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Have the Time of Your Life (Again)

Dirty Dancing comes to Toronto.

By Sarah B. Hood

“No one puts Baby in a corner!” When Patrick Swayze first uttered that line, a generation of filmgoers fell in love with *Dirty Dancing*, the poor-boy-meets-rich-girl movie musical that made a hit out of the song “The Time Of My Life”. Now, a whole new generation seems to be falling in love with the stage version; in fact, judging by advance ticket sales (100,000 tickets had already been snapped up by early last June), Toronto may have a love affair on its hands.

“It’s been such an iconic movie, and the response to staging the show as a musical has been huge,” says Craig Wilson, *Dirty Dancing*’s Latin American and Ballroom Choreographer.

Creating dance numbers for the stage is quite different from choreographing for a movie; the theatre audience can never get as close as the camera, but they have a much better sense of the overall movement of the ensemble. “Whatever is done between the man and the woman has to be done in a slower fashion,” says Wilson. “We try to amplify it to make sure that that true vision is brought across to the audience in the back row.”

And clearly that vision is getting across, especially in the climactic dance finale. When Johnny pulls Baby out of that corner, says Wilson, “That’s such a strong point of the musical! In the hundreds and hundreds of shows that I’ve seen, every time there’s a roar in the theatre, an absolute roar.”

The dancing in this show is different from what you might see in many other dance stage shows, says Wilson. “Choreographically, a lot of musicals that are onstage at present and in the recent past have been very upbeat or choreographed to be energy-plus. This show is very different than that,” he says. “This show brings a very respectful view of the relationship between a man and a lady. From the dance in the ballroom to the staff dancing in their staff quarters, there’s a very broad range of choreography styles.”

Part of the fascination with *Dirty Dancing* may also be tied to a general resurgence in the popularity of ballroom and Latin dance, as evidenced by such television shows as *Dancing With the Stars*. Wilson suggests that, historically, formal social dancing has tended to become more popular during wartime, but “Ballroom’s always been there. I think it travels in smaller circles,” he adds.

“I really feel there’s a resurgence, and I think it does create a wonderful opportunity to relate to a partner. I think that this particular story really shows the comparisons between two styles of dance and that still the core of both styles is a respectful feel between a man and a woman. The movements are all generated not from being forced or aggressive, so it comes across as being erotic, but it’s done in such a way that it has a feeling and emotion between two people that is very genuine.”

Dirty Dancing – The Classic Story On Stage runs until at least June 1, 2008 at the Royal Alexandra Theatre. For tickets, call 416-872-1212 or 800-461-3333, or visit www.mirvish.com.