

**Virginia National Ballet**  
7528 Old Linton Hall Road  
Gainesville, VA 20155  
[www.gainesvilleballetcompany.org](http://www.gainesvilleballetcompany.org)

Contact: Elysabeth Muscat Hegab  
[info@gainesvilleballetcompany.org](mailto:info@gainesvilleballetcompany.org)  
703-753-5005

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## **VIRGINIA NATIONAL BALLET PRESENTS TWO WORLD PREMIERES: BOHEMIAN RHAPSODY & LA BOHÉME**

Virginia National Ballet's visionary Artistic Director presents two thrilling world premiere ballets this February 11<sup>th</sup>, 2017 at the Hylton Performing Arts Center in Manassas: *Bohemian Rhapsody*, a hard-rocking contemporary ballet to the classic music of Queen, and *La Bohème*, a gorgeous, heart wrenching ballet based on the famous opera about star crossed lovers by Giacomo Puccini, accompanied live by the Old Bridge Chamber Orchestra.

Virginia National Ballet (formerly named Gainesville Ballet) is only three years young, yet is quickly establishing its reputation as an important, growing dance company in the Mid-Atlantic Region that presents new, exciting repertoire with talented, award winning international dancers from around the globe. The company is honored to have been chosen by the **Virginia Commission for the Arts** to be part of the Touring Directory for 2017-18. Presenters who wish to engage Virginia National Ballet to perform at their venues can receive a grant from the Commission to help cover the cost. This program encourages artistic collaborations throughout the State of Virginia.



With its outstanding, creative Artistic Director Rafik Hegab, the fresh company continues to lead the region with unique repertoire never seen before. Hegab debuted his choreographic skills with *Carmina Burana* in March 2014 which received standing ovations and rave reviews from audience members, and followed up with the ballets *Carmen* (based on the opera) and *Collection* in 2015. *Carmina Burana* was a contemporary ballet with a cast

of 25 dancers; *Carmen* was a neoclassical ballet in a totally original version which included one scene taken from the Bizet opera with live singing, also with cast of 25, and *Collection* was a group of short dances infusing various styles of music and dance.



Mr. Hegab's original new version of *La Bohème* for Virginia National Ballet marks only the 2nd time that the ballet *La Bohème* will have been performed in the world. *La Bohème* - the ballet, was originally created for the West Australian Ballet in 2004. The music for the ballet is an adaptation of the score from Puccini's popular opera, with some unique twists and orchestrations, adapted by the composer Kevin Hocking. In 2004, Hocking completed a commission by the West Australian Ballet to transform Puccini's opera, *La Bohème* into an orchestral ballet. He was awarded an 'Order of Australia

Medal' in 2006 for his services to music as a composer, arranger, conductor and pianist. Milwaukee Ballet presented a version of *La Bohème* in 2012, but they used the Puccini opera orchestration, and did not use Hocking's original score especially made for ballet. The story of *La Bohème* revolves around two main characters: Mimi and Rodolfo, and their friends. The young bohemian characters are happy starving artists in Paris in the 1800s. Mimi and Rodolfo meet by chance and quickly fall in love, only to discover soon after, that Mimi is suffering from tuberculosis and doesn't have long to live.

Tying the "Bohemian" theme together is the hard rock ballet, *Bohemian Rhapsody*. Hegab has chosen some of the most famous Queen songs along with some "deep tracks" which audiences will love. Virginia National Ballet's Managing Director, Elysabeth Muscat Hegab, is thrilled to be presenting this repertoire, as she is both a professional opera singer who has performed the role of Musetta in *La Bohème*, and is also a huge fan of classic rock. She has wanted to produce a hard rock ballet for many years and is excited to see this project come to fruition.



The Old Bridge Chamber Orchestra will not only be playing the music of *La Bohème*, but will also treat audiences to the rousing overture of *La Forza del Destino (The Force of Destiny)* by Giuseppe Verdi. This event marks the first collaboration between Virginia National Ballet and the Old Bridge Chamber Orchestra. The orchestra's Conductor and Music Director, David Kirven, recently won the 2016 Seefeldt Award for Outstanding Artist in Prince William County.

Virginia National Ballet's company dancers are thoroughly enjoying working with their Artistic Director, Rafik Hegab. They love the intelligent and unique choices of repertoire, his original choreography, and the wonderful work atmosphere he creates in the studio. The international group includes eleven dancers (seven women and four



men) from the USA, Japan, and Brazil: Saaya Pikula (Japan/Poland), Sakura Oka (Japan), Emily Hashiguchi (Japan/USA), Luiz Gustavo Madubuike (Brazil), Emanuel Tavares Filho (Brazil), and all from the USA: Savanna Alfanos, Esmee Gold, Rebecca Morneau, Madeline Sosna, and Matthew Waters.

Supporting the professional company onstage are the Junior Company dancers, a select group of pre-professionals from Gainesville Ballet School. These outstanding young dancers train five days a week in ballet, modern, jazz, pas de deux and variations, and rehearse twice weekly with the professional company. Additionally, they have the invaluable experience of performing onstage at the Hylton Performing Arts Center in both School and Company performances. The Junior Company get to perform solo roles in *The Nutcracker* and are featured in the School's Spring Recital, and they dance corps de ballet parts in the professional company productions. Members of the 2016-17 junior company include Chloe Banachoski (11<sup>th</sup> grader at Brentsville District High School), Isabella Reilly (11<sup>th</sup> grader at Battlefield High School), Maddie Penn (12<sup>th</sup> grader at Patriot High School), and Zeli Frantz (11<sup>th</sup> grader at Patriot High School.)

Celebrate Valentine's Day (a few days early!) by seeing two world premieres by Virginia National Ballet, accompanied by the Old Bridge Chamber Orchestra, at the Hylton Performing Arts Center. Enjoy gorgeous dancers, great music, and completely original choreography. The performances are on Saturday, February 11<sup>th</sup>, 2pm and 7 pm. Tickets range from \$17 - \$37 and can be purchased at the Hylton Box Office or online at <http://hyltoncenter.org/calendar/929/>.

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**Media Notes:** Flash photography/illuminated videography is permitted at rehearsals when coordinated with Gainesville Ballet, but prohibited during performances. Interviews with Elysabeth Muscat and participating dancers are available on request. As a theatrical production, cast assignments are subject to change. Additional photographic images will be released through an [online gallery](#) in advance of the performance and following the event. Photos are also available in a variety of compositions upon request.