



Italian myth presented with grace at OWU

By David Tull, The Delaware Gazette

Think Italian and you think of passion, fire, intensity and rich music. Dancer/choreographer Natalie Marrone has included all of those in her dance program called "The Widow's Spin: Contemporary Dances of and Ancient Myth," being offered at Ohio Wesleyan University tonight and Saturday.

She has created eight dances based on Italian themes and on Italian-American stereotypes. "I have for some time been inspired by my Italian culture," Marrone says in her program notes. "The deeper I dig into my heritage the more clearly I see the silken threads of common experience woven across cultures."

Her efforts honor not only her Italian heritage, but her chosen art of dance as well. Seldom has Delaware had the opportunity for as entertaining an evening of dance. The dancers, who include nine OWU students as well as professionals from Columbus, do a superb job, dancing with precision, grace and expressiveness.

The student dances, by the way, include Delaware native Sarah Cook.

"Spin" is composed largely of contemporary dance styles – from modern to jazz and even some acrobatics. Point of departure for the work is an Italian myth, says Marrone. The mythical ancient tarantula was noted for its bite that afflicted young women as they worked in the fields. The women, dressed in white, danced in an ecstatic state for three days, thus passing through a rite of purification.

Marrone's take on this myth presents us with mystical widows dressed all in black. They dance their memories and spin a web of imaginary characters caught in the fleeting vision of the dances.

"Spin" is nicely presented in Chappellear Drama Center, making use of many of the theater's special features. One dance, "The Widow's Window," is done entirely in the high window-like balcony just to the left of the stage's proscenium. It is a perfect setting for the seductive and sinuous dance by a black-clad Rhonda Austin.

Several of the dances make use of Chappellear's elevator that can raise or lower the apron of the stage. In any case, Marrone makes perfect use of the medium of dance. She mines the Italian heritage concept without becoming entangled in it. Her dances range from dramatic to comic, and from mystical and languid to exuberant. The dances are both stylized and literal. She even plays with gender role reversal, "as (people) often do during carnival time in Italy."

The reversal occurs in a new piece, "Delicatessen Dreams," which Marrone created with her own father in mind. Marrone's father owns a delicatessen in West New York, NJ.

Sarah Cook has the lead role as "Antonio," as Italian deli owner who falls in love with a beautiful woman who visits his deli. The "woman" is played by Blake Beardsley.

Marrone herself does a superb solo turn in the piece titled "Debarcation." Perhaps representing the immigrant's struggle to fit in, she enters the stage torturously, pulls on a black coat and hat and begins to walk across the stage, every movement expressing the difficulty of a new environment.

The widows in black are featured in one of evening's most moving pieces, "Condolences." Three dancers move slowly and precisely across a gauze-draped stage in a kind of funeral dance. The dance seems to express closeness in the face of death, as well as a kind of struggle to be free.

For pure fun, the dance, "L'Amore Della Famiglia," which opens the evening, and "Penso Positivo" are tops. "L'Amore," featuring Marrone and Kelly Gottesman, seems to encapsulate the experience of being in an Italian family. It features strong and exciting dancing to launch the evening.

"Penso" brings us almost everything we could hope for on stage – a ballerina, a dog, a guy with a rainbow wig blowing bubbles. It's a chance to enjoy dancing skills while also enjoying a good chuckle or a belly laugh.

"Penso" also includes all of the OWU dancers – Cook, Sarah Anderson, Leia Davies, Maggie Flanagan, Barb Lanciers, Moly Moldiviani, Eka Nersesian, Maria Shevtsova and Pam Slane.

The evening's final piece, "Tarantate," provides us with a vigorous stylized tarantella, as the white-clad young women dance away the spider's poison. But we note that the black spider still watches from above our heads as the curtain comes down.