

By Jocelyn Anderson

# Sacramento Ballet

Audiences get a little bit of everything from Sacramento Ballet.

Sacramento Ballet Co-Artistic Director Ron Cunningham likes it when guest choreographers praise his company for its positive working environment—being “a safe place for dancers to take risks.”

That is just what he and his wife, Co-Artistic Director Carinne Binda, have tried to create in the California company over the last 16 years. “We are a very tight family, so to speak,” Cunningham says. “And as dancers come and go, we’ve been able to maintain that spirit, which makes us, we feel, dance collectively always better than we are individually.”

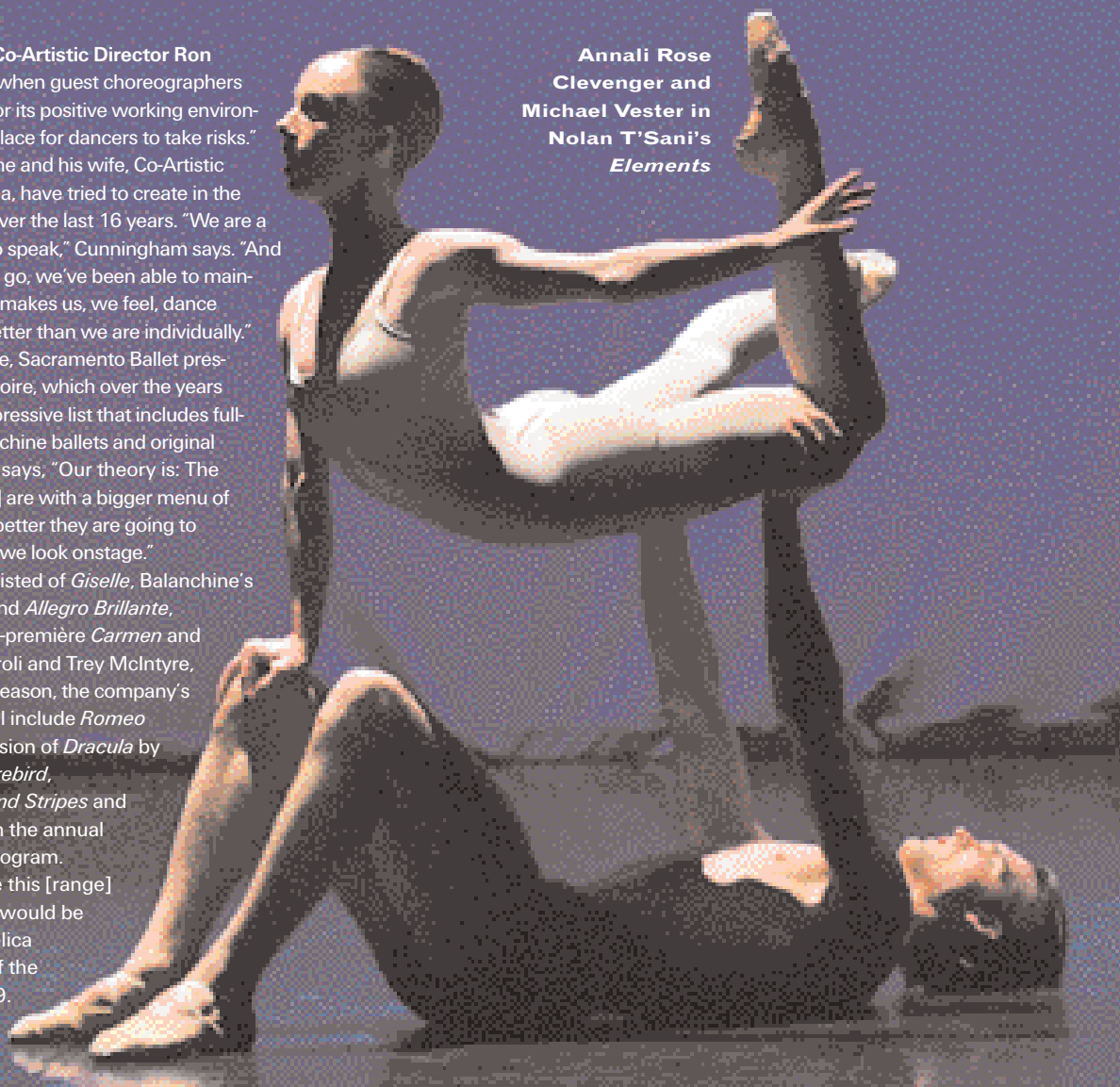
In this atmosphere, Sacramento Ballet presents its diverse repertoire, which over the years has swelled to an impressive list that includes full-length classics, Balanchine ballets and original works. Cunningham says, “Our theory is: The happier [the dancers] are with a bigger menu of ballets to dance, the better they are going to dance and the better we look onstage.”

This season consisted of *Giselle*, Balanchine’s *Agon*, *Who Cares?* and *Allegro Brillante*, Cunningham’s world-première *Carmen* and works by Val Caniparoli and Trey McIntyre, among others. Next season, the company’s 50th anniversary, will include *Romeo and Juliet*, a new version of *Dracula* by Cunningham, *The Firebird*, Balanchine’s *Stars and Stripes* and *Serenade*, along with the annual “Modern Masters” program.

“If we could have this [range] in every company, it would be amazing,” says Angelica Burgos, a member of the company since 1999.

“It’s very much an environment that a lot of dancers would

Annali Rose  
Clevenger and  
Michael Vester in  
Nolan T’Sani’s  
*Elements*



Jay Mather

want to be in because you want to be able to perform a little bit of everything.”

Because the company is not ranked, everyone gets an opportunity to dance a variety of roles. “If you work hard, they will use you,” says Jack Hansen, a member since 2000. “If you don’t, you will be stuck in the back doing nothing. I wouldn’t want to do that because I hate being in the back. I love being up front. That’s why I work as hard as I can.”

The directors look for dancers with potential who will contribute to the camaraderie of the group. “We like a dancer who has versatility and a lot of room to grow,” Cunningham says. “Because we are still a smaller company, we often will take a dancer who we feel needs some finishing, but has something special.”

Cunningham and Binda have also been working on expanding the company’s audience outside of Northern California. This season, Sacramento Ballet performed *Giselle* in Fresno and plans to return there with *The Nutcracker* and a mixed bill next season. Also in the works is a new Sacramento studio, and possibly an official school, in the next two years.

Most importantly, “Ron and Carinne respect their dancers,” Hansen says, “so if the dancers show respect to them, it’s a win-win situation. Everyone is working for that one goal, which is being onstage and presenting the best performance possible.”

## AT A GLANCE

**Number of dancers:** 21, plus four to five apprentices

**Contract length:** 33 weeks

**Official school:** Deane Dance Center is an affiliate school.

**Performances per year:** 50 to 60

**Auditions:** Annually in New York City, occasionally in other major cities and by appointment.

**Website:** [www.sacballet.org](http://www.sacballet.org)