

Written by Mike Schulz

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Since it's called *Love Stories*, you'd rightfully expect Ballet Quad Cities' latest presentation to be chockablock with stirring physicality and sensual *pas de deux*. And indeed, this Valentine's Day-inspired outing

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given the same title as
last

February's Ballet Quad Cities production, but boasting new vignettes by a quintet of choreographers — will find the company's professional dancers expressing, in thrillingly nonverbal fashion, what Executive Director Joedy Cook describes as “the many angles to love.”

Yet for her contribution to *Love Stories*, 29-year-old choreographer and Ballet Quad Cities veteran Lynn Andrews appears to have been inspired less by romantic love than her sheer love of dance. That, and perhaps her love of a challenge.

“We did it in five days,” said Andrews of the clever, exuberant piece that I watched, in rehearsal, during our early-January conversation. “And it was crazy. It was like, ‘Eleven dancers! Five days! Seventeen minutes of music! Go!’

“So I haven't been sleeping so well these past few nights,” she added with a laugh. “But now, I'm in a pretty good spot.”

As, I must say, are Ballet Quad Cities' company members. *Love Stories* will be staged at Davenport North High School's Holzworth Performing Arts Center on February 12 and 13, but at the rehearsal I attended, with more than a month before the first performance, Andrews' vignette already looked to be in outstanding shape.

Titled “Delicatessan,” and borrowing music from the 1991 French film of the same name, Andrews' *Love Stories* contribution is a tightly paced blend of mixed- and same-sex group

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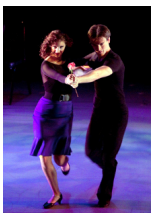
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routines and the inevitable romantic *pas de deux*, all underscored by a variety of songs with Latin, French, and 1920s-American stylings. And with Ballet Quad Cities' company members not only tackling the demanding choreography, but doing so while also miming such activities as flattening dough with rolling pins, baking cakes, and flipping pizzas in the air, Andrews' offering is a dynamically engaging yet down-to-earth piece of work – a showcase for both the dancers' gifts and its creator's obvious talent and imagination.

"I like people-watching," said Andrews of the inspiration for her choreography. "I like *pedestrians*. And so I really like infusing everyday gestures with this kind of large, virtuosic movement."

Though Andrews is now back home in Tuscaloosa, Alabama, the Bettendorf native's *Love Stories* ten
ure served as a return to Ballet Quad Cities for the choreographer, who was a dance student with the company "for seven, eight years, all through middle and high school.

"I started pretty late," said Andrews of her beginnings in ballet at age 12. But in the mid-'90s, "I saw *The Nutcracker* at the Capitol [Theatre in Davenport], and I fell in love. I wasn't, like, 'I want to be a fairy princess,' but I was energized by the movement, and the excitement, and the energy – everything. And I wanted to be part of it. I was like, 'I'll pull the *curtain* cur
. I don't care.'"



A few months after her Capitol Theatre visit, said Andrews, her mother enrolled her at City Center School for the Arts, the former name of what is now Ballet Quad Cities School of Dance. And after her many years as a student with the company – with which she was eventually able to realize her *Nutcracker* dream – Andrews' adoration for dance led a theatre-dance major at Decorah, Iowa's Luther College, a year spent at London's prestigious Laban Centre for Contemporary Dance, an MFA in choreography from the University of Iowa, and professional credits throughout the country as a dancer, choreographer, and instructor.

Currently teaching a course at the University of Alabama and choreographing projects for

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Tuscaloosa's Shelton State Community College, Andrews said, "I really grew up doing ballet here [at Ballet Quad Cities], even though I knew I was never going to be a ballerina. But I knew I wanted to keep on dancing, so this – teaching dance and choreographing – was a way to keep that going."

Yet in addition to teaching and working with the Birmingham-based modern-dance company AROVA Contemporary Ballet, Andrews also continues to assume guest-choreographer responsibilities for other companies nationwide, and is happy that her schedule allowed her to accept Joedy Cook's offer – made this past July – to choreograph for *Love Stories*.

"It's all about networking," said Andrews. "I had stayed in contact with Joedy and with Courtney [Lyon, Ballet Quad Cities' artistic director], and expressed my desire to make something for the company. And since I was going to be here anyway, and I could stay with my folks, it was perfect timing."

Cook agreed: "Lynn graduated from [the University of] Iowa last spring, and that's when we seriously started thinking about bringing her back to do a piece. ... And because she was going to be in the area for the holidays, we were able to bring her in.

"I mean, she is just a *really* good choreographer," enthused Cook, who stressed, "and I like her style because it is *fresh and happy*. The movement is so uplifting, and her choices of music are just so wonderful

"And, I have to say, her style looks *great* on our dancers," she added with a laugh.

Andrews' Alabama schedule, however, meant that while she was in the Quad Cities, she could only work with her dancers for five days, with between four and six hours a day scheduled for rehearsal. The *Love Stories* choreographer, however, came prepared.

"Because I knew I was going to be working in such a short amount of time," said Andrews, "I really tried to get super-organized. I mean, sometimes I start with music, then go to the dance; sometimes I start with movement, and then decide on the music way later. But for this, I had all

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the music picked out ahead of time, and I knew 'This is going to be the group section, this one's the double duet, this one's just the ladies, this one's just the men'"

Yet even given her preparation, Andrews said her planned choreography would routinely change based on how the dancers themselves responded to both her music and her movements.

"I'd give them choreography," she said, "and all of a sudden the dancers would be doing some lift and just *invent* something, and go into something else, and I'd go, 'Hmm ... I *like* that!' There's a lot of happy accidents involved. A lot of 'Keep that!'"

Unfortunately for Andrews, her schedule will likely prohibit her from catching *Love Stories* during its Davenport performances. But she is grateful for the opportunity to have briefly returned to Ballet Quad Cities, and said she knows that her piece "is in good hands with the ballet mistress, Erica [Attwood]. She was a ballet dancer when I was growing up here, and she's very clear and clarified in what she does.

"I'm hoping I'll get a nice copy on video."

Ballet Quad Cities' Love Stories will be performed at Davenport North High School's Holzworth Performing Arts Center at 2 & 7 p.m. on Saturday, February 12, and at 4 p.m. on Sunday, February 13. For tickets, call (515)244-2771; for further information, contact Ballet Quad Cities at (309)786-3779 or BalletQuadCities.com.

Eleven Dancers! Five Days! Seventeen Minutes of Music! Go!: Ballet Quad Cities Veteran Lynn Andrews C

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For more information on Lynn Andrews, visit her Web site at LynnDances.com .