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Diablo Ballet's 'Dance on Film' Series Continues at Lafayette Library

By Diane Claytor

Four years ago, Diablo Ballet, headquartered in Walnut Creek, collaborated with the Lafayette Library to bring older, timeless movies featuring music and dance to local audiences during the summer months. The "Dance on Film" series proved to be popular and this month viewers will have the rare opportunity to see a true classic. According to Lauren Jonas, Artistic Director of Diablo Ballet, audiences seem to prefer movies from the 1930s and '40s, the movies that our parents often referred to as real entertainment.

Last month, attendees saw a very young and very dapper Gene Kelly alongside an even younger and very handsome Frank Sinatra in "Anchors Aweigh," a 1945 musical comedy. As a special treat to that audience, longtime Moraga resident and local actress, Kathy Ferber, revealed that her mother, Pamela Britton, had a feature role in the movie, playing the Girl from Brooklyn. Ferber brought photos and told stories from the filming that her mother had shared with her.

On July 14, you can return to the days of yore when viewing "Top Hat," starring the incomparable Fred Astaire and Ginger Rogers (watch carefully and you'll see Lucille Ball in a bit part as the flower shop clerk). Two of the songs written by Irving Berlin - "Top Hat, White Tie and Tails" and "Cheek to Cheek" - have become American classics, and Astaire's tap solo in "Top Hat, White Tie and Tails" is often considered his most celebrated.

"Top Hat" was made in 1935 and is, according to filmsite.org, "one of the great '30s dance musicals, and possibly the best, most characteristic ... Fred Astaire and Ginger Rogers musical ever, with wonderful, magical dance and song numbers." In 1990, Top Hat was selected for preservation in the United States National Film Registry by the Library of Congress as being "culturally, historically, or aesthetically significant." The film ranked number 15 on the 2006 American Film Institute's list of best musicals.

For Jonas, who co-founded Diablo Ballet 22 years ago, these types of movies have a more personal meaning. "My parents grew up in New York and saw every Broadway musical. That's what I grew up on. I didn't listen to pop music; I listened to Broadway musicals and learned the words to every song. These movies bring back a lot of fond memories for me."

Jonas also feels good bringing these classic films to local viewers and seeing people appreciate dance by watching the movies. "Diablo Ballet's mission is to educate children and adults through the art of dance. It's important for us to be accessible and reach different audiences in different ways," she said. "Additionally, most of the movies chosen for this series are not readily available anymore so, in some cases, we're introducing a whole new genre to our attendees. And they seem to like it."

"Top Hat" will be shown at 6:30 p.m. Tuesday, July 14 at the Lafayette Library and Learning Center. Prior to the film, Jonas and Performing Arts Education & Enrichment for Kids Associate Director Edward Stegge will give a brief presentation, including behind the scenes facts about the movie and offer a dancers' perspective. Tickets are \$5 at the door. For information, visit lafayettelib.org.

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