

CLEVELAND BALLET

BEHIND THE SCENES IN CLEVELAND BALLET'S PRODUCTION SHOP: Q&A WITH DIRECTOR OF PRODUCTION JEFF McLAUGHLIN

WHAT CAN WE EXPECT THIS COMING SEASON?

The 2024-2025 season is going to be pretty phenomenal, I think. Starting out with *Dracula* just before Halloween has us all pretty excited. I honestly had no idea that there was anything like a “horror ballet.” And the fact that we’re doing Lynne Taylor-Corbett’s production and choreography makes it especially exciting. We’re using projections for the first time since I’ve been with the ballet and it’s always fun to add a new element to the production end of things. Plus, it’s very subtle projections, they blend into the set in an environmental way as opposed to “being” the set...it’s really well done.

Then, I believe *The Nutcracker* will blow everyone’s socks off this year. It will be completely new to Cleveland. We are upping the ante on the scenery, costumes, cast size, everything. Even new choreography. I know it’s cheesy to say, but if people think they’ve seen *The Nutcracker* before in Cleveland, they have literally not seen anything like this! But it’s not a “reimagining” or anything – very traditional, but the production value is going way up.

We’re closing the season at Playhouse Square with *Romeo and Juliet*. I’m a theatre rat to the core, so the idea of Shakespeare is personally very appealing. It’s a cool production with gorgeous costumes and an interesting set...it’s a standing set, and by that I mean one large set piece that does not move; however, it has a bunch of moving pieces that take the audience all over Verona. It’s always changing.



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HOW HAS IT BEEN WORKING WITH A NEW ARTISTIC DIRECTOR?

I've been a freelancer for most of my career, so I'm used to working with new people all the time. There's always a little learning curve, but I think Timour and I are getting into a rhythm fairly quickly. It's really nice to be working with a true artist, which I firmly believe he is. He has a great vision and I have absolute faith that he will lead this company to new heights. His work ethic is outstanding, and inspirational. The time and effort he is putting in is already making a huge difference around here. The talent has been in this building, I mean the company is fabulously talented, but he is making artistic choices and moves that will really make an impact on the audience. I'm truly excited to be part of this new phase under his leadership. Working with true artists is a joy, every time. It makes the work meaningful and fun at the same time. I've been fortunate to work with true artists many times in my career and it makes a difference.

HOW DOES YOUR BACKGROUND PARLAY INTO CLEVELAND BALLET?

As I said before, I'm a theatre rat through and through. I've been fortunate enough, at least in my opinion, to have been able to work in a wide variety of fields. My wanderlust has been served by the jobs I've done. I've worked in film, TV, commercials, corporate events, municipal events, concerts, dance...and I always come back to theatre. Even being behind the scenes, (mostly, but that's for another day!) you still get a thrill from live performance. The pressure is on and you've got one chance to get it right. You can feel the energy of the audience. That high never goes away.

I've been mostly a designer throughout my life, so I hope I'm bringing my eye and own artistic sensibilities to the table, but I think my background in live performance is probably the greatest asset I bring. The amount of planning and coordination that goes into a live show can often get lost to a lot of people. Heading up art departments or production departments my entire adult life has made producing shows and events almost second nature – scheduling, budgeting, building things – the big strokes are always mostly the same and the details are always different! But what I really love about the performing arts, whether it's a movie or a commercial or a dance piece, is that you learn something new every single time. That's what makes it fun and exciting and meaningful. At least for me. That, and working with other artists.