

Karen Kain
Artistic Director

Dancer brings beauty to stage

Richmond's own Heather Ogden returns to West Coast for single performance

by Matthew Hoekstra
Staff Reporter

Heather Ogden is coming home to witness art replicate life.

She'll be dancing the final scene from the ballet *Sleeping Beauty* with her real life partner Guillaume Côté. Set to Tchaikovsky's score, the *pas de deux* is the magical wedding of Princess Aurora marries Prince Florimund.

Richmond-raised Ogden is principal dancer for the National Ballet of Canada, and unlike Princess Aurora, she hasn't been asleep for a century—but she is getting married to her prince.

In July, the couple was vaca-

tioning in Italy, and while sitting on a quaint bridge in Florence watching the sun set, Côté popped the question.

"We both knew we wanted to be married, but the timing was a surprise," said Ogden, 28, in a telephone interview from Toronto. "It was pretty sweet."

Both dancers are offering Metro Vancouver a taste of *Sleeping Beauty* at Ballet B.C.'s IGNITE gala on Sept. 30 before the National Ballet brings the show to Toronto in November.

Coming home is always a treat for Ogden, who has plenty of local support—including from her parents Rob and Sheila Ogden, who still live in Richmond.

"It's so nice for me to come home and perform because those are the people I grew up with that supported me during all my training."

Ogden trained at Richmond Academy of Dance under artistic director Annette Jakubowski for 10 years. Her quest to become a professional dancer meant 25 hours of ballet and modern dance classes each week.

The year she graduated from Steveston Secondary, 1998, Ogden joined the National Ballet as an apprentice, moving up the ranks to become principal dancer in 2005.

Her fiancé is also a principal dancer. They've been dancing together for 11 years, but only became a couple three years ago.

"We had a great partnership before we were a couple. I think now it makes it even more enjoyable," said Ogden. "It's a nice chemistry we have on stage."

Sharing a significant part of their lives together, the care they have for each other on and off the stage is almost tangible. Ogden said she sometimes can't believe they don't get sick of each other.

"We do dance together a lot, but we also dance with different



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partners in different ballets," she said. "Sometimes Guillaume will be away for a month at a time, so I feel like when we're together, we're together a lot, but then we have our times apart too."

Besides rehearsing for *Sleeping Beauty*, Ogden is also working on a new piece by Canadian choreographer Aszure Barton, whose work will debut in late November.

Ogden has danced many parts in her career, including principal roles in *Swan Lake*, *Romeo and Juliet*, *The Nutcracker*, *The Merry Widow*, *La Bayadère* and *Cinderella*.

So intense are rehearsal schedules for principal dancers that injuries often accompany the career, but Ogden has been enjoying good health of late.

"Like most dancers, I've had my struggles with small injuries. It's so horrible when you have to take time off for an injury, because we really do what we love. It really brings you down to have those injuries, but it's part of the career. Right now I'm feeling good."



Ogden is realizing her dream as a principal dancer, but said she still has farther to go.

Nevertheless, she's already what many young ballerinas in Richmond aspire to be. One keen fan has even created the Heather Ogden fan club.

"I am one of Heather's biggest fans. I grew up with her in Richmond," said Tifarah Senkow, in a post on the fan club's website. "She truly deserves all that is given to her. She has worked hard and it shows in the wonderful career that she has only just begun for her."