

AMERICAN MIDWEST *Ballet*

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Cinderella, her Fairy Godmother, and her quarrelsome stepsisters come to life onstage in American Midwest Ballet's world premiere production. [More print-quality photos...](#)

IN THE WORKS SINCE FIFTH GRADE, ERIKA OVERTURFF'S *CINDERELLA* IS READY FOR ITS WORLD PREMIERE

Erika Overturff, artistic director and CEO of American Midwest Ballet [AMB], knows exactly when her new world-premiere ballet *Cinderella* first began to take shape.

"I got the idea when I was about 11," she said, "choreographing an entire production that was performed in my friend's basement. She was a ballet student with me, and also in the cast were her little sister and my little sister. The four of us did all the roles, and I choreographed it, planned it out, and directed people.

"We put on a whole performance – although it might have been missing the key element of an audience. So I've just been waiting for my chance ever since. And finally it's time to make it happen!"

Of course, there's been considerable evolution from that fifth-grade project to what audiences will see this spring. Overturff's *Cinderella* will feature AMB's full company of 25 professional dancers, supplemented by a community ensemble of more than 40 performers, with new staging that features more than 150 costumes designed especially for this production.

One thing that has never changed, Overturff said, is the universal appeal of the Cinderella story: the tale of a kind young woman whose goodness enables her to overcome mistreatment and change her destiny. The theme, she said, has inspired numerous tales beloved across centuries and cultures.

“That’s nice for a choreographer, because people are familiar with the Cinderella story,” she said. “It can be told in so many different ways, and there are so many interpretations, that you have the freedom to tell it in your own way.

“At the same time, people have a common understanding of the general story, and it makes the ballet accessible. People feel: ‘I know this story, and I’m interested in seeing how it is told through ballet.’”

Creating the magic of the story

One *Cinderella* story element that is unique to ballet, she said, is the role of the Seasons Fairies, who bring Cinderella the gifts she will need to go to the ball.

“It’s very exciting and beautiful,” Overturff said. “Traditionally, it would be performed by four female soloists – but I wanted to fill out each scene. I selected some animal friends that dance with each fairy. For the Spring Fairy, we have some adorable bunnies. We have a grasshopper that dances with the Summer Fairy. We have a red fox in the Fall Fairy variation, and we have a snowy owl that partners the Winter Fairy. And there’s a small *corps de ballet* that accompanies each fairy, related to her season.

“Fairies are magical creatures, so their section can have its own style. I liked tying them in with the natural creatures, because that’s playful and fun – and also because it ties in with Cinderella, who is such a sweet person that all the animals love her. Even at home when she’s in her kitchen, she has little mice friends and little bird friends. They’re her only cheerleaders when everyone else is mean to her. So it makes sense that whether she’s at home or in the forest, all these creatures can see the good in her and want to help her.”

Drawing out the characters’ depth

“One thing I want to draw forth in the story is this: What is so special about Cinderella?” Overturff said. “She is beautiful, but beyond that, it’s her kindness and goodness. We’re showing that through little moments in the story – showing that even when she’s not being treated the right way, she still has a generous and forgiving heart, and helps others. We’re painting that picture. That way we’re all rooting for her and understand why she deserves this wonderful opportunity.

“In her meeting with the prince, I didn’t want it to be just: ‘He’s a prince, so I want to marry him.’ And, ‘She’s the prettiest one here, so I want to marry her.’ I wanted to build up their characters. They meet, they dance, it’s very sweet. And he sees the gentle way she treats other people, so there’s something deeper going on – getting to know somebody, versus just love at first sight.”

Of course, Overturff said, not *all* the story's characters are gentle and sweet. "Two of the characters I'm most excited to work on are the stepsisters," she said. "There's a lot of humor to be had there. One of the strengths of our company is all the great actors we have. That's so important to storytelling in a performance. And we have people who are not afraid to give it their all, to make something really funny. We're having a great time developing those scenes!"

All the details add up

It's the polish given to all these details, big and small, that makes a world-premiere ballet a magical experience, Overturff said.

"We work really hard on every element: details within the story, costumes with just the right colors, setting the stage to create seamless visuals, all those little things," she said. "One of those details won't make or break the production, but they're all important. You do all those little things which might not be noticed on their own, so that overall it creates something special."

American Midwest Ballet's *Cinderella* will open with performances at 7:30 pm Saturday, April 27, and 2 pm Sunday, April 28, at the Hoff Family Arts & Culture Center in Council Bluffs.

Performances at Omaha's Orpheum Theater will be at 7:30 pm Saturday, May 11, and 2 pm Sunday, May 12.

Tickets start at \$25 at the Hoff Center and \$27 at the Orpheum. Ticket information is available at [**amballet.org/tickets/**](http://amballet.org/tickets/) .

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ABOUT AMERICAN MIDWEST BALLET

American Midwest Ballet [AMB] is your resident professional dance company, bringing work beyond words to audiences in Nebraska, Iowa, and beyond. Performing at home and on tour, our mission is to inspire people through dance programs of the highest quality: breathtaking performances, enriching education, and uplifting community engagement.

AMB's Season 14 is presented with the generous support of premiere benefactors the Holland Foundation, the Fred and Eve Simon Charitable Foundation, the Iowa West Foundation, and Douglas County; season sponsors Omaha Steaks and Cindy and Scott Heider; and major supporters the Nebraska Arts Council and the Nebraska Cultural Endowment.

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