

A Conversation with many of the Principals of the fully staged, collaborative, Santa Barbara production of

Carmina Burana

THE GRANADA STAGE WAS DARK as dancers and Druids, arts administrators and choreographers filtered into the foyer to meet with press. They represented four of the pillars of the Santa Barbara performing arts community, The Santa Barbara Symphony, State Street Ballet, The Santa Barbara Choral Society, and The Santa Barbara Center for the Performing Arts who are joining together for the first time in a collaborative production of Orff's *Carmina Burana* at the Granada Theatre on Saturday, October 17th at 8pm and Sunday, October 18th at 3pm.

DANIEL KEPL
MUSIC PREVIEW

Nearly sold out, the performance and collaboration has caught the imagination of the companies involved and their respective audiences.

As the full complement of participants appeared, there were comments, then press were allowed time to mingle with them. I chatted with two of the dancers and then spied the New York City-based costume designer for *Carmina*, A. Christina Gianinni, who has designed costumes for dozens of State Street Ballet productions, and called her over. I ask, what got into her head, the medieval texts?

"Yes," she shared. "I wanted to have that feeling of how ancient this tradition really is." I suggest that there's something Druidic about the look of the costume of one of the dancers standing with us, while the other dancer is sporting a more medieval look. "Absolutely. Stonehenge," Gianinni smiled. "You look at those benches standing up," referring to set pieces used in *Carmina*, "we're talking Stonehenge. These priestesses are standing," she continued, pointing to the druid-costumed dancer, "and they're ancient, almost pre-Christian. They're Druid priestesses. And there is that continuity."

"So, there's a distinct story to be told?" I ask. New York City-based Choreographer William Soleau steps in... "Yes, there's a story. I created a story about a couple that are looking back on their life," he revealed. "It's the Wheel of Fortune; you're born, live, and go back into the earth.... I won't tell you how it resolves itself, but you see this couple getting closer and closer to death – it shows the whole cycle. You have

a stage, the Granada, where you can literally take the orchestra and have them move down into the pit in the second half. Many theaters you cannot do that in. *Carmina* is a perfect venue for merging the music, the voice, and the dance. Carl Orff wrote it as a scenic cantata; he intended it to have dancers also, and actors, and mimes, and what have you. Coming here and working with these three organizations, which I have worked with separately on occasions, is such a pleasure for me."

Turning to State Street Ballet Principal Dancer Leila Drake Fosseck, I ask her to describe William Soleau's choreography. Drake Fosseck has danced many of Soleau's works created for State Street Ballet over the last ten years she has been with the company.

"Bill's choreography is phenomenal. He has a gift of putting a lot substance and emotion into beautiful movement and making it accessible to the audience and relatable, so everyone gets sucked into the movement. Even if it is abstract or contemporary, everybody is completely engrossed and enveloped in the story that he's crafting."

Next, I speak with Arthur G. Swalley, President of the Santa Barbara Symphony Board of Directors about the significance of these sorts of collaborations in presenting major classical music events like a fully staged *Carmina Burana*.

"It shows that all our companies and the Granada are really committed to working together and being part of this community and putting on top level performances, providing the community with the opportunity to hear what we can all do, working together."

Rodney Gustafson, Artistic Director of State Street Ballet, then stepped up, freshly back from a blockbuster tour of China with SSB. I ask if this collaboration concept is the way of the future:

"Absolutely!" he replied. "This is taking it to the next level. It's very significant, because it's our 20th anniversary (SSB) and it's Nir's (Kabaretti, SB Symphony Music and Artistic Director) 10th anniversary with the Symphony. I think these are big milestones.... It's really quite incredible the way this has evolved in fulfilling the mission of the Granada, which is to see companies working together."

Later, I ask Craig Springer, Santa Barbara



Photo by David Bazemore

Maestro **Nir Kabaretti**, conductor of the Santa Barbara Symphony; State Street Ballet Costume Designer **A. Christina Gianinni**; **Meredith Harrill**, State Street Ballet; State Street Ballet Artistic Director **Rodney Gustafson**; Santa Barbara Choral Society Conductor **JoAnne Wasserman**; **Gaja Kabaretti**; State Street Ballet Principal Dancer **Leila Drake Fosseck**; and Choreographer **William Soleau**

Center for the Performing Arts Chrisman Executive Director about his earlier remarks about both performances being nearly sold out. Does he think they're going to get there?

"We will absolutely get there," he related. "In Santa Barbara, almost nothing sells out in advance, because everybody waits and waits. So to have a program that's two weeks away and to look at it and go, there are going to be no tickets left for this. There are a few tickets left for each performance, as of this morning when I looked, but by the time we get there it's going to be done.... It wasn't until we all kind of said to each other it makes sense for us to do this collectively. The community just lit up. And so when we were out raising money for it and went on sale with it, it just all clicked. Nobody was ambivalent about it. Everybody was like, 'we're in.' And it's really fascinating to be able to say OK, four big organizations that you would assume, given the way the arts world tends to function, would be at loggerheads about something or other, all said, we're not going to do that, there's no reason for us not to work together. As soon as we did it, the community responded. Talk about the value of positive response; we all learned a big lesson."

I also talked with Santa Barbara Symphony Executive Director David Pratt who related, "For orchestras to survive, they have to be deeply rooted in the community and that means serving a broad section of the community."

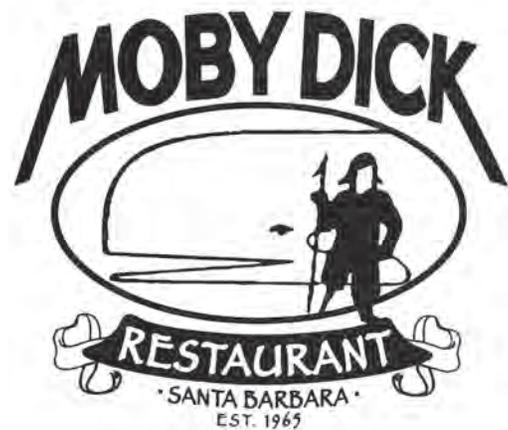
This production of *Carmina Burana* is the opening performance of the Santa Barbara Symphony's season. Music and Artistic Director

Nir Kabaretti will conduct the Symphony, Santa Barbara Choral Society and soloists, and State Street Ballet in the spectacular, fully staged and costumed performance, in association with the Santa Barbara Center for the Performing Arts. Also on the opening's program are Beethoven's *Leonore Overture No. 3*, and Bernstein's *Chichester Psalms*.

"*Carmina* is really classical music's most famous spectacle and is such a wonderful piece of music," Pratt enthused. "But beyond that, this is actually a symbol of the future; performing arts organizations coming together to work towards a common goal. You're sharing your resources, your expenses, your income, but we all share the same artistic vision, and we bring something to the table artistically. These days, when it's getting more and more difficult to raise money, I'm proud to say that these organizations raised the entire cost of the production before we even got into one rehearsal. That is extraordinary in a community the size of Santa Barbara. Philanthropists and foundations want to see more of it; shared resources and co-collaborating on artistic projects if it makes sense artistically, because it's always about the product, ultimately."

Purchase tickets for *Carmina Burana* (\$28-\$133) by calling the Granada Theatre box office at 899-2222 or visit www.granadasb.org

Daniel Kepl has been writing music, theatre, and dance reviews for Santa Barbara publications since he was a teenager. His professional expertise is as an orchestra conductor.



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