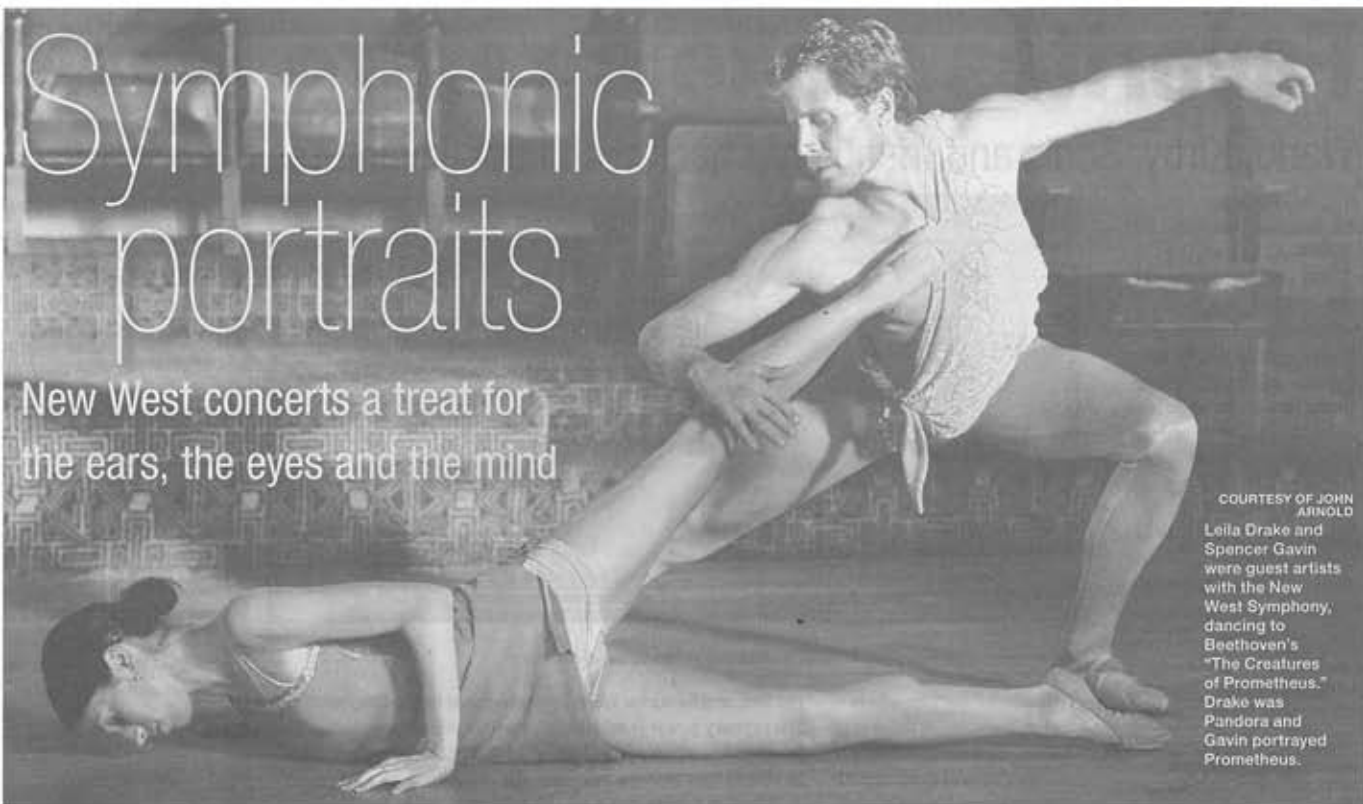


Symphonic portraits

New West concerts a treat for the ears, the eyes and the mind



COURTESY OF JOHN ARNOLD
Leila Drake and Spencer Gavin were guest artists with the New West Symphony, dancing to Beethoven's "The Creatures of Prometheus." Drake was Pandora and Gavin portrayed Prometheus.

BY RITA MORAN

Arts writer

With crowd-pleasing elements to spare, the New West Symphony unwrapped a package of delights for its weekend

[REVIEW] audiences, beginning

with a rousing concert at the Oxnard Performing Arts and Convention Center. The concerts continued in Thousand Oaks and Santa Monica.

Grieg, Beethoven and Mussorgsky/Ravel is the kind of lineup that provides easy listening for young and old, and there were more than the usual of the former in Oxnard's auditorium Friday night, some obviously fans of the visiting Ventura County Ballet Company, others in groups possibly getting their first taste of a live classical concert.

All of the music fit neatly into the program's Musical Portrait moniker, pre-concert commentator Charles McDermott noted, because

New West Symphony

The orchestra's next concert, dubbed Movie Medley, will be performed at 8 p.m. Jan. 23 at the Oxnard Performing Arts and Convention Center, 8 p.m. Jan. 24 at the Thousand Oaks Civic Arts Plaza and 4 p.m. Jan. 25 at Santa Monica High School. The performances, featuring guest pianist Sean Chen, will include Leonard Bernstein's symphonic suite from "On the Waterfront" and Bernard Herrmann's suite from "Psycho." For tickets, \$25-\$98, call 866-776-8400 or visit <http://www.newwestsymphony.org>.

each piece sketched scenes that could be conjured up in the mind while savoring the orchestral illustrations.

Grieg's Suite No. 1 from "Peer Gynt" follows the mischievous trail of an adventurous peasant who barely escapes the repercussions of his folly. Grieg wrote the music for a revival of Henrik Ibsen's fantasy play. Most listeners, however, are captivated by the expansive pastoral theme, the infectious mazurka and the fast-moving finale signaling the character's escape from the hall of the Mountain King. New West's music director, Boris Brott, and his alert crew captured the variegated spirit

of the work while the expanded brass and percussion sections provided the heft behind imposing moments.

While each of the evening's works offered ample "danceable" moments, Beethoven's "The Creatures of Prometheus" was actually written as ballet music to accompany a retelling of the legend in which the banished Prometheus, who stirred the anger of Zeus by stealing fire and taking it to man, is punished by being shackled to Earth for eternity. In this version of the tale, he is visited by Terpsichore, the Muse of Dance, who offers deliverance. Zeus creates Pandora and

sends her to lure Prometheus. He recruits three muses to educate her in the arts. Three fine dancers took the roles of Prometheus (Spencer Gavin), Terpsichore (Alyson Mattoon) and Pandora (Leila Drake). Currently a member of State Street Ballet in Santa Barbara, Gavin proved a stylish and athletic hero, dancing within the confines of a long but quite narrow stage-front surface. His dramatic leaps and spins were so secure that any space limitations were easily forgotten. Mattoon and Drake displayed elegant lines and easy grace. Mattoon has danced with the Ventura County Ballet Company previously and, like Gavin, returns this season. The New West appearance was Drake's first with the company. She and Mattoon are affiliated with State Street Ballet.

Dancing the three muses were Shannon Finnegan, 16, a junior at Foothill Technology High in Ventura; Hailey Goleta, 17, an Oxnard High

senior, and Samantha Schilke, 16, a Buena High junior. All proved lithe and well-trained, with their overall charming debut with New West marred only by passages during which their matching moves unraveled.

Mussorgsky's "Pictures at an Exhibition," transcribed for orchestra by Maurice Ravel, was written in memory of artist Victor Hartmann, a close friend of the composer's, and reflects the scenes and sentiments expressed in an exhibit of his works. With Ravel's vivid orchestration, "Pictures" never fails to stir audiences.

As a prelude to the concert, a group of New West women donors grabbed an assortment of noisemakers and joined the percussion section for a free-wheeling rendition of Richard Hayman's "Pops Hoedown," a frequent favorite as a lighthearted fundraiser for the orchestra.

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