

For Alexander Academy's 'Cinderella,' we talk story with dancers Nate Hunt of Alvin Ailey American Dance Theater and Hanna Claerbout of Alexander Academy Performing Company

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The Alexander Academy Performing Company will be dancing a captivating rendering of Prokofiev's *Cinderella* this weekend at Seabury Hall's 'A'ali'ikuhonua Creative Arts Center. The show will also present the talents of more than 150 dancers aged three to adult in contemporary, jazz and hip hop numbers.

Cinderella will feature Hanna Claerbout and Laurel Bicker dancing the role of Cinderella, Jen Cox and Eliza Wright as the step-sisters, Nicole Yezzi as the step mother and Ashley Krost and Giulia Salaparuta as the Fairy Godmother. Nathaniel Hunt returns to dance with the Academy as the Prince.

"Our guest performer Nathaniel Hunt is our Prince Charming," says Danelle Watson, the Alexander Academy's director. "He performed with us last year in *Swan Lake*. We couldn't have been more pleased with his professionalism, ability to connect and be such an inspiration to our students. He is a gem of a person as well as a dancer. We're excited and fortunate to have him join us again."

Hunt graduated summa cum laude with a Bachelors of Fine Arts in dance from Long Island University-Brooklyn, and has studied at the Ailey School, Earl Mosley's Institute for the Arts and the Joffrey Ballet School. He's presently dancing and touring the world with the Alvin Ailey II Company.

We caught up with Hunt and Claerbout in a rare moment without their toe shoes to find out more about their upcoming performance...

MAUITIME: When did you decide to become a dancer? How long have you been dancing?

NATE HUNT: I decided to become a professional dancer when I was in high school. I went to a regular public high school and my dance director Dianne Rosso gave me the opportunity to not only perform at the school but also choreograph and teach my fellow peers. The utter bliss I got from working with students and performing alongside them is when I realized I wanted to make this my career. I have been dancing for as long as I can remember with my older sister but I started taking dance classes when I was about 12 years old.

HANNA CLAERBOUT: I started dancing at age 10 but I think it was after playing Wendy in *Peter Pan* when I was 13 that I realized I wanted to be a dancer. I was so incredibly sad when the show was over, and that was when I realized if I became a dancer, I could perform more!

MT: Do you get stage fright?

NH: Of course! Haha! It's ok to feel that way. It's natural to be anxious or nervous. It makes us human!

HC: Nope. I cherish every moment I'm onstage.

MT: What's your favorite part of dancing?

NH: Performing. Being able to travel to different places both internationally and domestically and share what I love doing is a dream come true. Performing for audiences who say that seeing dance gives them absolute hope is such a humbling and beautiful experience. It makes me appreciate my own performing and makes me realize that my dancing can affect so many people.

HC: So far, my favorite aspect of dancing is performing; to be able to share what I love with others.

MT: Why is dance an important part of society and the arts?

NH: Dancing is important because I believe society connects to movement more than any other communicative modality. Movement is the universal language. When a story is presented through movement, ideas, emotions and concepts can be more understood and appreciated.

MT: How has your experience in *Cinderella* been different from other performances that you've done?

HC: In previous performances, I meticulously counted down weeks, days, hours until the day of the show. I realized in doing so that I had not been living fully in each moment because I was constantly thinking about the future. This year, I've focused more on the process and committing more to each day of rehearsing.

NH: *Cinderella* is stress-free, although it may not seem like it! Haha! I have only two weeks to learn this ballet with A.A. where I have to learn a *pas de deux*, miming of scenes, and work with the corps de ballet. However, working with Hallie, Amelia and Danelle has been a joy. They know what they want, they are open for compromise and they enjoy what they are doing.

MT: What's unique about Alexander Academy compared to other dance companies?

NH: There's a community at Alexander Academy that I haven't found any where else. It's a place where adults and kids can dance together in a judgment-free environment. Similar to the aesthetic of Hawaii, Alexander Academy has a foundation of ohana. They care. The teachers dedicate their days coaching and teaching their students with information that's technically efficient, anatomically correct and artistically challenging. The students care about one another. They care about one another's growth as well as their own. To put it simply, Alexander Academy is a family like no other.

HC: There are so many things I love about Alexander Academy. There's a sense of community or a dancing ohana among the dancers and the teachers each hold a special place in my heart. The building and location itself is quite magical, too. In the late afternoon classes, sunlight pours in and lights the studio with a golden glow. Seeing the colors of the sunset while dancing is very inspiring.