

LIFE & ARTS

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MONDAY, MAY 2, 2011 ■ SECTION D



TV PICKS

Television writer Dale Roe runs down the week's viewing options ■ D2



'Black in Latin America'

PET PROJECT

Emmylou Harris has a new album, an Austin show and dog rescue work that's close to her heart ■ Back page



PAM LEBLANC
FIT CITY

A triathlon in Armstrong's – I mean, Juan Pelota's future?

What's a seven-time Tour de France winner to do once he's hung up the bike?

Turn to triathlon, of course.

Lance Armstrong said early this year that the Santos Tour Down Under in Australia was his last competitive cycling event. Don't mistake that to mean he's done racing.

Based on tweets from Armstrong's triathlon-obsessed alter ego, @juanpelota, he's returning to his roots. ("Pelota," in case you were wondering, means "ball" in Spanish. We'll leave it to you to figure out the reference as it pertains to a testicular cancer survivor like Armstrong.)

Armstrong, who will turn 40 in September, was an accomplished swimmer by the time he was 12. He entered a junior triathlon on a whim, won, and four years later became a professional triathlete. In 1989 and 1990, he was the national sprint-course triathlon champion.

He eventually zeroed in on cycling, going on to win his first Tour in 1999. (He's also been dogged for years by allegations of doping, although none have been proved.)

Armstrong prefers to communicate with the media via his Twitter account these days, so we decided to take a look at @juanpelota's feed.

Pelota's Twitter bio? "Grew up idolizing The Big 4. They used to call me Junior. Retired. Raisin' 5 kids. I swim, I bike, I run. I travel. I fight cancer. And I like cold beer."

The roughly 16,500 people who follow @juanpelota on Twitter (compared with more than 2.8 million who follow @LanceArmstrong) listen in as he jokes and jabs with his training buddies, including Austin triathlete James Bonney, Olympic swimmer Aaron Peirsol and former University of Texas swimmer and "Engine 2 Diet" author Rip Esselstyn, usually in a funky mix of Spanish and English.

Whom @juanpelota follows on Twitter is equally telling: three-time world Ironman Triathlon champion Chrissie Wellington; three-time Ironman champion Chris Lieto; and two-time Ironman world champion Chris McCormack, among others.

Pelota has told his Twitter followers that he swims six or seven days a week and

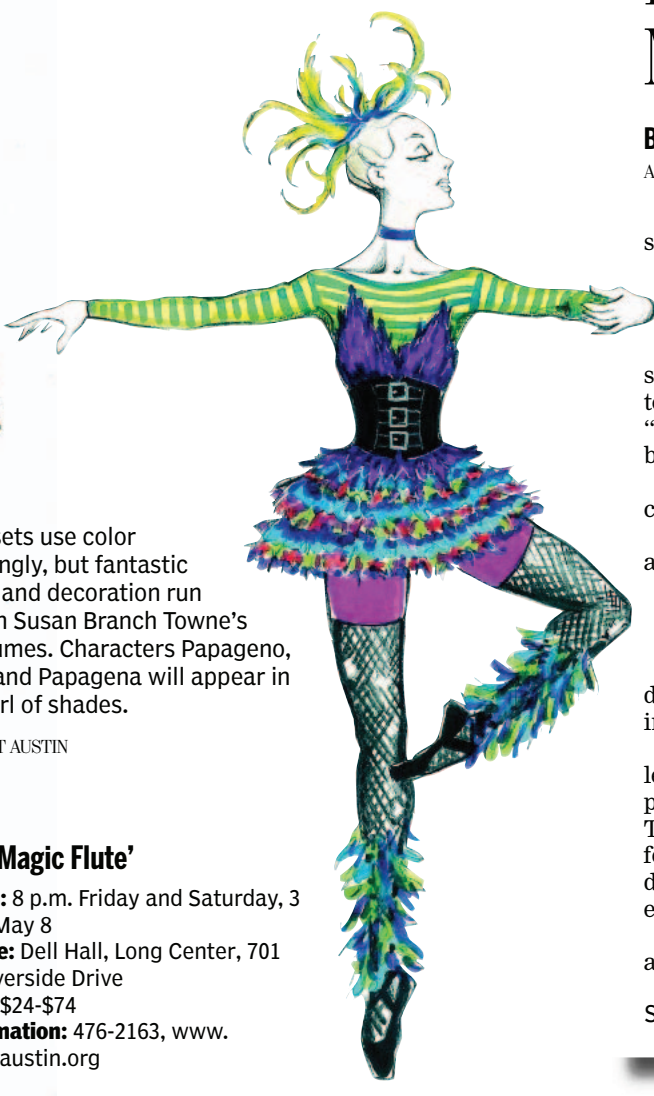
See LEBLANC, D3

ARTS ■ BALLET



Larry Kolvoord AMERICAN-STATESMAN

Silhouettes loom large in Stephen Mills' newest full-length narrative ballet, inspired by a shadow puppet art installation he saw in Venice. 'The Magic Flute' unfolds in a world of shadows.

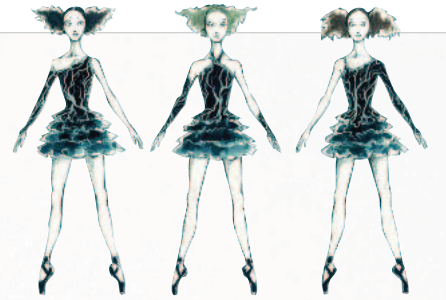


The sets use color sparingly, but fantastic hues and decoration run riot in Susan Branch Towne's costumes. Characters Papageno, left, and Papagena will appear in a swirl of shades.

BALLET AUSTIN

'The Magic Flute'

When: 8 p.m. Friday and Saturday, 3 p.m. May 8
Where: Dell Hall, Long Center, 701 W. Riverside Drive
Cost: \$24-\$74
Information: 476-2163, www.balletaustin.org



BALLET AUSTIN

Muted hues return in the designs for the opera's 'Three Ladies.'

Fanciful light & magic

Mills creates a contemporary reimagining of Mozart's 'Flute'

By Jeanne Claire van Ryzin

AMERICAN-STATESMAN ARTS WRITER

How to turn one of the most treasured operas in the repertoire into a fresh new ballet?

Shadow puppets.

If it seems like an unusual creative solution, it's what tripped the switch for Ballet Austin artistic director Stephen Mills to transform Mozart's "The Magic Flute" into a contemporary ballet.

Credit the low-tech magic of figures cast in shadow and silhouette.

"I've been in the theater for 30 years, and there's very little that's still magic for me," says Mills with a smile. "But there's a simple magic to shadow puppetry I just love."

Mills' "The Magic Flute" opens Friday at the Long Center for the Performing Arts.

It's the first full-length narrative ballet Mills has created since 2008's highly praised "Cult of Color: Call to Color." The choreographer has spent the past few years crafting shorter, non-story-driven dances for the company's repertoire.

And though Mills has in the past created well-received ballets from Shake-

See FLUTE, D6



FLUTE: Inspiration for Austin ballet came from Asia, Spain, art

Continued from D1

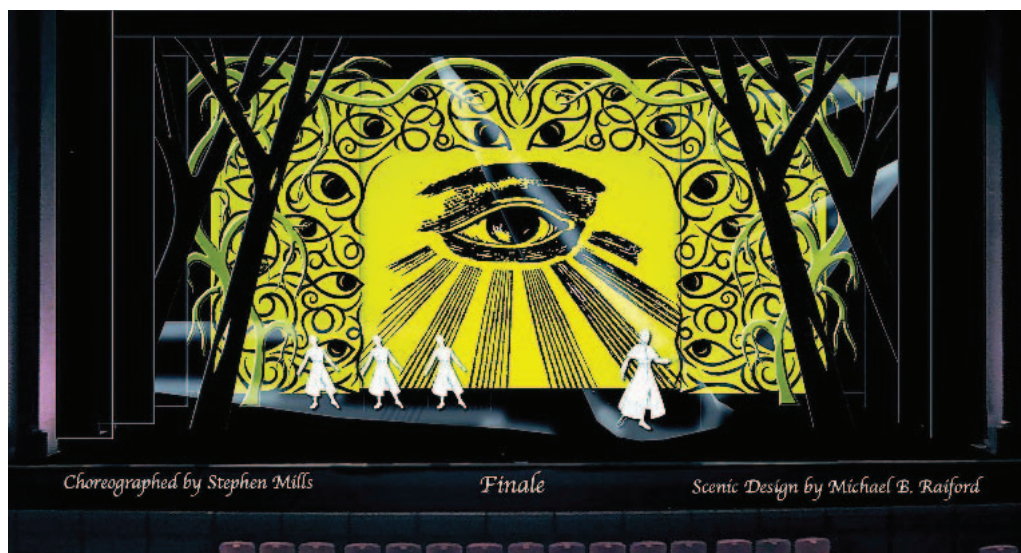
speare's canon — "Hamlet," "A Midsummer Night's Dream," "Romeo and Juliet" and "The Taming of the Shrew" — he had been ruminating on a way to reimagine one of opera's greatest hits. "I like to tell stories," Mills says.

A shadow puppet installation by American artist Paul Chan that Mills spied at the 2009 Venice Biennale sparked his imagination as a means of expressly translating the elaborate allegorical tale.

"Movement in (silhouette or shadow) is very intense," says Mills. "One small gesture can express so much."

Mills called on Austin-based set designer Michael Raiford and shadow puppet creators California-based Shadow Light Productions to collaborate on the innovative production.

In the show, dancers will perform in silhouette and shadow, interacting with puppets that are operated live by the stage crew. Scenic ele-



BALLET AUSTIN

This drawing of the set for the finale of 'The Magic Flute' shows how the different influences came together for a unique concept. Michael B. Raiford did the scenic design.

ments are also formed from silhouette and shadow, making the visual world of the ballet mostly black, white and gray. Color is used sparingly in the sets. And so costume designer Susan Branch Towne infused

the guises for the fantastical cast of characters with vivid color and fanciful detail.

Raiford, who has created set designs previously that incorporate shadow puppets, said he mined a trove of aesthetic

sources to create a unique visual landscape "that has all kinds of a mystery but didn't have too many specifics."

Art historical images, Art Nouveau decorative elements, traditional Asian art, folk

tale illustrations, the almost other-worldly architecture of Antonio Gaudi and of course the symbols of Freemasonry (a prominent element of Mozart's opera; both the composer and the librettist Emanuel Schikaneder were Masons) are just some of the well-springs Raiford tapped to create the setting for the story of a prince vying for a princess in land of mythical creatures.

"There is a familiarity to the imagery, but it resonates as its own world," says Raiford.

Marking the line between the original opera and an all-new contemporary ballet proved the biggest creative challenge



Designer Susan Branch Towne's 'Queen of the Night' comes clad in shades of blue.

BALLET AUSTIN

for the collaborators. After all, "The Magic Flute" is one of the most enduring favorites of the opera canon, its arias pilfered for countless movies and commercials, its metaphorical story and Enlightenment-era political allusions parsed out by generations of scholars.

But whereas an opera can easily be three hours long, that's too long for dancers.

"But if every note is perfect, what do you let go of?" Mills says. "Paring down the score proved one of the biggest challenges."

Mills enlisted the help of composer and University of Texas professor Donald Grantham, who whittled Mozart's musical epic down to a ballet-friendly 90 minutes. Grantham's score omits the opera's stretches of spoken dialogue as well as the vocal parts, letting Mozart's melodies tell the story. The music is played live by the Austin Symphony Orchestra.

"I wanted to produce a space between Mozart's original opera and the new ballet I was creating, and eliminating the singing was one way to do that," says Mills. "I let the movement, the dance tell the story."

And the shadows? "They have their own mystery," he says.

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Itinerary

May 1 Crested Butte, Colo., comes alive in summer

May 8 Grand resorts and spas offer dreamy retreats

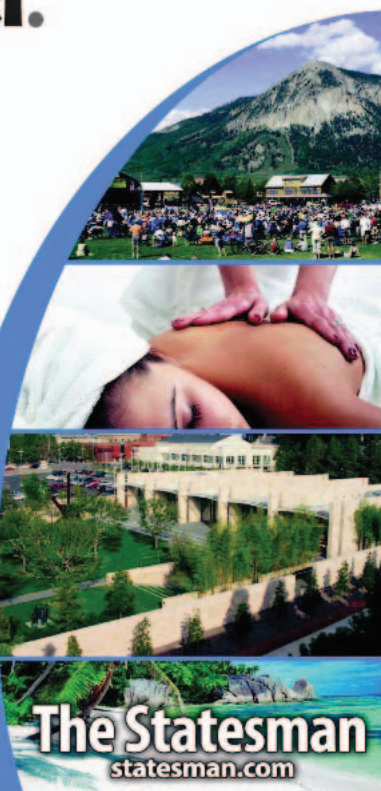
May 15 Dallas is getting greener

May 22 Kick back in Belize

May 29 Plan a family reunion trip

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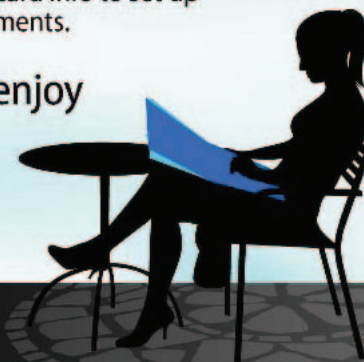
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