

## An Evening of "Brahms, Britten & Ballet."

by SALLY VALLONGO. BLADE STAFF WRITER.

Quickly, what color comes to mind when you think of Johannes Brahms' famous over-the-top romantic song cycle, *Liebeslieder Waltzes*? Nigel Burgoine thought heliotrope - perhaps the most intense version of lavender the eye can spy. Forget red. Heliotrope is THE color of passion, especially the feelings conjured by Brahms in his first collection of 18 songs all about L-O-V-E. "It was the color that came to mind as I listened to the songs," Burgoine said. So heliotrope trimmed with spring flowers is what Ballet Theatre of Toledo dancers will wear when they perform Burgoine's choreography to the Brahms masterpiece, sung by Masterworks Chorale. Chorale artistic director and conductor Donna Tozer Wipfli invited the company to collaborate for its "Brahms, Britten & Ballet" program at 8 p.m. Saturday in the Maumee Center for Performing Arts, 1147 Saco St., Maumee (adjacent to Maumee High School).

"It adds this new element to the music," Tozer Wipfli said recently, during a break from rehearsal. "It enhances the music. Both composers and choreographers are inspired by shape, line, rhythm, and phrase. When those components are successfully blended, the experience is rich and moving." In her 18th year leading the group - it's celebrating its own 35th anniversary this season - Tozer Wipfli will conduct the 40-member choir in English madrigals, Benjamin Britten's *Choral Dances* from his opera, *Gloriana*, also with dancers, and the Brahms. It should be an evening to delight eyes, ears, and soul.

Fresh from the triumph of his original dance production, *Aladdin*, in March, Burgoine has found in the Brahms inspiration for a very different style of dance. "It's lovely to have the story line," Burgoine said, adding: "I find with music like this, challenging the dancers to express themselves with movement and music rather than a story, is very exciting. "It's more abstract. It's been very interesting watching how the students see one group doing one piece, then another, and how they're having to change mood and change choreography in a very short space of time." This is not the first time Tozer Wipfli and Burgoine have collaborated. "In previous years we've done *Carmina Burana*, the *Missa Kenya*, and the *Faure Requiem* with Nigel's dancers," Tozer Wipfli noted. Her singers respond well to the addition of movement. "They see it in a new way, interpreted in movement. They are really in tune with the text." Burgoine's dancers are equally inspired by the musicianship of Masterworks singers, he notes. "You can see it in the dancer's faces, the minute they hear the singers' quality," he said. "It inspires them." While choreographing the Brahms songs is all about the waltz in various tempos - and trying to establish subtle differences between each - Burgoine also set Britten's energetic *Choral Dances* for his company. They will wear pale blue for this performance. "The way it jumps backwards and forwards, I find that challenging and exciting choreographically," Burgoine said, adding, "And then it has a very soft ending." Pianists Jill Roth and Michael Boyd will accompany the Brahms; the madrigals and Britten will be sung a cappella. Tickets for the Masterworks Chorale/Ballet Theatre of Toledo "Brahms, Britten & Ballet" performance at 8 p.m. Saturday in the Maumee Center for the Performing Arts, 1147 Saco St., Maumee (adjacent to Maumee High School), are \$25 for reserved seats and \$20 for general admission. They can be ordered at 419-246-8000.

Contact Sally Vallongo at: [svalongo@theblade.com](mailto:svalongo@theblade.com).