

# The 'Tocks' rock their frocks with balletic grace

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When dancer Tory Dobrin became part of the corps of Les Ballets Trockadero de Monte Carlo in 1980, he knew it could be a mistake.

"When I joined, it was a career wrecker," said Dobrin, in a recent phone call from New York.

That's because the all-male troupe, which was founded in 1974 in a New York loft, has made it its wicked mission to tweak the most sacred of ballet traditions. Male dancers perform in heavy makeup, tutus and toe shoes, use ridiculous Russian-

sounding names and dance the most cherished female roles, en pointe. Anyone who has caught their take on the Dying Swan from Tchaikovsky's "Swan Lake" may never again view the show the same.

Opinions change, however, and 34 years later "the Tocks," as they are fondly known by fans, sell out regularly in theaters nationally and abroad. They do more than 100 shows a year, and have been the focus of stories in serious magazines such as the New Yorker. They even have been immortalized on greeting cards.

These days, young men make a proud beeline for the company upon graduating from the most prestigious dance academies in the

world, said Dobrin, who turned in his tutu a decade ago and is now artistic director.

In short, the Trocks have become as much an institution as, say, American Ballet Theater.

"You need to be in an institution to work in this place," joked Dobrin, who seems to have mixed feelings about his company being described in such a way.

Those mixed feelings are confirmed later in the interview, when Dobrin makes a point, several times, of describing the Trocks as "an all-male comedy company."

Whatever you wish to call them, the Trocks return tonight to the Carpenter Center, where they sold out their last engagement and are very likely to sell out again.

And their mission remains the same - to lovingly and expertly parody balletic mores. The Carpenter show program involves a pas de deux, a Vivaldi suite and, yes, "Swan Lake" with the prominently played Dying Swan.

The Trocks also strongly adhere to their Slavic roots, faux as they may be. The company name, Dobrin said, was an homage to Les Ballet Russes.

"The Russians are considered to be the most classical of schools," Dobrin said.

Political problems there led many promising dancers to flee and start new companies in other European capitals. This made the Russian school even more popular, and encouraged dancers of every nationality to change their names so they would sound more Russian, and therefore more marketable.

That is why many of the 11 Trocks have adopted their own Russian aliases. South Carolina native Robert Carter, a Joffrey Ballet-trained dancer who has been with the Trocks since 1995, is "Olga Supphozova" when playing his female alter ego and Yuri Smirnov when playing a man.

Each performer, Dobrin said, takes on male and female roles.

"We don't divide the repertory up," he said. "Everybody has to dance everything."

Nor are the Trocks out to fool anyone, in spite of the makeup and costumes.

"We don't want the audience to think we're female," said Dobrin. In fact, he added, any dancer who bonds too closely with his feminine side is taken aside by the ballet captain and told to butch it up.

Though the Trocks will never abandon the Russian school, they are willing to explore ballet trends. Recent interest in everything Latin American has led the company to develop "Majisimas," an homage to the National Ballet of Cuba.

With travel restrictions and sanctions in place, it is unlikely Cuba will get to see the Trocks tribute. Then again, the Trocks have not performed in Monte Carlo either, despite adopting the principality's name.

"We've been very close," said Dobrin, adding that Monte Carlo's own ballet likely would not appreciate it. The two troupes almost ran into each other in another European city.

"It was confusing," he said.