

DRAFT

Special to the Weekender

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Daniel Ernst discovered his love for dance through his love for his sister, Elizabeth. Elizabeth is a hip hop dancer and choreographer, and has performed with Studio 4 Dance Theater for the past four years.

“I started dancing myself after watching Elizabeth perform in two Spring Showcases,” he said. “I loved the contemporary dance and all the variety of dance styles in the show.”

Studio 4 Dance Theater’s 2015 Spring Showcase is coming up May 1 and 2 at the Bret Harte Theater in Angels Camp. It’s an eclectic mix of ballet, jazz, hip hop, tap, and contemporary dances, many of them choreographed by young dancers in the company.

As the only male dancer, Daniel acts as lead, guide, or centerpiece in many of the dances.

It’s not a problem being the only male dancer “because we all get along so well,” he said. “But I wish there were more guys interested in dance. There’s this stereotype that dancing is just for girls and you can’t be masculine as a dancer, but it actually requires tremendous strength and male presence.”

Daniel will portray Russian composer Modest Mussorgsky in “Pictures at an Exhibition,” an original ballet being performed as the first half of the showcase.

Mussorgsky composed the work as a tribute to his friend Viktor Hartmann, a prolific artist who died suddenly at age 39. Studio 4 Dance Theater Artistic Director Tammie Lee has created a ballet of the 35-minute piece, which includes segments inspired by specific artworks.

“‘Pictures at an Exhibition’ has been an educational experience for the dancers and for me, musically and choreographically. It’s wonderful to see the company grow together,” said Lee. “I am excited for our audience to be amazed at our talent this year!”

Portraying Mussorgsky requires both acting and dancing skills, according to Daniel. “I am portraying his life and his mourning and his loss of a friend. My job is to connect with the audience and show them the story,” he said. “It’s my first lead role; it’s pushing me and making me feel like I am advancing as an artist.”

“Daniel has worked incredibly hard at his role as Modest Mussorgsky, technically and artistically,” agreed Lee. “A couple of times during rehearsals I would get a look –‘you want me to do *what?*’ I have really pushed Daniel and I am so proud; in this past year he has matured as an artist and developed as a dancer significantly.”

The second act is a showcase of ten new works by both new and seasoned choreographers from Studio 4 School of Dance and Studio 4 Dance Theater. Dances range from ballet to lyrical to jazz to tap to hip hop, with an equally wide variety of music, eye-catching costumes and creative lighting designs. The finale will be “Sing, Sing, Sing,” developed by Tammie Lee based on the original choreography by Bob Fosse.

Daniel will perform in four of the dances in the second act, including one solo he choreographed himself – another first -- to the popular song “Smother” by Daughter. “It’s about wanting something so bad, and the struggle of trying to push through and finally having to give up,” he said. “The dance was inspired by the music.”

Most of the show is really upbeat, according to Daniel. “I think my favorite parts are the hip hop pieces, which are especially lively and fun to watch,” he said. Of course, two of those hip hop dances were choreographed by Daniel’s sister Elizabeth.

The Spring Showcase has only two performances: 7pm, Friday, May 1, and 3pm, Saturday, May 2, 2015, at the Bret Harte Theater in Angels Camp, and is appropriate for all ages. Tickets to the Spring Showcase 2015 are \$12 for adults and \$8 for children 12 and under, available at [www.studio4dancetheater.com](http://www.studio4dancetheater.com) or by calling 1-800-595-4849, or at the box office one hour before each show (cash or check only.) For further information, the public may contact Tammie Lee at 209-728-5347.

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