a niche in the cultural life of Moscow," Sexton observes, adding that contemporary dance remains a relatively underdeveloped art form in Russia.

In addition to the two performances in Moscow, the company will also hold a master class for local dancers on Tuesday morning. There is a large amount of interest in American contemporary dance in Moscow, said Sexton, and the master class will give young dancers the opportunity to experience some of the current trends and techniques firsthand. Varone is also interested in learning more about contemporary dance in Russia, saying he wished there were more opportunities for Russian dancers and companies to showcase their works in the United States.

For the company's Moscow program, Varone picked three pieces that he feels will make a compelling evening of dance and theater. "We are opening the program with 'Lux,' which was created in 2006 and set to an amazing Philip Glass score," he said. "The energy of the dance really explodes past the stage and into the audience. The second piece on the program is entitled 'Boats Leaving' (2006) and is set to a beautiful Arvo Part choral score. The work begins very quietly and slowly, and eventually a narrative and journey are explored."

The final dance, which recently premiered in New York, is titled "Alchemy" and is based on a new score by Steve Reich. "It pays homage to Daniel Pearl, the Wall Street Journal writer that was kidnapped and slain in 2002. It is a brutal work that ultimately delivers a message of hope," said Varone.

"All of the work that I create is about humanity, and I am always humbled by how we all share the same feelings and emotions, regardless of where we live on this earth," Varone said, expressing hope that his company will once again elicit a positive response from Russian audiences.



Doug Varone And Dancers

One of the shows the company will perform is "Alchemy," based on the life and death of journalist Daniel Pearl.