

Historical Challenges

From your director, Catherine Fair

Living and working in the Amherst area is a boon to the artist who wishes to take advantage of its rich and abundant educational and historical resources. While I have created full length ballets before, *Emily of Amherst* presents some unique challenges. And opportunities! For the first time, I am producing a ballet with deep local and historical roots. It is important to be mindful that a lot of people in the Amherst area know a lot about Emily Dickinson. Fortunately I am working with Jane Wald and the Emily Dickinson Museum (EDM), collaborators whose scholarship is essential to *Emily of Amherst's* success.

“Emily of Amherst is a project that explores new territory”

Music: We know what kind of music Emily listened to and played: Harvard has her family's music books. Jane Wald, executive director of the Emily Dickinson Museum, and I felt it was very important to have the music in *Emily of Amherst* reflect Emily's taste and time period. Working with Amherst composer Ted Trobaugh has been very rewarding as he has realized 19th century music in a 21st century way. Ted is composing and recording the orchestral score as well as directing the reading and recording of all the narration. A variety of local voices will be reading letters written by Emily Dickinson, Martha Dickinson Bianchi, Susan Gilbert Dickinson and Mabel Todd Loomis as well as a number of Emily's poems as part of the score of the ballet.

Costumes: It is very well known that the Belle of Amherst wore white in her adult years. In fact, the only existing white dress to have belonged to Emily belongs to the Amherst History Museum; a reproduction is a feature of the tour at the

EDM. AB parents Linda and Carlton Ho have spent time with Jane Wald looking at the reproduction dress at the EDM and have recreated a “danceable” version of Emily's white dress. You'll find it on the dancer who graces the cover of our invitation and posters advertising our performances. On close inspection you'll see the intricate pleats and tucks reminiscent of the original. Thanks to Linda and Carl for their beautiful work.

Parents and costume mavens Karen Schweitzer and Heidi Stemple spent the fall researching 19th century fashion and have begun the creation of more than 70 costumes our dancers will wear. They are ingenious at recycling

some of our existing costume stock with a dash of lace here and a dollop of ribbon there. But they have many costumes to create from scratch and I am happy to report that they have a willing sewing crew of parent volunteers. They are assisted by AB Senior Instructor Sueann Townsend's years of expertise and experience in costume construction and I am grateful for her guidance. Amherst Ballet's productions are well known for their beautiful costumes and this year will be no exception.

Sets: Designer and AB parent Barry Magnani has been working with Jane and me to develop a set that is clearly

continued on page 2

InsideInsideInside

Tea at the Dickinson Homestead

YAGP Ballet Competition

2008 Harvest Fete

Ticket Order Form

Love Notes

No Age Limit in Ballet

Where Are They Now?

Catherine Fair

Benefactor \$1000+
Amherst Cultural Council

Patron \$500 - \$999

Sponsor \$250 - \$499
Katherine Atkinson, MD PC
The Kittredge Foundation
Peter Shea

Friend \$100 - \$249

Ana Caban
Tom Dumm
David Farkas
Maureen O'Leary &
Rafael Fissore
Richard Goldsby
Nancy Huntley
Jeanne Esposito &
George Karras
Steve Mallet
Robert & Lynn Moskin
Roy & Florence Shimabukuro
Gerda Wald

Donor \$25 - \$99

Susan & Steve Abdow
Anonymous
Jose Ornelas & Gloria Bernabe
Michael & Tina Berins
Nonny Burack
Nicola Courtright
Melanie DeSilva
Henion Bakery
Pete Houlihan
Judie's Restaurant
Lisa & Michael Kittredge
The Lahti Family
Marlene & John Musante
Tracy Hightower & John Reid
Marion Rosenau
Sallie Schneider
Mary Sharma
Otto & Diana Stein
Larry & Ann Steinhauer
Andrea Turcatti
Jack Wileden

Supporter \$1 - \$24

Clarkdale Farm
Pauline Heffley

reminiscent of Amherst's 19th century landmarks. Featured in his designs will be inside and outside views of Amherst Academy, grave stones of the departed (created to look like the originals at West Cemetery), an interior view of the Homestead featuring the parlor complete with fireplace and French windows, and Emily's bedroom with writing table. Keeping the important components of the home intact while preserving sight lines for the audience has presented a unique, but not insurmountable challenge! A team of experienced volunteers (AB dads!) will be working under Barry's direction to build, transport and assemble the sets.

Dance: The choreography for *Emily of Amherst* is a collaboration of choreographers Sueann Townsend, myself, and former AB instructor (currently an assistant professor of dance at SUNY Fredonia) Sam Kenney creating different scenes from the ballet on AB dancers. We look for inspiration in Emily's poetry and letters and also the dance styles of the late 19th century. There are two major sections of the ballet created for younger dancers portraying children. The first occurs around events at Amherst Academy, the school that Emily attended which once stood on the grounds currently occupied by the parking lot by the Amherst Cinema complex. The second occurs much later in the ballet, during Emily's later years at the Homestead, and features local children (including Emily's young nephew Gilbert) dancing around the Homestead in anticipation of receiving some of Emily's delicious gingerbread. Prominent in both sections is the polka step, commonly danced in the 19th century, many examples of which are found in Emily's music collections. The "Poetry of Motion" dance features Emily, her sister Lavinia, and a collection of young women friends who dance with fervor during an elicit evening while parents Edward and Emily Norcross are out for the night. This segment is based upon

reminiscence by Susan Dickinson which describes the commonly held view of the day concerning such activities as being "wicked as idols!" She described the evening as one where the participants danced "with something not



unlike abandon!" Another scene involves Emily's visit to the West Cemetery (located behind Ren's Mobil Service in downtown Amherst),

From Your Director

which sat directly behind the home she occupied prior to her family's return to the Homestead. Based upon Emily's letter ("I am feeling lonely, some of my friends are gone, and some of my friends are sleeping – sleeping the churchyard sleep –"), this hauntingly beautiful scene portrays Emily's love and grief for her departed friends as she dances with the spirits of friends such as longtime friend and school teacher Leonard Humphrey and childhood best friend Sophia Holland. These biographical sections of the ballet are contrasted with the finale, which features dancers who



photos by Janine Norton

represent people throughout the world who have been touched by Emily Dickinson's work. Whereas the remainder of the ballet is costumed in period costumes — long dresses and skirts with high collared necklines and long sleeves for the women and girls, knickers, long pants and coats for the men and boys — the finale has a distinctly different look with dancers clothed in timeless apparel dancing with a decidedly contemporary feel. Here, the



audience will hear a selection of Emily's poems read one after the other, coupled with dance and music leading to a great crescendo of movement, color and sound.

Emily of Amherst is a project that explores new territory by creating an original musical score and four act ballet based upon the life and works of Amherst's most famous resident. If you haven't yet bought your tickets you might want to do so fairly quickly... The appeal of Emily Dickinson is not to be underestimated!

Afternoon Tea at the Dickinson Homestead

As part of our on-going celebration of Emily Dickinson, AB is collaborating with the Emily Dickinson Museum to host an Afternoon Tea on the grounds of Emily's home! The Tea will take place on Sunday May 17 at 4:30 at the Dickinson Homestead on Main Street; in the event of rain the Tea will be held at nearby Amherst College's Alumni Hall. Tickets for this event must be purchased in advance; you may order them along with your theater tickets on the Ticket Order Form included with this newsletter. Seating is limited so send in your order early.

Our Afternoon Tea will be held between the ballet performances on Sunday May 17, so you may have tea after the matinee or before the evening performance. Walk in the footsteps of the "Belle of Amherst"! Stroll the grounds of the Homestead on Amherst's Main Street, sip tea and lemonade, sample Emily's famous gingerbread cookies and other goodies. Enjoy live harp music provided by Amherst Ballet parent Barbara Russell. And listen to a recitation of Emily's poetry presented by "the Belle of Hatfield" – local writer Jane Yolen.

We invite you to continue the celebration of Emily's life and work by attending this Afternoon Tea fundraiser on the lawn at her home. Return to the elegance of a 19th century tea at an historic and treasured local site. Parasols, bustles and boater hats optional!



2008 Harvest Fete

By Andrea Leibson

It was a beautiful night for our Annual Harvest Fete which took place on October 4, 2008. Generous hosts Gillian and Jim Duda and a small army of board members, AB dancers and their parents decorated the barn with harvest motifs. Portabella Catering of Amherst prepared our dinner and music for the evening was again provided by the ever-popular Johnny B and the Hornets' four-piece band. AB board president Jeanne Esposito said a few words to those in attendance and so did AB director Catherine Fair. New teacher Sueann Townsend introduced AB dancers (**Isa Braun, Aliya Cycon, Marissa Hashizume, Marissa Ho, Camille Kemache, Robin Palmer, Olivia Riley, Ethan Schweitzer-Gaslin, Pilar Solomon-Jefferson and Marianne Wald**) who



Through his efforts and those of volunteers, we raised over \$9000 on interesting auction items.

The Fetes have been the most successful fundraisers in AB's history and the 2008 Fete continued that trend netting AB over \$10,000. Each year these events have grown in popularity and fundraising revenue to help AB meet its mission of dance education, performance and community enrichment. Such success must be repeated! If you would like to donate an item for next year's Fete and Silent Auction, please contact Andrea at AB and it will be included.

The following are vacation home owners, artisans, institutions, restaurants and businesses who donated to the Silent Auction. Please patronize them, and when you do, thank them for their support of Amherst Ballet.

Amherst Coffee
Amherst Golf Club
Amherst Wine and Spirits
Annette & Dean Cycon
A to Z

Donors List continues on next page

“Rosenberg... cajoled, teased and worked the crowd into quite a bidding frenzy.”

treated us to a show of their dancing talents and group camaraderie.

After the entertainment it was time for the not-so-silent part of the Silent Auction. State Representative Stan Rosenberg, a wonderful supporter of the arts in general and Amherst Ballet in particular, served as auctioneer. He cajoled, teased and worked the crowd into quite a bidding frenzy.



Left: Jim Duda, Jeanne Esposito and Jerry Schoen, all AB Presidents, at the Fete
Above: Representative Stan Rosenberg gets out the bid.

photos by Andrea Leibson

Love Notes

The Amherst Club holds a benefit each year to raise money for Amherst-area human service agencies. This year, with programming arranged by Amherst Ballet founder **Therese Brady Donohue**, Amherst Ballet was well represented as several alumnae and one current Amherst Ballet student performed.

Current student **Ethan Schweitzer-Gaslin** danced a solo as the Golden Idol from *La Bayadere*. His choreography was set by AB teacher **Sueann Townsend** based on the ballet by Marius Petipa and modified by Vakhtang Chabukiani. This Indian-inspired dance made an interesting comparison and contrast of classical ballet with the Odissi Indian Dance performer also on the program. To quote Sueann, "Ethan was very golden." Backstage, Ethan startled State Representative Ellen Story who bumped into him as he was spraying himself with gold make-up.

Recent AB graduates **Eliza Arsenaault** and **Hannah Goodwin**, now sophomores at the University of Vermont, wowed the audience with their ballroom and salsa dance demonstrations. Eliza and Hannah brought with them their partners from the UVM Ballroom Dance Team. There are

more than 100 members on the team; Hannah is the president of the team and Eliza is the treasurer. When they are not studying (biology and math for Hannah and chemistry for Eliza), they travel and compete with the dance team. They've competed at Harvard and MIT and participated in a national competition in Ohio. To read more about Eliza and Hannah, please go to our website and click on the Spring 2006 newsletter.

Jennifer Weaver performed a contemporary dance with her 5 year-old daughter Ruby. Jennifer danced at AB in the 1980s and attended the SUNY Purchase dance program after graduating from Amherst Regional High School. In 1988 Jennifer apprenticed with the Merce Cunningham Dance Company and became a full company member the following year. For 8 years she toured the United States, Europe and Asia, leaving the company in 1996 to dance in Australia on a Fulbright Scholarship. She continued to perform until 2000 with Irene Hultman and Steven Petronio. Jennifer now lives in Maine with her husband and daughter and teaches dance.

Donors List continued

Carlton & Linda Ho	Heidi Stemple	Michelson's Gallery
Carolyn Herzig	Henion Bakery	Moira Megargee
Chez Albert	High Meadow Skin Care	Monkey Bar
Christine Stevens	Interlink Books	Mullins Center
Clark Museum	Jack Wileden & Andrea Leibson	Nancy Howard Smith
David Farkas	Jan Kelly	Nancy Huntley
Dean's Beans	Jane Wald	Nancy's Flower Depot
Delcie Bean	Jane Yolen	Northampton Wools
DePalma Salon	Jay Pope of Good Dirt Pottery	Old Sturbridge Village
Dick & Jane Carnes	Jeanne Esposito	Peter Shea
East Heaven Hot Tubs	Jim & Gillian Duda	Robin & Ted Diamond
Elements Hot Tubs	Judith Cary-Glover	Salon Divine
Emily Dickinson Museum	Julia Rueschemeyer	Sandy Litchfield
Eric Carle Museum of Picture	Kamel Hassan	Scandihoovians
Book Art	Karen Michaels	Silverscape Designs
Esselon Café	Karen Schweitzer	Sugarloaf Nursery
Fine Arts Center	Knowles Flower Shop	Susan & Steve Abdow
Food for Thought Books	Laughing Dog Cyclery	Todd Felton
Four Seasons Liquors	Leta Herman	Tom Dumm
Garnki Pottery	Linda Bean	University Club
Glax Abdow	Liquors 44	Valley Frame Works
Gold's Gym	Mark Roblee	Valley Veterinary Hospital
Gregory's Pastry Shop	Marlene & John Musante	Valley Computer Works
Hadley Garden Center	Maureen O'Leary & Rafael Fissore	Wanda & Jerzy Kokurewicz

Youth America Grand Prix

By Mitch Gaslin



Left Ethan Schweitzer-Gaslin

Below: Kenna Tyrrell

photos by YAGP



What do you get when you combine some 250 talented ballet students, an absolutely gorgeous theater, and a lovely March weekend in Torrington, Connecticut? The regional semi-finals of the tenth annual Youth America Grand Prix ballet competition!

For the first time, five Upper School students from AB (**Aliya Cycon, Marissa Ho, Camille Kemache, Ethan Schweitzer-Gaslin and Kenna Tyrrell**) — along with dutiful parents, director Mrs. Fair, and senior instructor Sueann Townsend — attended this competition, which bills itself as “the world’s largest student ballet scholarship competition.”

For the students and their teachers, however, the road to Torrington began in the fall when Mrs. Fair and Sueann, with input from the dancers, selected a classical ballet variation for each student (or in Ethan’s case, two variations) designed to show off their skills, as well as to help them work on areas of dance that they may need to focus on. Weekly coaching sessions throughout the winter helped the dancers put together beautiful variations to take to the stage in Connecticut.

With Ethan competing in the youth age group (12-14 years old), and the girls in the senior division (15-19 years old), each dancer had a wonderful experience bonding

with, and supporting each other, as well as getting to meet other amazing young dancers from throughout the northeast. In addition to performing their variations in front of an appreciative audience for four world-renowned dance instructor/judges, the dancers were also fortunate to participate in five hours of classes with these same judges on Sunday following the competition.

As all of the participating dancers will happily tell you, this was a remarkable experience for each of them, and will surely help them in their future dance endeavors.

*Postscript from Catherine Fair, director:
Congratulations to Ethan Schweitzer-Gaslin for being invited to New York City to participate in the finals of the Youth America Grand Prix Competition!*

Ballet Has No Age Limits

Amherst Ballet offers classes for children aged 3 and older. Did you know that AB also has a large and growing cadre of adult dancers? Why should the kids have all the fun? Ballet is a means to fitness throughout the life span. Flexibility, muscle tone, balance, strength, grace and movement to music know no age limits.

AB's adult students are young and middle-aged, male and female, people who have danced for 30 years and people who had never danced before. Some of the parents of our younger dancers have joined in, seeing how much fun their kids are having. We even have a few 30 year old dancers who remember taking dance classes and attending summer dance camps at AB when they were 5 years old.

AB offers two levels of dance class to adults: a beginning class and an intermediate/advanced class. Director Catherine Fair and her beginning class were recently featured in an article written by Sarah Dunlap in the Living/Health section of the Daily Hampshire Gazette. Catherine's beginning ballet class is for adults

and teens who have never danced or are returning to the studio after many years. The class draws students from nearby high schools and the 5 colleges/University and community members from throughout the Valley. Catherine says that adult beginners progress quickly because their motivation and coordination are usually quite high.

AB Senior Instructor Sueann Townsend teaches our adult intermediate/advanced class. She has a loyal group of regulars who attend class whenever the rigors of parenting, employment, school work and life allow them the time. Some of these adult students have danced for more than 30 years. Like the beginning students, these dancers come from all over the Valley to work at the barre and do floor work. Some know each other well and having been taking classes together for a long time.

If you are interested in trying an adult class, please check AB's website and look for the Adult Registration Form. We'd love to see you back in the studio!

Where are they now? News of former AB students & faculty

Teacher **Ariel Cohen** has had an interesting year. In the fall she and her dance partner Kellie Ann Lynch received a Massachusetts Cultural Council grant for choreography. In January they moved their dance company *slipperyfish dance* to New York...

Former teacher **Jenny Bennett-Mansur** is living in Chicago and teaching at three schools there and says Chicago "is no Western Mass."...

Alumnae **Eliza Arsenault, Hannah Goodwin, Galya Ponomareva, Carolina DeGroot, Anna Caldwell, Margaret Woodbridge, Ella Stocker** and **Lydia Wileden** met at local restaurant Pasta e Basta while they were all home this past December. See more information on Eliza and Hannah in

the Love Notes article in this newsletter...

Lydia Wileden spent last summer in New York City serving as an intern in the Marketing Department at New York City Center, a theater that hosts many dance companies. She worked on marketing *Damn Yankees* and the *September Fall for Dance Festival*. Lydia is currently a sophomore at Barnard College...

Meghan Oefinger who danced as Aslan in *The Magician's Nephew* sent email in August. She's no longer dancing but she has "found a passion in improving the quality of life through the promotion of exercise." To that end she is finishing a BS with majors in both exercise science and psychology at Slippery Rock University. She did an internship at the Verizon Wireless Health and

Wellness Center in Laurel, Maryland where she "enjoyed the process of educating corporate employees (aka regular people!) and assisting them in various health related behavior changes...employees can come use the fitness center and attend classes while they are at work!" She hopes to be employed for a few years working with "the people who cannot motivate themselves as well to live a healthier life" and then to pursue a graduate degree.

Please let us know where **YOU** are these days and what you're doing. Send your news to info@amherstballet.org or drop us a card at 29 Strong Street. And if you're in the area, please stop in to say hello and see what Amherst Ballet is up to!



Amherst Ballet
29 Strong Street
Amherst, MA 01002

Non-Profit Org.
US Postage Paid
Amherst, MA
01002
Permit #119

Catherine Fair *Director*
Andrea Leibson *Office Manager*
Therese Brady Donohue *Founder*

BOARD OF DIRECTORS

Jeanne Esposito, *President*
Carlton Ho, *Vice-President*
Heidi Stemple, *Secretary*
Mitch Gaslin, *Treasurer*
Susan Abdow
Stephen Braun
Annette Cycon
Jan Kelly
Marlene Musante
Maureen O'Leary
Julia Reuschmeyer
Peter Shea
Jane Wald

ADVISORY BOARD

James Duda
Pam Glaven
John Montanari
Deanne S. Riddle
Stan Rosenberg
Howard Sonoda
Ellen Story

Upcoming Events

SAT, APRIL 18	School Vacation begins at 12:30; no Level C.
APR 18 – 21	YAGP FINALS, NYC
APRIL 20 – 25	School Vacation. Some <i>Emily of Amherst</i> rehearsals scheduled. Classes resume April 28
MAY 13 – 14	Dress & tech rehearsals at Kirby Theater, Amherst College
THUR, MAY 14	NO LEVEL C, NO LEVEL A, NO JAZZ 3 OR 4, NO ADULT BALLETT.
FRI, MAY 15	NO REGULAR CLASSES. Daytime public schools performances of <i>Emily of Amherst.</i>
FRI, MAY 15	7:00 pm performance: <i>Emily of Amherst</i>
SAT, MAY 16	ALL LOWER SCHOOL CLASS DANCES REHEARSALS at Kirby Theater.
SAT, MAY 16	2:00pm matinee performance: Lower School Class Dances & <i>Emily of Amherst.</i> 7:00pm performance: <i>Emily of Amherst</i>
SUN, MAY 17	2:00pm matinee performance: Lower School Class Dances & <i>Emily of Amherst.</i> 4:30: Afternoon Tea fundraiser at The Homestead. 7:00pm performance: <i>Emily of Amherst</i>
MON, MAY 25	No Classes. Memorial Day