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## 'Giselle': Dancers tell classic story of lost love

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Dancer Linnea Johnson says Ballet Theatre of Toledo's upcoming production of *Giselle* gives her the "Wilis". And she's loving every minute of it. "The Wilis are dramatic and haunting," she said, during a recent rehearsal at the company's Holland headquarters. "It's a very unique ghost story." Indeed, the Wilis are ghosts, spirits of young maidens who have died, deserted, on their wedding day, and then returned to wreak vengeance on those who have wronged them, and to recruit new members.

*Giselle*, who falls for a nobleman in disguise and turns away from her humble true love, only to die after the deception is uncovered, is perhaps the ultimate Wili. Wilis wear the traditional long white tulle skirts — layers of sheer and floaty fabric — that lend a ghostly quality to the 19th-century ballet by Adolphe Adam.

The BTT version has been choreographed and staged by artistic director Nigel Burgoine, after the original 1841 Parisian version by Jean Coralli and Jules Perrot. "It's wonderful to keep it as a classic," notes Burgoine, who skipped over the more ubiquitous, later version of *Giselle* by Marius Petipa.

Of Coralli and Perrot, who helped advance classical ballet, he says: "Their work is what made the ballet a stand-out from the circus." Female dancers, by then, had learned to dance on tiptoe, wafting in rapid, tiny steps — the bourree — across the stage en masse. The evanescent effect was heightened by those white tulle skirts.

The concept gave rise to the term "White Ballet," used to describe *Giselle* and other classics such as *Swan Lake* and *Les Sylphides*, which employed a corps of dancers moving smoothly together.

Costumes for the other roles are lavish and traditional, as is the scenery. Both were created in Russia and are being used by BTT for its two performances next weekend in the Maumee Performing Arts Center. Also imported will be dancers for the major roles. The ill-fated heroine *Giselle* will be portrayed by Tricia Sundbeck; Jay Goodlett will dance the role of her deceitful lover, Albrecht. Both dancers are professionals with the Cincinnati Ballet, where Burgoine worked before coming to Toledo.

Appearing in the part of Hilarion, *Giselle*'s true love, will be John Thomas Bell, a former All-American diver who has danced with professional companies across the country. Returning to town as the Duke of Courland is Richard Helldobler, a former Toledo dancer who now is active in dance and higher education in western Pennsylvania.

Helldobler will be reunited with a former dance partner, Anne Marie Getz, associate BTT artistic director, who is portraying Bathilde, Albrecht's spurned fiancee.

Hannah Meyers, 11, who will be a Waltz Girl in Act I and a Wili in Act II, says, "My favorite part is when *Giselle* comes out and leads everybody to dance." And Spencer Hack, 11, a Waltz Boy, says he likes the Peasant pas de deux best. "It's nice and simple," he notes.

Two cast members who have not yet voiced their opinions are retired show dogs Fizzy and Cash, graceful Irish setters who will appear at the end of Act I in the hunting party scene.

The Ballet Theatre of Toledo production, "*Giselle*," is to open at 7 p.m. Saturday with a second performance at 2 p.m. April 6, in the Maumee Performing Arts Center, 1147 Saco St., at Maumee High School. Tickets are \$17 to \$34 at [www.ballettheatreoftoledo.org](http://www.ballettheatreoftoledo.org) or 419-861-0895.

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