

# Ballet students leap across Atlantic to perform in France

By AMY ROE

For Francophiles, everything sounds grander in the language of love. Consider the translation of Ballet Bellevue when two of the company's dancers took the stage at a guest performance at the Palais des Congres in Juan les Pins, France.

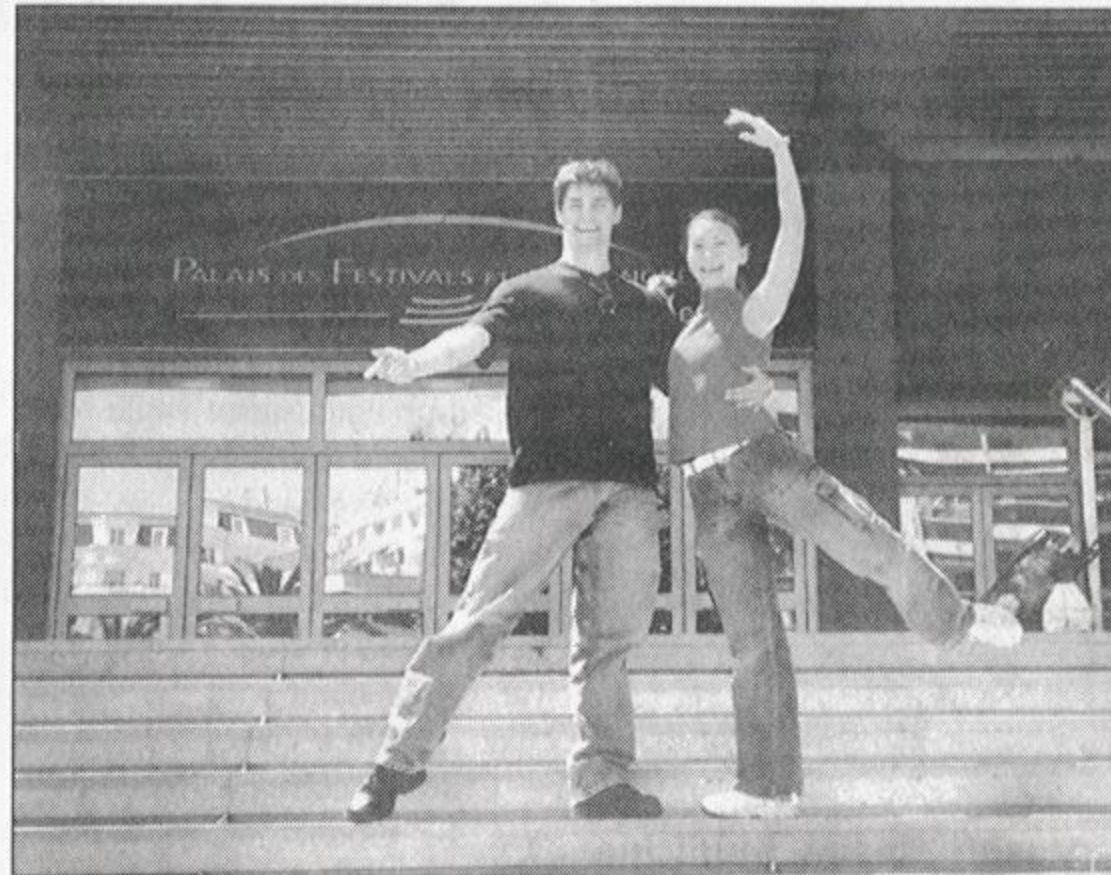
Ballet Bellevue became: Royal Ballet de Seattle.

"There's no kingdom here," laughed Artistic Director Viktoria Titova.

Nonetheless, the aristocratic name was printed on posters advertising the gala celebrating the 30th anniversary of d'Antibes Compagnie Dagmar, where the dancers performed, and on posters for the show hanging around the town of Cap d'Antibes, where the company is located. It was even printed in the Nice-Matin, the local newspaper of that French Riviera hot spot.

Befitting their somewhat bur-nished reputation, Titova's students, Bryon Brill, 19, and Sarah Poppe, 16, got the royal treatment.

When the dancers performed the grande pas de deux from "Swan Lake," the audience applauded loudly, demanding two bows from



Courtesy photo

**Ballet Bellevue students Bryon Brill, left, and Sarah Poppe, shown here in Cannes, France, performed part of "Swan Lake" this summer at the Palais des Congres in Juan-les-Pins, France. The trip was sponsored by an adult Ballet Bellevue student, Neige Gil.**

Poppe prior to the coda.

"That was amazing," Poppe said by phone from Vancouver, British Columbia, where she is enrolled in a summer program with the Goh Ballet. "For a young performer to get that kind of response ... it was phenomenal."

Brill is completing an apprenticeship with the Houston Ballet, and another Ballet Bellevue student, Natasha Keeley, is enrolled

in a summer program at American Ballet Theater New York City.

For a week following their performance, Brill and Poppe took classes with the Ballet Monte Carlo, the Opera Ballet of Nice and the Rosella Hightower School in Cannes.

Poppe, who has been dancing since she was 11 years old, said it was bit intimidating to step up to

## If you go

Ballet Bellevue's next performance, Summer Classics 2005, which commemorates the opening of the Bellevue Arts Museum and coincides with the Bellevue Arts and Crafts Fair, will take place at 7:30 p.m. July 30-31 the Theatre at Meydenbauer Center. Tickets are \$17 for adults, \$10 for seniors and students and \$22 for patrons (VIP seating). For tickets, call (206) 325-6500 or go to Ticket Window, [www.ticketwindowonline.com](http://www.ticketwindowonline.com).

the *barre*. There was the rarefied air of dance in France, not to mention the language barrier. It was her first trip to Europe, but the language of dance, she discovered, is universal.

"Because you understand dance, you can understand each other."

Intimidation soon gave way to inspiration. "Just being with other people, and you know they understand your passion, it's so inspiring it makes you want to drive harder," she said.

That's exactly the reaction Neige Gil, who helped organize and sponsor the trip, was hoping to engender in the young dancers.

Gil, who takes adult ballet classes at Ballet Bellevue, suggested the students travel to France for the gala, which was held by her friend, company director Dagmar Fiamango-Bozovi.

"When you are an artist, when

you want to be a dancer, it's important to meet other people," Gil said.

So Gil, who was born in France and now lives in Clyde Hill, donated air miles for Brill's ticket and arranged for the dancers to stay with host families on the French Riviera. In addition to providing room and board in a villa overlooking the Mediterranean, the French hosts showed their visitors around the south of France.

"I think they were thinking of their own youth, when they started to be dancers," she said. "They wanted the same experience."

Gil said the trip was funded privately through donations and personal connections.

"This is how it happened," she explained, "only friendship and talking."