

'Fire of the Dove'

Modern-day composer & tragic centuries-old tale of French martyr inspire NH native to choreograph work

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Though the tragic tale of Joan of Arc has endured for nearly 600 years, it was a New York composer's passionate score for a 1928 film that inspired a Granite State native to choreograph a dramatic dance piece about the final days of the teenage French martyr.

"Fire of the Dove," to be performed by the Amy Marshall Dance Company in a 7 p.m. performance Saturday, March 31, at The Lakes Region Theater in Meredith, chronicles the end of the 19-year-old warrior saint's life as she is imprisoned, beaten and burned at the stake.

The poignant performance is set against the backdrop of several pieces from "Voices of Light," a 1995 project in which New York composer Richard Einhorn created a musical score for the daring silent film "The Passion of Joan of Arc" decades after the avant-garde picture stunned audiences.

The film, with its extreme close-ups and unexpected camera angles, depicts in physically and emotionally searing scenes the final struggles of Jeanne D'Arc (1412-1431) as she appears in court, is interrogated and put to death.

A saint of the Roman Catholic Church, the woman known as Joan of Arc was only 17 when, proclaiming she received visions from God, she gained renown fighting to recover her homeland from English domination late in the Hundred Years' War in the mid-15th century. Two years later, she was captured by the English, tried for heresy and killed in Rouen, France.

It is a weighty topic, but one that continues to inspire artists to re-tell the story in a host of mediums, from theater screens to theater stages.

Einhorn, in his liner notes for "Voices of Light," said he first viewed Carl Dreyer's landmark film "The Passion of Joan of Arc" in 1988.

"I was idly poking around in the film archives of New York's Museum of Modern Art, looking at short avant garde films, when I happened across a still (image) from 'Joan of Arc' in the silent film catalog. Some 81 minutes later, I walked out of the screening room shattered, having unexpectedly seen one of the most extraordinary works of art that I know. I immediately began to write the piece about Joan of Arc. ... It took six years to put together."

In turn, Amy Marshall, a Sandwich native who founded her own dance company seven years ago, said it was Einhorn's deeply moving work that propelled her to develop a new interpretation of the remarkable tale.

"I had listened to the music and was quite inspired by it and studied up on it," Marshall said. "I e-mailed (Einhorn), who lives in New York, and said I would be interested in using a few of the pieces of the score to create a



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piece about Joan of Arc. He said I certainly could. He ... gifted me his music to use for this particular project. I chose seven sections and sort of wove them together."

The production recounts Joan of Arc's trial, her dialogue with God through the intermediaries of the saints Margaret, Catherine and Michael and her final moments as she is consumed by the fire.

"The appearance of a flock of doves when she died was said to confirm the truth of her

divinity," Marshall said. "For the French in particular and women in general, Joan has been an inspiration of strength and action for nearly 600 years."

Though motivated by the music Einhorn composed specifically for the film, Marshall said she avoided viewing the "Passion of Joan of Arc" until after she had choreographed her dance project.

"I didn't want to steal (images) ... I wanted to have my own story in my head, based on

reading books about her life and trials," she said. "Afterwards, I looked at the movie and it was kind of funny how it fell into place."

While she approached the subject a bit differently, Marshall said her choreography mirrors elements in the movie, such as in the way the film is broken up by sequences labeled with phrases such as "The Jailers," in which jailers are tormenting Joan of Arc. Unintentionally, Marshall said, she had established the same subject titles at times.

The acclaimed performance of actress Maria Falconetti in the title role of "The Passion of Joan of Arc" led Marshall to incorporate certain facial expressions into the dance production, which will feature Christina Lynch as Joan of Arc.

"That was kind of interesting to see," Marshall said. "You could really see the emotions without the sound, which is what dance is. It's a good thing to look at the silent film for inspiration for the dance piece."

Marshall, who is four and a half months pregnant, initially portrayed Joan of Arc in "Fire of the Dove" before turning over the role to a member of the dance troupe. Led by Marshall and executive director Chad Levy, the company also includes dancers Natasha Czarniewy, Danielle Zuccheri, Shannon Mulcahy DiNota, Billy Blanken, Eileen Jaworowicz, Stacey Martorana and Todd Staiger.

Marking the company's third visit to the Lakes Region, the Meredith performance will feature three of Marshall's other works as well: "Unharvested," a dance set to a commissioned score for cello and violin by Kevin Keller; "Quercus," a quirky piece that features a percussion of whistles and bells; and "In Fieri," a dance set to a commissioned score by Arthur Solari.

"We've gained a pretty good following up there," Marshall said of the Lakes Region. "We find that the New Hampshire audience has a real love for the arts. I always love sharing my company and my art with my native people!"

"I grew up there. I went to Interlakes High School ... and I have great memories of that area," said Marshall. "I graduated in 1988 in a class of 80 people. So, we were all pretty good friends by the end of it. I had some good high school years."

Marshall has lived in New York City since 1992, when she received a bachelor of arts degree in dance and theater from Goucher College in Baltimore, Md. She performed in the companies of H.T. Chen and Dancers, David Story Danceworks, Cortez and Co., Parsons Dance Company and Taylor 2 before forming the Amy Marshall Dance Company in 2000. She has taught master classes and performed at colleges and universities across the United States, and in 2002, created a commissioned work titled "Sentido de Mujer" for Winthrop University.

Tickets are \$25 for adults, \$18 for students and senior citizens. For more information, log onto www.amymarshall.com.



Actress Maria Falconetti's acclaimed performance in the 1928 silent film "The Passion of Joan of Arc" led choreographer Amy Marshall to incorporate certain facial expressions into her theatrical account of the martyr's final days.

