

## Berkeley's Aurora stages a special Stravinsky 'Tale'

By Janos Gereben



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MANY DIMENSIONS: FROM LEFT, L. PETER CALLENDER, MURIEL MAFFRE AND JOAN MANKIN APPEAR IN AURORA THEATRE COMPANY'S MULTIDIMENSIONAL PRODUCTION OF IGOR STRAVINSKY'S "THE SOLDIER'S TALE." (COURTESY PHOTO)  
Many dimensions: From left, L. Peter Callender, Muriel Maffre and Joan Mankin appear in Aurora Theatre Company's multidimensional production of Igor Stravinsky's "The Soldier's Tale." (Courtesy photo)

Aurora Theatre Company has assembled an exceptional group of local talent — writers, directors, dancers and musicians — to present Igor Stravinsky's unique "The Soldier's Tale," opening in previews today.

In 1918, the young Stravinsky was a leading composer for ballet companies, including the famed Ballets Russes, when he wrote "Tale," an unusual mix of music, narration, acting, puppetry and dance.

Former San Francisco Ballet principal dancer Muriel Maffre, co-director of the project, says she became interested in the work due to its rhythmically intricate music, high story quality and human themes.

"Losing and gaining control over one's life are ongoing concerns of ours," says Maffre. "At one point or another, we all become the subjects of evil powers, whether they are coming from the outside or are internal. Credulity and human flaw are also found at the heart of the story."

Based on a Russian folk tale and featuring a book by Charles Ferdinand Ramuz, "The Soldier's Tale" is a parable about a soldier who trades his fiddle to the Devil for a book that predicts the future.

The cast consists of the Devil, a Narrator (who also takes on the roles of minor characters) and the Soldier, which in this production is a puppet manipulated by Maffre, who also dances the role of the Princess.

"These qualities are poignantly rendered by the beautiful life-size puppet," Maffre adds. "There are many layers to this musical play because of its multidisciplinary makeup, the treatment of our staging and the themes it deals with. This is a production that should appeal to diverse audiences."

Maffre's co-director in the enterprise is Aurora Theatre Artistic Director Tom Ross, who credits Maffre for initiating the project.

"Muriel, who directed 'Tale' at the Orcas Island Chamber Music festival, is passionate about it," Ross says. "I was intrigued by the idea of this fusion of music, dancing and acting. And the idea of doing the piece in the intimate space of the Aurora just sounded wonderful to me."

Berkeley West Edge Opera's Jonathan Khuner arranged the music, which is played by members of the San Francisco chamber group Earplay under the direction of Mary Chun. L. Peter Callender appears as the Narrator, Joan Mankin as the Devil.

The designer is Benjamin Pierce, formerly of San Francisco Ballet, where he danced and later designed productions such as Julia Adam's "Night." The English translation of the libretto is by Pocket Opera's Donald Pippin.

## **IF YOU GO**

### **The Soldier's Tale**

*Presented by Aurora Theatre Company*

**Where:** 2081 Addison St., Berkeley

**When:** Previews 8 p.m. today, Saturday and Wednesday; 2 p.m. Sunday and 7 p.m. Tuesday. Opens 8 p.m. Nov. 17; runs 7 p.m. Tuesdays, 8 p.m. Wednesdays-Saturdays, 2 and 7 p.m. Sundays; closes Dec. 18

**Tickets:** \$30 to \$48; \$55 opening night

**Contact:** (510) 843-4822, [www.auroratheatre.org](http://www.auroratheatre.org)

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**Bio:**

Janos Gereben is a writer and columnist for SF Classical Voice; he has worked as writer and editor with the NY Herald-Tribune, TIME Inc., UPI, Honolulu Star-Bulletin, San Jose Mercury News, Post Newspaper Group, and wrote documentation for various technology companies.

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