

Sneak Preview of Documentary Film in Naperville

Chicago Festival Ballet Founder Featured in Documentary



Naperville, Sep 6, 2018 (Issuewire.com) - The exciting sneak preview of the documentary film “Born to Love Ballet-The Kenneth Von Heidecke Story” will be shown free to the public on Sunday, September 9th , from 3 – 6 pm, at Center Stage Theater, 1665 Quincy Ave #131, Naperville, IL 60540.

Filmmaker and composer Stuart Meyer has created an incredibly beautiful score and brings this story to life. The film will be a candidate for major film festivals across the United States.

Kenneth von Heidecke is the founder and chief choreographer of the Chicago Festival Ballet and School. He is also a renowned choreographer for opera and ballet companies around the world having choreographed over 60 operas and 80 ballets. Recently he choreographed Aida with rave reviews for Lyric Opera of Chicago. He choreographed a new production of Giselle in June 2012 and Coppelia in June 2013, two different productions of Aida for both Dallas Opera and San Diego Opera and another Samson & Delilah.

Von Heidecke began his career as a dancer, working his way through the ranks of many prominent companies such as La Scala in Milan, Rome Opera, San Francisco Ballet, Ballet Met and Chicago City Ballet. Most significantly, he was hand-chosen by legendary Prima Ballerina Assoluta Maria Tallchief to appear in the 1975 world premiere of George Balanchine’s Orfeo ed Euridice, a ground-breaking moment in his career. Over the years, Tallchief continued to coach Von Heidecke in the Balanchine repertoire and referred to him as her protégé.

His choreography has been presented at the Lyric Opera of Chicago, Alaska Dance Theatre, Scotland’s Edinburgh Festival, Washington DC’s Kennedy Center, Los Angeles Music Center, New York City’s Lincoln Center, Dallas Opera, San Francisco Opera, San Diego Opera, Ballet Nacional de Panama, Germany’s Badisches Staatstheater and countless others. In 1989, he opened the doors to his school of ballet in Naperville, Illinois. In 1990 he founded his company, Chicago Festival Ballet, which performs a repertoire of classical, romantic and neoclassical works in venues around the United States.

The company also began producing an annual touring Nutcracker, which is now a staple in the Chicago area and a much-requested production in cities across the country. In 1996, Von Heidecke had the unique opportunity to serve as Ballet Master to the U.S. Olympic Gymnastics Team. Former students of Kenneth von Heidecke include American Figure Skater, Evan Lysacek (2010 Figure Skating Champion Gold Medalist and 2009 World Figure Skating Champion), Joanna Wozniak (principal dancer with Joffrey and featured in the film Save the Last Dance), Christina Salerno (former Royal Ballet dancer, San Francisco Ballet, Boston Ballet, Zurich Ballet), and Victoria Born (dancer for American Ballet Theatre, principal role in the film Center Stage, Ballerina in the Broadway production of Phantom of the Opera).

Mr. von Heidecke’s works have been on WTTW’s Chicago Tonight news program, WTTW’s “Arts Across Illinois” entertainment special, PBS’ “Making of an Opera” and a PBS documentary on Maria Tallchief’s life. In 2008 he was inducted into the Fox Valley Hall of Fame.

A Seven-Year Journey Through an Unexpected Ballet Legacy

Born to Love Ballet is the unexpected story of Kenneth Von Heidecke, a classical music-loving blue-

collar kid from just outside of Chicago who became transfixed by the intense beauty of ballet as a young boy while observing his sister's dance class

However, upon learning of his son's strong desire to take a ballet class, Ken's father strictly forbid him from pursuing ballet for the entirety of his childhood and adolescence.

Undeterred, Ken's resolve could not be extinguished and years later his secretive defiance and determination led him to the realization of his ballet dreams even before his parents discovered he had been sneaking out to ballet classes in Chicago and Oak Park unbeknownst to them throughout his late high school and early college years.

The tragedy that followed led to a ballet legacy which this film follows for a period of seven years, including the solitary journey of Sarah, a devoted ballet student, from age 11 to her first professional audition with the Nashville Ballet at age 18.

Director Statement

On a blizzard January weeknight in 2008, I arrived at the Von Heidecke School of Ballet to meet Ken for the first time. His publicist had contacted me about making an introduction based on a blog I had been writing about Naperville and the Arts.

On the treacherous drive to the studio, I envisioned an elegant and professionally-appointed ballet studio designed to impress the mothers of precocious little girls seeking to live out their ballerina fairytale. Instead, as I walked through the door my first impression was something closer to the type of rustic yet adequately equipped gym where professional boxers get back to their roots in training for the big fight.

As for Ken, having taken a quick glance at his Wikipedia page, I anticipated a regal and poised personality with the faintest hint of boastful ego. As I walked around the corner, I noticed an older gentleman with jet black hair hobbling up the hallway wearing glasses that were slightly foggy from having just walked in the back door. Thinking this individual worked at the studio, I announced that I was there to see Kenneth von Heidecke. He replied, "Oh yes, I'm Ken".

For the next couple hours, it was difficult to keep my jaw from dropping as I listened to the twists and turns of his story expressed through his genuinely humble spirit. I had worked in independent film for years as a composer but even prior to the meeting I'd been working toward launching my first feature documentary film project with a strong music-focus and suddenly in my presence on that dark and snowy evening as if by some divine intervention here was one of the greatest stories I had ever heard live by one of the most gracious human beings you could hope for as a filmmaker.

Nearly all of the original music Meyer created for the film was composed within the first year of production as the images and story behind ballet couldn't stop "dancing" in his mind. Meyer and Von Heidecke partnered up to create a number of original ballet pieces, some of which appear in the film. Additionally, both have spent the past few years in the early creative stages of creating a full ballet, entitled "The White Rose", one piece of which is featured near the end of Sarah's storyline.

And so the journey continues...

About the Director

Stuart Meyer dropped out of law school in 1998 to move from Kentucky to Chicago in hopes of getting involved in independent film. Having composed original music for piano/synth since age 11, Meyer first became involved in the independent film as a film composer in 1999 with multiple IMDB credits to his name. With a lifelong love for documenting life through audio, photography, video and storytelling, he made the move to documentary filmmaking in 2007.

In the 10 years he has devoted to Born to Love Ballet, Meyer has also produced other award-nominated, festival-selection documentary feature films, shorts and web series including, Inside the Pizza Box (2015), An American Small Town (2014), American BBQ Trail (2014), Behind Ribfest(2011), and Small Town Flavor (2010-12).

Meyer fell in love with both film and the observation of life growing up in what was then the small Kentucky town of Elizabeth town. He was inspired by regular trips to the 1940s-era single-screen State Theater and using audio tape recorders to capture family life.

In the early 1980's, a small upright piano arrived in the Meyer household on loan from a family friend and he quickly began teaching himself how to play and compose, which led to a deep passion for synthesizers and multi-track sequencing/recording.

Though the family never owned a video or movie camera growing up, Meyer used to beg a neighborhood friend to haul out his family's video camera/VCR setup to make short videos which ignited a love for production.

Meyer's father was a newspaperman which meant there was always some kind of still camera sitting around which he never hesitated to use and to this day, Meyer still loves shooting still photos.

"In this film, I wanted the audience to feel as though they are on stage and in the studio with these dancers as much as possible as the story unfolds" stressed Meyer. "Even if it meant nearly getting run over on a number of occasions."

"I love documenting the extraordinary stories behind ordinary people," says Meyer. "While my goal is to be a full-time filmmaker, my truest measure of reward will come when one-day hundreds of years from now somebody will stumble across these rarely documented glimpses of these lives and stories and be happy that somebody went to the trouble of capturing them in such a beautiful way."

"Truth is always more interesting and insightful than fiction and that is why I love documentary film", says Meyer.

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