

Ballet

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at a chicken factory down here in Belfast and while I was working at a chicken factory at the age of 22, my uncle Ralph Robinson was working with the Maine State Ballet at the time. He said, 'Keith, you should try dance,' and I went, 'eh, I don't think so.' Finally after about six months he said, 'Keith, let's do it,' and I said 'OK.' The first dance class I took, I was hooked."

Maureen Robinson started dancing as a child growing up in Portland, where she danced at the Dorothy Mason School of Dance, which eventually was combined with the Maine State Ballet, where Ralph Robinson and his wife, Jeanne-Marie, were teaching.

"Jeanne-Marie and Ralph were teaching there and at one point when I was 17 or 18 he was doing a show in Camden and asked me to perform with him. It was wonderful. He was such a great teacher and had so much to offer. He wanted all of us to dance and do things we might not have had the chance to do otherwise. He was really professional and had a lot of insight into the professional world," Maureen Robinson said.

The two became founding members of Robinson Ballet under the direction of Ralph Robinson, but they also took time to discover new things outside the United States, dancing professionally in Europe.

"We've been married come Saturday 37 years. We got married when I was 30 and she was 22 and we took off to Europe and danced professionally in Paris, France, for a year and then professionally for three years in Athens, Greece," Keith Robinson said.

After returning to the United States, the two came back to Robinson Ballet. They had a son, Ian Robinson, now a 31-year-old professional dancer. Both Keith and Maureen light up when they talk about him, and many of their favorite memories involve watching him dance.

"He's a third-generation Robinson male to be performing. He's now an elite, world-class modern dancer. He dances with the Batseva Dance Company, which is the premier modern dance company in the world. He works in Tel Aviv, Israel, and from there he tours the world. He's been there for six years," Keith Robinson said. "He danced with [Mikhail] Baryshnikov. That was probably the highlight of my dance career, was to see Ian dance with him in New York. I was covered in goose bumps. That was my favorite moment in dance," he added.

Ian grew up dancing in Robinson Ballet's studio with McGary. They were part of a group that Keith and Maureen refer to as "the dream team."

"They were incredible. All of them," Maureen Robinson said.

The "dream team" disbanded after their time at Robinson Ballet was over, each going in different directions, but much to Keith and Maureen's delight, Stevie returned. Though she doesn't bear the Robinson name, both Keith and Maureen consider her to be a part of their family.

"We've known Stevie since she was 9 or 10, so the same thing that Ralph instilled in us, we've been instilling in her for all these years," Keith Robinson said.

As for McGary, she's excited to take on the new challenge and transition from the business side of the company to an artistic role.

"They've been at the helm for 30 years so I'm excited to extend from where they've been and also keep with the same tradition of the company. We haven't been around for 40 years for nothing," McGary said.

Some of her new ideas include a salon, which would invite the public in to see what the company is working on. She already is working on the upcoming season and plans to do a children's matinee of "Where the Wild Things Are" along with some new productions.

"I'm playing around with ideas for something a bit more provocative than what the company has done before," McGary said.

She hopes to do a produc-

tion called "Love," which will feature three pairs of dancers, two female, two male, and one male and female. The production will explore the variety of relationships one sees in everyday life.

"Hopefully it will make the audience examine those ideas," McGary said. "I'm not a 'throw stuff against the wall and call it art' kind of person, but I think we can step toward the edge a bit more without going over."

The Robinsons both look forward to what McGary will bring to the company and hope to see her carry on the ideas that founded it many years ago.

Ralph Robinson, who is now in his 80s, was the inspiration for Keith and Maureen's teaching style. He allowed his dancers to be creative and express themselves on stage.

"Next year will be the 40th anniversary if [Stevie] keeps the name. Forty years is a good run for a regional company," Ralph Robinson said. He said that he hasn't been involved with the company since the '90s, but when Keith and Maureen took over as artistic directors, it was a natural decision.

"It was a godsend. [Jeanne-Marie and I] were done. To have somebody in the family take over was a very simple progression," Ralph Robinson said.

He trusts the decision



MICKY BEDELL | BDN

Keith Robinson (right) watches one of his ballet classes work through a routine at Robinson Ballet in Bangor on Monday afternoon. Keith and his wife, Maureen, have stepped down from their positions as co-artistic directors of Robinson Ballet in Bangor.

Keith and Maureen made in handing over the reins to McGary.

"I know that she's totally capable," he said of McGary.

"Ralph would give us opportunities by never giving us anything we couldn't do," Keith Robinson said. "Every time we went on stage we felt comfortable and confident. That's what we've tried to instill in all of the performers from Robinson Ballet through the years. We try to get them so that when they're on the stage they're confident. They don't have to think about steps, they think about character and the overall picture, and this was all rooted since we first started."

Keith and Maureen Robinson have watched Robin-

son Ballet grow and change over the years, and anticipate that the triumphs and challenges that have defined their time in the company will continue.

"The world has changed so much since we started," Maureen Robinson said. "I think people used to go to see dance more than they do now. We don't know exactly why, whether it's because of the programming, the group you have, the dancers you have. And for us it's always been this way. The company is always evolving and changing."

One of the partnerships that led to success for Robinson Ballet has been its collaboration with the Bangor Symphony Orchestra for the annual "Nutcracker" perfor-

mance, which Keith Robinson said has been going on for about 30 years. They hope to see the company continue the collaboration, and perhaps expand upon opportunities for shows with the orchestra.

In addition to the ups and downs of dance in Bangor, the two hold on to the memories that they've gathered through the years, from long bus trips to northern Maine in snowstorms for performances with Robinson Ballet, to their own experiences dancing in an ancient theater shadowed by the Parthenon in Greece.

The simple things have been important, too.

"We used to drive around in a pickup truck with our set and now we have a U-Haul. I used to dance every role because it was just me and another guy as the male dancers, so I would dance every part ... and now we've got much more to choose from," Keith Robinson said.

Though Keith and Maureen Robinson are stepping down from this position, they won't stop dancing.

"It's been 45 consecutive years since I started dancing on stage," Keith Robinson said. "One of the nice things about being artistic director was that I could put myself in any piece I wanted to. Now I'm going to have to audition, so that will be interesting," he said with a laugh.

Alice

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his satirical characters such as Ali G and fake Kazakh reporter Borat, is a new addition to the cast, playing the tick-tocking Time.

"Essentially you're in a room with blue carpet everywhere and there are a lot of people wearing blue one-piece suits made out of spandex and you can't see their faces," Cohen said of working on a film with plenty of computer-generated imagery.

"So, it's hard to sometimes concentrate and take it seriously ... Did I go mad? Yeah."

Alice's quest to help the Mad Hatter sees her come across the Red Queen, for which Bonham Carter's head was again digitally increased.

"She's a fun person to play ... Even the big head is great ... And it's liberating to play somebody who is so direct and so fantastically self-absorbed and narcissistic," Bonham Carter told Reuters in a separate interview in Los Angeles.

"The downside is the shouting and ... how long it takes to get ready, and two bald caps."

"Alice Through the Looking Glass" hits cinemas worldwide from Wednesday.

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