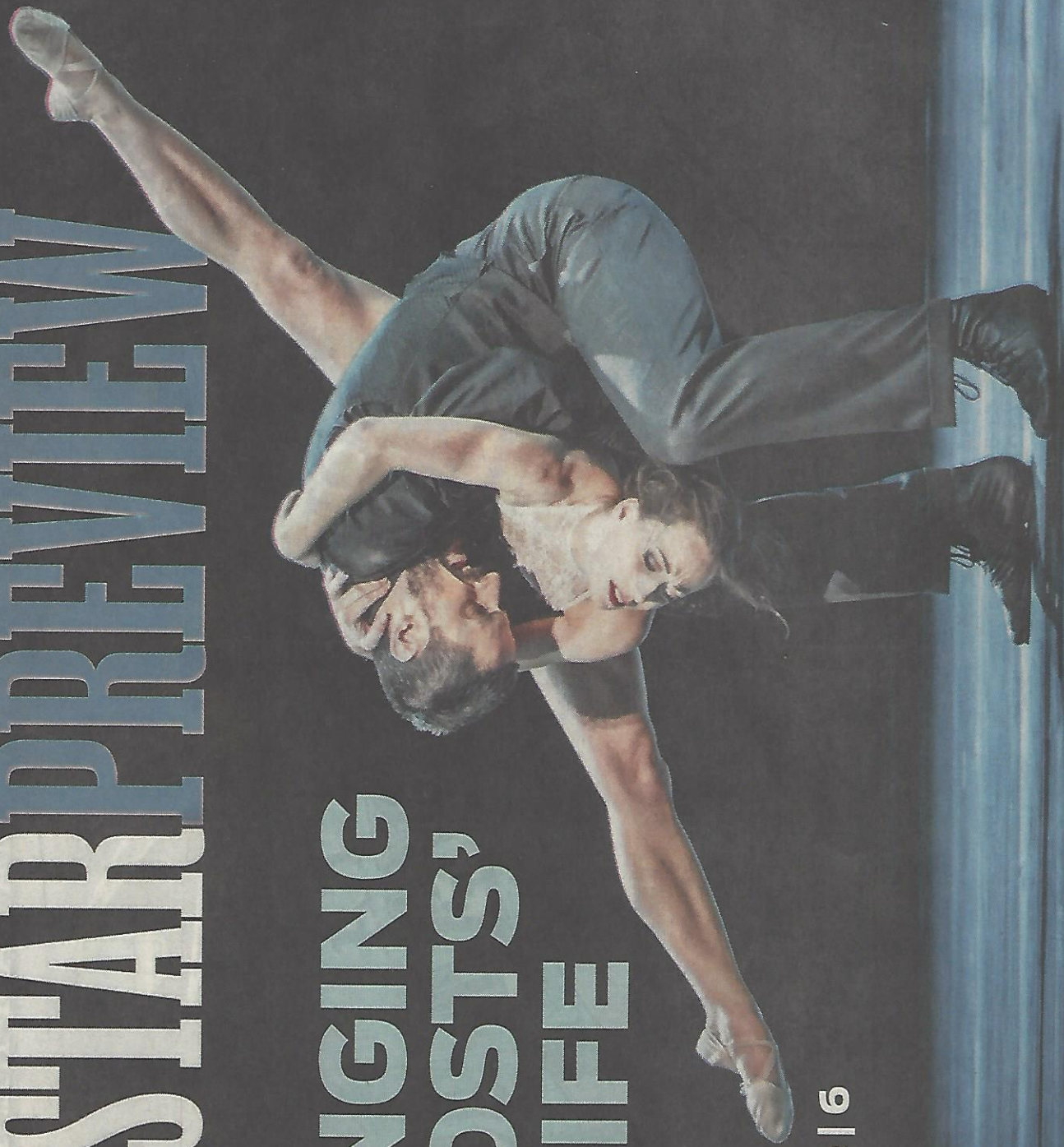


STARPREVIEW

BRINGING 'GHOSTS' TO LIFE

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COVER STORY

DANCE

Norwegian troupe puts Ibsen in motion

By Molly Glentzer

Rarely do leaders of the ballet world invite theater people to create their productions. But one of the nine U.S. premieres during this weekend's Dance Salad Festival suggests it might be a good idea.

"Ibsen's Ghosts" was commissioned by Norwegian National Ballet because it wanted a company signature, a dance that conveyed the essence of being Norwegian. And theater and TV director Marit Moum Aune seemed like the right person to make it happen.

Aune suggested they adapt Henrik Ibsen's psychological drama "Ghosts." A critically acclaimed collaboration with up-and-coming choreographer Cina Espejord and the well-known Norwegian jazz composer and trumpeter Nils Petter Molvæ, it premiered in September. Molvæ and fellow



Eric Berg

Dancers from Norwegian National Ballet will perform Marit Moum Aune's "Ibsen's Ghosts" during Dance Salad's 20th anniversary Festival at Wortham Theater Center.

musician Jan Bang will perform live, along with five dancers, for the 30-minute Houston version.

It's been pared from a 90-minute show, with nine dancers who move within a three-story set that helps to convey the

story by rising one floor at a time, as layers of a family's long-held secrets are revealed.

"It's about family

that doesn't talk about important issues and the danger that carries for children. But it's also about all Norwegians.

We have this problem about being closed in small communities. We are quite silent about things," Aune said.

She's directed many stage productions of classical works, including Ibsen plays. (She's done "Ghosts" once before.) "We always feel strongly connected to Ibsen. We grew up with him; he's in our genes. But for so many years, people were so polite about this author.

Not any more. We use his stories to tell the truth.”

“Ghosts,” considered one of the Norwegian playwright’s

masterpieces, premiered in 1881. The plot is complex, and the script contains verbal acrobatics that don’t

translate easily. Dance, of course, has its own visual language. Aune helped Espejord and the dancers get the story into their bones before they created the steps by doing live readings of Ibsen’s script for a week.

With dancers from all over the world, they read it in Norwegian, English and German.

“It’s not highbrow. We don’t want to be arrogant,” Aune said. “You have to tell the truth, and sometimes it comes too late. That’s what ‘Ghosts’ is about. It’s an important message; that we should all be open.”

Recently, the team has been back in the studio to condense the ballet for Dance Salad. The members didn’t just pull excerpts; they created a new dance, essentially. “We didn’t want to go to Houston and not do it properly,” Aune said.

In addition to the set, she had to leave behind a “ghost

Dance Salad Festival

When: 7:30 p.m. Thursday-Saturday

Where: Wortham Theater Center, 501 Texas

Tickets: \$20-\$50, 877-772-5425, dancesalad.org

family” of dancers; although she says you can “feel their breath” in the music. She’s surprised by how well the shorter version works. It’s more psychological now.

“It’s always hard to cut, but we’re on a journey with the ballet now,” Aune said. “It’s been quite inspiring.”

Performers learn more about any production with repeat shows, she added, but re-creating this ballet forced the dancers to dig deeper into their characters. Aune knows that experience will inform their tour of the full-scale ballet next year in Berlin.

Not that she wants to repeat the short version. Aune



Eric Berg

Marit Moum Aune says the condensed version of “Ibsen’s Ghosts” was a natural for the Dance Salad Festival.

said when New York dance presenters caught wind of the condensed “Ibsen’s Ghosts,”

they wanted to have it, too. She declined.

It made sense in Houston

because “curations” are the soul of the Dance Salad Festival, Aune explained.

The Norwegian National Ballet will be in good company for its fifth appearance at the festival.

Former Houston Ballet star Li Cunxin brings the company he directs, Australia’s Queensland Ballet, for the first time with works by Nils Christie and Andrew Simmons. The program, which changes slightly each night, also brings the first U.S. visit of South Korea’s Bereishit Dance Company and the first Houston look at work by Spain’s Patrick de Bana. And there’s a flurry of portions of recent works by choreographers who are by now familiar to festivalgoers, including Sidi Larbi

Cherkaoui, Jiri Kylian, William Forsythe, Annabelle Lopez Ochoa and Karole Armitage.

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