

NALMES

Azmet Baste, Director

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Roper Performing Arts Center

Hello, I'm Edgar Loessin with Loessin at Large.

Tucked away on the scenic northern slopes of the northwest Caucasus Mountains is the tiny Republic of .Adygea. It has a population of only 450,000 people in its 7,600 square kilometers. Its capital is Maykop which is the home base of Names, the Republic's dance company. It is more than just a group of dancers, however. Since 1936 it is the gatherer, guardian and interpreter of the national culture, especially folk dance and music.

Including an orchestra, the company is made up of 75 people. The average age of the artists is 20 years old. Their dancing is not folk dancing as we think of it in America. The dancers study for years to master the sophisticated technique and physical stamina required to perform these highly energized, fast track dances.

The women are thin and beautiful, like porcelain dolls, and move with effortless agility and Rockette precision. They seem to float or glide on air with their feet doing steps as intricate and delicate as the fluttering of butterfly wings. Their costumes are lavish and regal.

The male members of the company are handsome and each has mastered the highly athletic style required for the demanding dances and acrobatic feats. Sword fight dances make up a good portion of the extravaganza. They sparkle, quite literally, with real sparks flying off the clashing metal blades. The guys also do incredible air turns and leaps in the Russian tradition.

Most of the dances utilize the entire company doing whirling complicated choreographic patterns in a relatively small space. Their control is indeed impressive. Many of the dances have brief solo spots and pas de deux to show individual talent and skill. Some of the men, by the way, dance on their toes.

To give the dancers a chance to catch a breath, there are musical intervals where the orchestra plays traditional music. Percussion is a big part of the accompaniment for the dances. The four drum players' do indeed make a joyful noise and their solo turn is a high point of this consistently delightful evening.

The group has toured all over the world with great critical acclaim. Thanks to the extraordinary Virginia Arts Festival this is Names first North American appearance. I have a feeling it won't be their last.

This is Edgar Loessin with Loessin at Large and I'll see you at the next opening.