ANNA KARENINA – (brochure quote)

***Drama, intrigue, love and infidelity, this is the story of Russian beauty Anna Karenina.*** *Based on Tolstoy’s magnificent novel, the ballet, a world premier created by Executive Artistic Director Kim Tuttle explores a wellspring of family dynamics, social issues, and changing times. With stunning sets by Mihai Ciupe and striking projections by Houston Wells, it is not to be missed.*

Kim’s notes:

Kim has always loved serious and dramatic material - plays, novels, art work, music. As she comes to a close with her catalog of full-length ballet choreography, she wanted to select a literary work of great depth and drama to create from, and Anna Karenina has always been on her ‘bucket list’ as a theme for an original ballet. Anna Karenina is a ‘thick’ story, with many levels. It revolves around upper class Russian society, and a very extended family and social circle around that family. Within the story are relationships that are good – those that are not so good – and those that are so misguided they result in true tragedy. But all of these go through twists and turns to the last page of the novel, and thus the last scene of the ballet. Russia itself was going through major changes from Czar driven philosophy to a more socialist point of view. And a strong ‘Woman’s Question’ was prevalent - could women select their own husbands? Should women be educated? And the question of technology versus agrarian Russia was discussed. All of these thoughts are woven through the ballet as seen through the eyes and minds of the characters. As we know, these issues are still present, and will probably always be the topic of heated conversation. (Some things never change!) But ‘Anna’ shows that slice of life, at that point in time, with those people.

A ballet based on an 800 page tome will obviously need to be edited in many ways to tell the story. One – because the dancers don’t speak and Two - because there is a limited amount of time onstage. So the choreographer generally makes artistic decisions, called euphemistically ‘artistic license’, to emphasize the aspects of the story he or she wants to focus on without losing the integrity of the book. So for instance rather than having members of society shun Anna at the opera, as it is written in the book, the choreographer may choose to have her shunned elsewhere. The point is to have her shunned – the place is not so important. And other elements such as that. Another critical aspect of ‘ballet’ versus ‘book’ is to be able to ‘view’ the story, rather than ‘read’ it or ‘hear’ it. That requires a lot of thought and care. And also creating a large society on a normal size stage in a short amount of time obviously requires a certain editing of characters, places, etc.

It’s the choreographer’s job to honor the original work to the best of his/her ability. That’s the challenge, and that’s the joy. And Anna Karenina holds a world of challenges, but what fun in meeting those challenges!

Fortunately, we have a true Russian beauty in the ballet company in principal dancer Julia Ponomareva, who has been tapped to portray Anna. Her real-life husband, Alexsey Kuznetsov, will portray her lover, Vronsky. Julia has emotional depth and maturity coupled with a beautiful classical style and immensely enjoys (LOVES!) performing dramatic works. Alex is a truly elegant principal dancer, with stature and technique to match. They will be wonderful to watch dance these roles.

So – there you go. Anna Karenina in a nutshell. What a nut to crack!