

Falling in Love with Dance, a San Antonio Ballet

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By [Melanie Robinson](#)

For those of you that don't know, my lovely editor [Iris Dimmick](#) allows me to rant and rave about the arts in San Antonio because I am marketing coordinator at the local performing arts nonprofit, [ARTS San Antonio](#) (ARTS SA). The sheer quantity of the word "art" in that first sentence should allude to the fact that I am, at the very least, exposed to art more than your average San Antonian would ever want to be. I embrace the love of all that is creative though, and answer to the call of "hipster" by its colloquial definition and enjoy both vegan cupcakes and poetry readings.

Editor's note: False. I let her do it because she's good at it – she could work at McDonald's for all I care. However, I'm very glad her talents are put to good use at ARTS SA (and with us at the Rivard Report).

That being said, ballet has never been my forté. I danced a little in high school and saw *The Nutcracker* before I was old enough to remember the storyline, but I didn't appreciate the classical form much and saw little in terms of entertainment value. Fate is funny in that it tends to screw me over most days. I graduated from college and accepted my position at ARTS SA; I was subsequently asked to learn about, market, and promote four ballets. That makes about 16,000 seats that I needed to fill for performances of an art form I didn't yet appreciate. Needless to say, a great deal of Google-ing and YouTube-ing ensued.



Romeo and Juliet. Prima Ballerina Olga Pavlova and Principal Dancer Yevgeni Anfinogenov. Photo by Edward Casati, courtesy of ARTS SA.

October rolled around and I forced myself to go see [Dracula](#), a production by [Ballet San Antonio](#). By intermission, I was surprised to find myself literally on the edge of my seat out of excitement – and the fact that I was straining to see from my terrible second balcony seats.

Later, from the end of January until March of this year, I was privileged to be a part of ARTS SA's series of events centering on the renowned Chicago-based ballet company, The [Joffrey Ballet](#), and its first appearance in San Antonio in more than 30 years. The Joffrey performed two modern works and the production culminated in the recreation of the groundbreaking [The Rite of Spring](#) on its 100th anniversary, which caused a riot in the theatre during its 1913 debut in Paris. Witnessing The Joffrey perform was breathtaking. I quickly found myself falling through the rabbit hole of dance filled with ballet slippers and spandex. I was loving every moment of it.



Courtney Barker, executive director of Ballet San Antonio. Courtesy Photo.

Courtney Mauro Barker, Executive Director of Ballet San Antonio, noted that ARTS SA's presentation of The Joffrey Ballet was a significant moment for dance in San Antonio.

“It was amazing; bringing a ballet company like The Joffrey helps educate San Antonio about ballet in general. We have done surveys that indicate our residents are going to other Texas towns to see ballet,” Barker said. “There is definitely an audience out there, but we have to figure out how to keep them in SA to watch our performances.”

In terms of support of dance in San Antonio, Barker feels we are still lacking. “People are still unaware that we have a professional ballet studio. Our solution is to present ballet with a recognizable name in the hopes of bringing in a different range of audience members,” she said.

With that in mind, [Ballet SA's upcoming season](#) will kick off with Ben Stevenson's *Cinderella* and will feature a variety of notable works, concluding with *The Firebird*.

Ballet SA will be the resident ballet company of the [Tobin Center of the Performing Arts](#) upon its completion, and Barker sees the new theatre as a great platform for dance. She anticipates an uphill struggle, yet sees much promise for progression.

ARTS SA has presented its fair share of dance performances during its 2012-13 season. Most recently, the all-male spoof company, [Les Ballets Trockadero de Monte Carlo](#), graced the [Lila Cockrell Theatre](#). Dancing *en pointe*, the men were both hilarious and talented and even closed out the show with some booty shaking as a disco ball was lowered on stage.



The boss man, John Toohey Executive Director of ARTS SA, is all smiles this season. Photo by Melanie Robinson.

My mentor and Executive Director of ARTS SA, John Toohey, prides himself on presenting artists of the highest quality with nothing less than a globally significant resume. He has an extensive background in the performing arts, including serving as managing director of Texas Ballet Theatre for three years.

“San Antonio has a long and nationally respected tradition of presenting and fostering great dance. A number of professional dancers have come from San Antonio and the city has a reputation of being a great place for companies to come and perform,” Toohey said.

[San Antonio Metropolitan Ballet](#) (SAMet) is a company that deserves some time in the spotlight as well. The pre-professional company is dedicated to providing high-quality, low-cost dance productions in the community while offering young dancers the opportunity to expand their experience. SAMet has partnered with ARTS SA on a number of events, including the mammoth of a production: [The Nutcracker](#).



SAMet Artistic Director Susan Connally. Courtesy Photo.

Artistic Director, Susan Connally, says SAMet brings guests artists from some of the best American and international companies, but is discouraged by our patron’s tendency to buy more often when they see a foreign name such as the Moscow Ballet’s *Great Russian Nutcracker* or [Shen Yun](#). Rather than purchasing tickets to these out-of-town companies, performing arts organizations would ideally like to see the money filtered back to supporting their endeavors.

Toohey feels the city’s support for performing arts institutions still has not fully recovered from the Great Recession.

“The money that families use to buy tickets to a performance is discretionary and a willingness to part with that money is based on one, having the money in the first place, and two, having optimism and confidence in their personal financial position.”

Loss of revenue and redirection of funding are our biggest obstacles in the performing arts world, and while we in the business regret this redirection of charitable giving, we understand the motivation. Arts programming is the first to go in times of hardship, and

we are seeing trends of giving shift toward quality of education for children even though volumes of research demonstrate that students who benefit from an arts education perform far better academically than those students who are not exposed to the arts.

Ultimately, Toohey says, “Sophistication is a function of exposure. The more experiences an individual has, the more discerning he or she will be in choosing what to do. The work we invest will therefore benefit other dance institutions. It will help to re-acquaint audiences with what these companies do, but there is undoubtedly pressure to perform at a level to retain those audiences.”



Romeo and Juliet. Prima Ballerina Olga Pavlova and Principal Dancer Yevgeni Anfinogenov. Photo by Edward Casati, courtesy of ARTS SA.

Translation? Go see ARTS SA's upcoming performance of Romeo and Juliet this Wednesday, May 1, at 7:30 p.m. at the Majestic Theatre. The performance will showcase internationally recognized principal dancers Olga Pavlova and Yevgeni Anfinogenov and choreography by Paul Mejia, whom *The New York Times* has called, "Fluent and sophisticated in his approach to movement." After that, check out some performances from Ballet San Antonio and San Antonio Metropolitan Ballet and support local dance.

[Melanie Robinson](#) graduated with a Bachelor of Arts in English with a Concentration in Professional Writing and a minor in Anthropology from the [University of Texas at San Antonio](#) in December 2011. Her current Marketing position at the local nonprofit organization [ARTS San Antonio](#) has afforded her the opportunity to further explore her love of the arts. She now spends her nights among local musicians, artists and poets – finding beauty in self-expression. You can contact Melanie through [Facebook](#).