

# A memorable tribute to a dance legend

 By [Debbie Hathway](#)

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I don't attend the ballet as often as I would like but this short run, produced in tribute to American Academy of Ballet founding director Mignon Furman, happened to fit into a gap in my schedule. The drawcard was not entirely the presence of principals from the New York City Ballet (NYCB) and American Ballet Theatre (ABT). Mignon Furman is a name as familiar to me as Dame Margot Fonteyn and prima ballerina assoluta Phyllis Spira - my late godmother danced with Spira under Faith de Villiers when they were teenagers!



Ashley Bouder & Joaquin de Luz - American Ballet Theatre

Furman is the former director of what was then the University of Cape Town Ballet School. After reaching the pinnacle of her career on home soil, excelling in teacher training, syllabus development and examining, she left South Africa to start the American Academy of Ballet in New York. It is widely regarded as *the* Summer School of Excellence for budding ballet dancers in America. She also created and choreographed the Performance Awards, a programme taught and presented in the US and beyond in 'pursuit of excellence through the joy of dance'.

## Vocal appreciation

Furman's husband Simon and son Laurence founded the Mignon Furman Ballet, which made it possible for the guest appearances by the dancers for this occasion. I attended the first of five performances by the international stars and Joburg Ballet, performing as a company for the first time in the Mother City. There appeared to be a capacity audience by curtain-up, extremely vocal in their appreciation of the performances from the entire cast. That's always a pleasure to hear. They performed devoid of sets, on a beautifully lit stage, elegantly costumed.



Carmen - Joburg Ballet

Throughout the short season New York City Ballet's Ashley Bouder and Joaquin de Luz alternated performances of Balanchine's 'Tchaikovsky Pas de Deux' with the pas de deux from 'Sleeping Beauty', 'Nutcracker', and 'Don Quixote'. These selections are perennial crowd pleasers! So too is the pas de deux from 'Flames of Paris', performed this time by Daniel Ulbricht (NYCB) and Betsy McBride (ABT).

The only piece choreographed by Furman herself was 'A Silent Tear', performed by Remy Young (ABT) with coaching from Gina Chiavelli.

## A triumph

Kevin Durwael, director of the Royal Ballet School of Antwerp and teacher at the AAB Summer School of Excellence, choreographed 'Affection' In memory of Furman. It was performed by McBride and Marshall Whiteley (ABT). He also choreographed the neo-classical piece 'Joy' performed by ABT dancers McBride, Whiteley and Young as well as Joburg Ballet's Monike Cristina and Ruan Goldino. What a triumph that was! Durwael also choreographed the wonderful 'Transcendence', performed by Joburg Ballet.



A certain standard is expected when international dancers of this stature venture abroad to perform. They certainly lived up to that. I'm probably not alone in thinking we could have done with more of the likes of 'Tango' by Ulbricht, but this short solo was enough to ignite excitement for those of us gearing up for the upcoming Tango Marathon Cape Town in December.

Some of the takeaway comments heard from audience members include what a pleasure it was to see new performances by different dancers (meaning those not based in Cape Town) and that we don't see much neo-classical ballet. If you're a dance fan, and want to see this style more regularly, please look out for Cape Dance Company programme announcements.



Daniel Ulbricht - Principal Dancer New York City Ballet

Back to the tribute, what a pleasure it was to see Joburg Ballet in their stride. Their performances were truly enjoyable,

polished, inspirational and aspirational for any young dancers wanting to make ballet a career. Revil Yon, in particular, has grown so much as a performer since being a member of this company. The production will live in our memories for some time to come.

*Photos by Pat Bromilow-Downing*

## ABOUT DEBBIE HATHWAY

Debbie Hathway is an award-winning writer, with a special interest in luxury lifestyle (watches, jewellery, travel, property investment) and the arts.

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