

SUN VALLEY BALLET IS *EN POINTE* FOR THE FUTURE

By Sabina Dana Plasse



The combination of balance, focus, muscle memory, and discipline, along with a significant dash of elegance, may easily describe a World Cup skier, a Formula 1 sports car racer, or a student at the Sun Valley Ballet school. Ballet is perhaps one of the most physically and mentally demanding disciplines of body movement in the world. Those who love it often use it to excel in many of life's other adventures and challenges. For 39 years, the Sun Valley Ballet School has held high standards and beliefs of ballet as an artistic and athletic pursuit for Wood River Valley ballet students since its inception.

In 2016-17, the Sun Valley Ballet is poised to continue elevating its dedication to ballet education, classes, and expansion with a new artistic director, new programming, and a capital campaign, expanding their scope to include the presentation of national dance events and performances in Sun Valley.

Leading this effort, among others, is Sun Valley Ballet's Artistic Director Anna Duvall, who sports an impressive resume. She was a first-place scholarship recipient of the Denver Ballet Guild and among the first Americans invited to study at the Bolshoi Ballet Academy in Moscow where she received a full scholarship, a story which garnered international news coverage from both CNN and the *Moscow Times*. Upon returning to the United States, she danced with the San Francisco Ballet and Colorado Ballet School, also on full scholarship.

Connected to a variety of international personalities, Duvall found a guest artist opportunity in Japan to perform, teach, and further her training. In December 2015, again on scholarship, Duvall completed her Master of Arts degree at New York University in conjunction with the American Ballet Theatre's Pedagogy (dance) Program, to expand her teaching credentials. The American Ballet Theatre has developed a National Training Curriculum that has a special focus on the health and proper development of the dancer, with an emphasis on technique or artistry and the physicality of dance.

"Coming to Sun Valley was an opportunity for me to grow professionally and the Sun Valley Ballet was open to adopting the American Ballet Theatre® curriculum, which I am certified to teach at all ages and levels of proficiency. This was an opportunity to build



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Opposite page: Dancers of the Sun Valley Ballet School. Above (from left to right): Sun Valley Ballet Foundation Board of Directors President Daryl Fauth, Sun Valley Ballet Foundation past president and current director Nadja Hirner, and Sun Valley Ballet Director Anna Duvall.

upon my life experiences," reveals Duvall, who is originally from Denver, Colorado, and moved to Sun Valley from Manhattan in 2016. Instilling the fundamentals of ballet technique and instructing on the artistry of dance is a large part of Duvall's passion to build the program.

"We have dancers of all shapes and sizes, and strongly support diversity; both cultural and economic," tells Duvall. "You have no idea who will become an accomplished dancer. It's about focus and passion and a deep desire to learn. When I taught girls internationally, who had no exposure to ballet, they were some of my best students because they were so hungry for knowledge and growth."

Sun Valley Ballet's roots can be traced back to 1984 when former dancer Paula Caputo moved to Sun Valley. An accomplished artist residing in New York City and member of the City Center Opera Ballet Company and Charles Weidman Dance Company, Caputo danced with the New York City Ballet in 1948, delighting audiences under the tutelage of George Balanchine and Jerome Robbins, both renowned masters of the art.

Caputo became the Director of the Sun Valley Ballet School in 1985, bringing focus and passion to its scholastic program and creating a pre-professional ballet

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—Anna Duvall, Sun Valley Ballet
Artistic Director

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school for serious students of dance. Three years later, she founded the Sun Valley Summer Dance Festival, an annual event that graced the Valley with world-class dancers from the Joffrey Ballet for a run of five years. In addition, she choreographed musicals presented by the Laughing Stock Theatre Group, an arts mainstay of the Valley.

"Thirty-nine years ago, there was a group of women who desired to develop a robust ballet program, and with Paula Caputo they founded the Ballet School," explains Nadja Hirner, a Sun Valley Ballet Foundation past president and current director, who joined the organization a mere 26 years ago, when her elder daughter began to dance ballet. "Paula had a small student body, supported by a few other teachers. My two daughters danced there. My volunteering began with designing and crafting costumes those many years ago."

In 1982, Hirner left Kufstein, Austria, to relocate to Sun Valley and work as a nanny. With a degree from a fashion





Opposite page: Dancer Ida Belle Gorby plays Clara in *The Nutcracker*. Right: Sun Valley Ballet's young dancers await their performance.

design school in Innsbruck, Austria, it didn't take long for Sun Valley Ballet to discover that Hirner was a European designer with a flair for the arts. Twenty-six years later, she's still creating tutus and other costumes that compare to those of major ballet companies around the world.

As a male supporter to the future of the ballet school, Daryl Fauth, the Sun Valley Ballet Foundation Board of Directors President, may seem like an unlikely choice to lead the non-profit. But as the father of a committed dancer, he quickly became involved with the school.

"I saw all the hard work and commitment that deeply moved me. What began as supporting my daughter's passion by simply volunteering to help with productions, morphed into an invitation to join the board," says Fauth.

"Initially, I joined the board as treasurer and then was elected as president. We have an active board of both men and women, parents

and just plain aficionados, with a deep love of the arts. With Anna Duval as the Artistic Director, we're able to bring a fresh outlook and commitment to Sun Valley Ballet and our community."

Ballet is considered to be an important building block for sports, providing and developing the discipline of balance. A background in ballet helps ski racers improve their edge control, stamina, and drive. Sun Valley Ballet has a number of boys who partake in classes and participate in performances. Fauth says, "The number of NFL players who take ballet and swear by it is well documented. In 2014 the Dallas Cowboys installed ballet bars for training. Everyone should be exposed to ballet. It's a foundation for sports, life, and so much more."

According to Hirner, "In Italy, ski racers take ballet classes for building balance. It's not just dance, it's a combination of experiences, physically, mentally, and artistically. It's so

important to have art; exposure to dance and performance experiences pays off later in life. The children in the Wood River Valley have this wonderful opportunity to be exposed to these life lessons with the Sun Valley Ballet."

The Sun Valley Ballet board's goal is to create a school that is self-sustaining as well as building community awareness of the program. To meet these goals, the Sun Valley Ballet Foundation (a non-profit 501c(3) organization) has launched a capital campaign to resurrect the Sun Valley International Dance Festival with full-length featured ballets and educational opportunities for the Valley's youth, and to support its day to day operations and scholarship programs, ensuring that every qualifying child who wishes to dance may do so. The scholarship program is available to all who desire to dance regardless of means and is a core value of the foundation. In 2016, the Sun Valley Ballet Foundation presented \$10,575 in scholarships. The "Paula Caputo Scholarship Award," which exists in Caputo's honor, as an annual merit-based full tuition grant from the Sun Valley Ballet Foundation, is available to all students who attend the Sun Valley Ballet School, ages three years old through the 12th grade.

"Creating the International Dance Festival is something I am dedicated to and plan on making a reality for the 2018 summer season," reveals Duval. "I also would like to expand our class offerings to include a Baby Ballet class for mothers and their young ones as well as summer classes and a continuous outreach effort for Sun Valley Ballet throughout the Valley."

Sun Valley Ballet Artistic Director Anna Duval is presenting an excerpt of "Coppélia" in 2017 for the spring performance. One of the most frequently performed and well-loved comic ballets, "Coppélia" presents lovable characters and is among the first comedic ballets from the romantic period. It was first performed over 100 years ago in Paris in 1870, and was an immediate success—a great relief from the heavy and sad ballets of that time. While "Coppélia" was triumphant at its premiere, there were only 18 performances before the invasion of France by the Prussian army, shuttering the production. Eventually it would be presented over 500 times and become the most performed ballet at the Paris Opera.

For more information about supporting Sun Valley Ballet or for class descriptions and schedules, visit sunvalleyballet.com, call 208.806.1441 or email sunvalleyballet.com.