

Phylogeny



Second Life Ballet

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Phylogeny is an original virtual ballet presented with live original music in collaboration with Indiana University / Purdue University, Indianapolis. Premiere April 22, 2008.

Animations & Choreography by Inarra Saarinen
Music composed by Douglas Anderson, performed live by IUPUI Telematics Ensemble, Scott Deal conducting
Resident Costumer SavannahAnn McMillan, Spirit
Set designed by Inarra Saarinen
Set build by Tik Merlin and Mark Cassini
Theater build and Playbill by Espresso Saarinen

Synopsis

It is the beginning of time. We see beings fly and soar in the air and crawl and tumble on the ground. They are not animals, but humans. Then, as their dance and the mysterious music continues, they transform into bears. Then the bears transform into dragons. Who has evolved from whom? A different view of who was first and phylogeny -- the development of the species.

The Place The universe
The Time The beginning

The Dancers

Amelie Dibou (Washington, DC)
Neena Botanical (New York City)
Pyper Dollinger (Florida)
Tatiana Kurri (California)
Tik Merlin (Portugal)
Vivienne Darcy (Colorado)

The Crew

Espresso Saarinen (Tokyo), roadie
Halden Beaumont (Portugal), machinimatographer
Mariel Voyunicef (Mexico City), photographer
Willis Cassini (Washington DC), sound engineer

Mark Cassini (Minneapolis), Master of Ceremonies

Inarra Saarinen (Tokyo), Director, Founder, and Artistic Director
Second Life Ballet

Thanks to IBM for hosting us in our Second Life Ballet Theatre.

Special thanks to Kristin Story (Maya Debevec) and Scott Deal of Indiana University/Purdue University, Indianapolis and the other artists and techs there for asking us to join in this exciting venture!

<http://slballet.org>

<http://slballet.blogspot.com>

YouTube search 'Second Life Ballet'



by Mariel Voyunicef

The Making of a Ballet in Virtual Space

Inarra Saarinen

Creating Second Life Ballet's original ballets is truly an amazing experience. They take several months from concept to completion. Besides the normal artistic challenges there are also technical and logistic challenges.

I created Second Life Ballet with a crazy idea, some fabulously talented and committed people, and a ton of perseverance.

STORY

Artistically, the stories are written and become more clarified over time and rehearsals. Part of the beauty of writing the story specifically for Second Life Ballet is that I am able to utilize the unique aspects of Second Life to bring the story to life. For example, In Olmanen, I saw dragon-like creatures appearing in the air, a couple in love spiraling down and up, sprites flying, and a beautiful woman transforming instantly into an old woman while the man transformed into one of the evil beings. In Windows, I saw silhouetted women dancing in the air, teenagers doing slow aerial flips, and a dream sequence where a man transforms to his younger self and the lovers spiral up together.

PEOPLE

I find some wonderful collaborators in places all around the world, and we work live, something that would be very difficult in First Life. Our composer for our first ballet lives in London, our architect is in Australia, and our dancers and crew are from Austria, Denmark, East Coast of the U.S., England, Hawai'i, mid-West U.S., Netherlands, Portugal, and the West Coast of the U.S.

It was a challenge to find a costume designer, lighting designer, set designer, videographer, and stage manager at first. The dancers are also cross-trained in some crew positions. We also originally had a challenge keeping dancers because of First Life changes and commitments. Now, however, the understanding of the commitment is a part of the audition process. These dancers put in

very significant dedication and work to Second Life Ballet and are a large part of why the ballet works. The entire cast and crew are volunteers that are interested in pursuing artistic movement and dance in Second Life.

ANIMATIONS

Technically, I used Avimator, Qavimator, Poser and others to create the animations. I began with some ballet animations and created quite a number over the course of the choreography. All in all, I now have approximately 250 original animations. The main difference between dance animations at clubs in Second Life and these ballet animations is that 100% of the ballet animations do not loop and run under the precise control (SL willing) of the dancer. The animations are put into gestures, which I make akin to musical phrases in ballet. This way the choreographer and dancers and composer are able to work in a normal First Life style. The gestures also allow very precise timing between animations (in tenth of seconds but, alas, not counting lag) and compound animations. That is, in a gesture if you do not add a 'wait' step the two animations happen at the same time. The dancers map the gestures to function keys or use chat '/gesture_name' to activate the phrase. It is up to the dancers to rehearse and time the execution of each gesture in order.

During these times, I have tried working with both off-the-shelf and custom HUDs, but neither of them gave me all of the functionality that I needed. There were added lags in a HUD, for example, even though having buttons might have been convenient for the dancers.

REHEARSALS

Once the story begins to fall in place, I am able to animate most of my visions. What a wonderful release to be able to choreograph with dancers who have grand jete's that are full splits in the air, perfect 'turn-out', and timely forever turns! This allows me to really produce many of the effects I want. Of course, these are real dancers, so there are always the 'I thought said you wanted me to come downstage?' kind of discussions. The dancers are not scripted!

Rehearsals take place in almost exactly the same way a First Life rehearsal does -- except for the 'I need you to hover up a bit' kind of directions.

STAGE

Our home theatre in Quat is where we first debuted. The theatre originally held 20, then 30, then 40 avatars, and then we could no longer hold our audience. So we investigated and researched plans for a more efficient, reduced lag, larger theatre. Eventually, we built a similar theatre to our home theatre hosted by IBM in the IBM sims . This theatre stretches across two sims -- the audience of 80 is in one and the stage and dancers are in another. Besides reducing lag, and allowing for a larger audience, security is enabled by simply putting different access restrictions on the stage sim.

COSTUMES

Because of the lack of a costume designer, we spend a significant amount of time finding and assembling off-the-rack costumes and AVs that fulfill the artistic vision, and then spend some time negotiating to make them 'transfer ok'. In this way, costumes can go out to the dancers and then are transferred back into Second Life Ballet wardrobe department. Our Wardrobe Department is an automated system that allows the dancers to 'check out' costumes while letting everyone know who has what. Designers who contribute costumes are acknowledged in the playbill.

WHAT NEXT?

In closing, this is an exhilarating experience with an absolutely wonderful committed artistic team. We are learning an amazing amount of what Second Life can and cannot do, and what virtual and physical dance is and how it interconnects. We look forward to more exploration in the future.

If you have the chance to sit it out or dance, dance!

