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DJ Q&A

Susan Cohn Daily Journal Senior Correspondent



Peninsula Ballet Theatre Executive Director Christine Leslie.
Tom Jung/Daily Journal

MAKING MAGIC ONE STEP AT A TIME: PENINSULA BALLET THEATRE EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR CHRISTINE LESLIE SHARES ABOUT OPENING WEEKEND AND WHAT LIES BEYOND.

DJ: Tell a bit about yourself.

CL: I live in San Mateo, I graduated from Aragon High School, have a BS Journalism and MS Mass Communications San Jose State University and an EMBA from University of San Francisco. I spent over 20 years in high-tech. I am the oldest of seven. My mother was an elementary school teacher and my father a nuclear engineer. They were very involved with fundraising galas for a local social service organization. My earliest memories are of being in the rehearsal hall with my mother where she was not only choreographing, but also playing the piano for rehearsals and then a lead dancer on stage. My father was stage managing. I thought all homes had costumes hanging from every door jamb, and that anyone could break into song at the slightest suggestion. It was very magical in so many ways.

DJ: Peninsula Ballet Theatre is opening its 55th season on Sept 24. How did it start?

CL: PBT was formed in 1967 by Richard Gibson and Dick Ford as the nonprofit arm of their ballet school located above what was the Thrifty Drug Store at 343 B St. in San Mateo. In 2010, with the support of Concar Enterprises, we renovated the old Circuit City in San Mateo where we now have six ballet studios, a Pilates studio, a warehouse with 55 years of sets, props and costumes, admin offices and space to create our own custom costumes.

DJ: How did you become PBT's executive director?

CL: I began as a student taking ballet classes at PBT, eventually performing with the professional company while working full time in high-tech. I then served on the board, including a time as president. In the early '90s the artistic director was also serving as the executive director. It became obvious that the administrative function needed

more attention and as an 'interim' measure I took on those responsibilities. The rest, as they say, is history. In 2008 I transitioned to full time after I left the world of high-tech and business development.

DJ: Do you have a typical day?

CL: One thing that is certain in the world of nonprofit performing arts is that no day is typical. When we were a much smaller organization, I had my fingers into every aspect of the operation, including stepping in as a last-minute substitute teacher and acting as rehearsal mistress.

Thankfully, we now have seasoned professionals that have day to day responsibility for not only our school but our professional stage productions. My primary responsibility is to ensure that we are meeting our mission and responsibility to the residents of our region and that we not only survive but thrive. This means internal meetings with the board of trustees, MARCOM and administrative staff, artistic and production staff and conservatory staff, and observing rehearsals as well as classes. I also work to keep informed about what is happening in our community and region as well as the other arts organizations in our area.

DJ: Have you been a performer?

CL: My initial training as a young performer was as a singer, performing with local choir and musical theater productions. As I grew older, I had my 'paying career'. Performing was what I did because I loved it, not as a 'job'. Funny how things turn out. When I look back at the 'snowshoe tracks' of my life, I can see how they logically concluded, a combination leading to the business of making art. My job is to say no if a project does not have the promise of satisfying both aspects of that reality. The art cannot lead and neither can the business — they have to coexist. Not always straightforward.

DJ: PBT's opening program's centerpiece will be Carmina Burana, staged by four San Mateo County-based performing arts groups: Peninsula Ballet Theatre, Masterworks Chorale, Ragazzi Boys Chorus and the Pacific Sticks Percussion Ensemble. What has it been like to work together?

CL: This collaboration has been wonderful. As we were coming out of the pandemic, we needed to get audiences back in the theater and the best way was to give them compelling reasons to do so. Naturally we had kept track of who was still presenting. Masterworks and Ragazzi still with us, great. Where was Pacific Sticks, quick search, also still with us! Meet with our Artistic Director Greg Amato. How would you like to choreograph Carmina complete with chorus and percussion ensemble? A resounding yes! All that was left was to make contact with all the players, again it was an instant yes to the concept. It is always a thrill when everyone is working toward the same goal.

DJ: What does the next year hold for Peninsula Ballet Theatre?

CL: This is a big year for PBT. We have formed Peninsula Broadway Theater with performances of Evita and a surprise to be announced in our winter season. Of course, we continue with Hip Hop Halloween and Hip Hop Nutcracker and no holiday season would be complete without Peninsula Ballet Theatre's every popular Nutcracker. We do this because the greater Peninsula deserves no less and it is our passion, making magic one step at a time.

OPENING WEEKEND PARTICULARS. Carmina Burana is presented by Peninsula Ballet Theatre, Masterworks Chorale, Ragazzi Boys Chorus, and Pacific Sticks Percussion Ensemble, with soprano Shawnette Sulker, tenor Corey Head, baritone Zachary Gordin, conductor Dr. Bryan Baker and choreographer/director Gregory Amato. Music by Carl Orff based on 13th century sacred and profane texts sung in Latin. The evening will

begin with a short program of mixed repertory dances by Amato along with premieres by choreographers Aline Carili (Expresse) and Marika Brussel (Unleashed). Sept. 24 at 7 p.m. and Sept. 25 at 2 p.m. San Mateo Performing Arts Center, 600 N. Delaware St. San Mateo. Ticket information at <https://www.peninsulaballet.org/> or (650) 212-5867.



<https://youtu.be/-R3o5tRv0Sk>

Carl Orff's powerful cantata "Carmina Burana" in a spectacular new production with Masterworks Chorale, Ragazzi Boys Chorus, Pacific Sticks Percussion Ensemble, soprano Shawnette Sulker, tenor Corey Head and conductor Dr. Bryan Baker.

For tickets and information visit [peninsulaballet.org](https://www.peninsulaballet.org)

If You Go

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