

scene

CULINARY & CULTURE GUIDE



THE TROCKS RETURN TO WORTHAM WITH MORE
MIRTH AND GRACE

COVER STORY

The Trocks return to Wortham with more mirth and grace

Hayley Benton Special to Scene

The lights go up, the curtains draw back, and six male ballerinas, dressed in drag, take the stage, their tulle skirts fluttering to the rhythm of Tchaichovsky's score in "Swan Lake." Four dancers twirl their way to stage left, while two others sashay to the right.

• The visual imbalance, however, is an error — and, frantically realizing her mistake, the out-of-place dancer collides with her neighbor in a flurry of flowing fabric. At any other ballet, a scene like this might harm a company's reputation. But at Les Ballets Trockadero de Monte Carlo, laughter is a welcome response to an evening of calculated absurdity. • In fact, the all-male company often touts its performances as "the most fun you will ever have at the ballet." But, despite the comic nature of its productions, these performers' prowess *en pointe* is no joke. • "They're all professional, classically trained ballet dancers, and they're also comedians," said Tory Dobrin, artistic director of "The Trocks," as the company is lovingly known to fans. Dancing the line between drag and ballet, the show appeals to "people who love ballet and people who don't — people who love comedy, people who love drag, and it's really fun for children, as well."

In other words: You don't need to love dance to love The Trocks, but for those that do, the talent of the performers, the spin on classic works and the hidden in-jokes are all the more enjoyable.

Back in Asheville by popular demand this Valentine's Day, The Trocks are bringing a fresh set of works from their repertory — including a campy, joke-filled version of "Swan Lake Act II," the separate yet similarly themed solo ballet "The Dying Swan," and the seductive, Spanish-style ballet "Majisimas," a play on Cuban choreographer Jorge García's "Majísimo."

"We try to make the program very diverse so that the audience gets a little bit of everything," Dobrin explained. "They'll hear different types of music, see different colors on different styles of costumes, be entertained by different personalities — and that's what we're always aiming to

do: show variation on stage."

And while it's easy to document, in detail, the training and talent that go into performing classical ballet repertoire with athletic artistry and technical expertise, "the comedy aspect is harder to talk about," Dobrin said. "You just have to experience it. For instance," he continued, "when we're in rehearsal, we keep everything very fun, very loose. The comedy just comes out naturally and spontaneously. Some of it we keep, and some of it we don't. It's a way to always find freshness in the work."

Founded in 1974, Les Ballets Trockadero de Monte Carlo was created by ballet enthusiasts to playfully parody the beloved art form, using comedy to enhance rather than mock the spirit of the works. Now on the eve of its 50th birthday, not much has changed in terms of how The



Members of The Trocks perform "Nightcrawlers." PHOTOS BY ZORAN JELENIC/PROVIDED

Trocks present themselves and their work on stage — though the audience for drag ballet has certainly grown in the last half-century.

The Trocks last performed in Asheville in 2018 at the Wortham Center for the Performing Arts, the same stage they're returning to for their upcoming Feb. 14 and 15 shows. More recently, however, locals may remember attending the company's virtual drag makeup workshop, hosted by the Wortham Center, at the height of the pandemic in 2021.

"Makeup is such an important element of the show, not necessarily for the audience, but for the dancers themselves," Dobrin said. "Before the show, the guys are all sitting in front of the mirror putting on their makeup, and it's really a way to chill out and get ready for the performance." The pandemic was "such a chaotic time for everyone," and that workshop gave The Trocks a chance to share that mo-

IF YOU GO

What: Les Ballets Trockadero de Monte Carlo

When: 8 p.m. Feb 14 and 15

Where: Wortham Center for the Performing Arts, 18 Biltmore Ave., downtown Asheville

Tickets: \$20-\$58 at worthamarts.org

ment of calm — and a part of themselves — with their fans.

Having resumed a touring schedule within the last year, Dobrin said it feels great to be back in their element. "The energy has been great," he said. "We're so excited to be back; we're still sort of riding that high — so now is a great time to come see us."



The Trocks perform "Out Of Line."