

# The Bulletin

## ARTS CULTURE

### Corporate Greed Through Dance

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By Louise E. Wright, For The Bulletin

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“Pas de bourrée. Tour jeté. Entrechat six.” Rebecca Davis walks Sergey Pakharev through steps familiar to any student of ballet. Then she turns on the alternative rock score, and Mr. Pakharev’s edgy, disjointed movements define the choreography as modern, rather than classical.

The two are rehearsing *Greed: The Tale of Enron*, which the Rebecca Davis Dance Company premieres this weekend at the Prince Music Theater. The modern dance production chronicles the collapse of the energy giant whose name has become synonymous with corporate corruption.

Mr. Pakharev portrays J. Clifford Baxter, the executive with a conscience whose mysterious death has been ruled a suicide. Other protagonists include Enron chairman Kenneth Lay, chief operating officer Jeffrey Skilling and chief financial officer Andrew Fastow.

In addition to telling the story of Enron, *Greed* explores the psyches of the individuals involved. The characters’ emotional and psychological states, rather than aesthetic considerations, determine the choreography. Ms. Davis explains that a dancer might work through fourth position or move his hand a certain way in response to the situation in which his character is involved. At one point, for instance, Mr. Pakharev collapses from an open épaulement to a contracted one in order to express Baxter’s inner turmoil as he attempts to confront Lay but then recoils from him.

“Giving the dancers motivation is a big part of the process,” Ms. Davis says, adding that they frequently consult the libretto so as to better understand their characters.

Of the six protagonists, only one is female: Rebecca Mark, who loses her bid for chief operating officer to Skilling and leaves before the company implodes. Aware of theories that the Enron scenario might have played out differently had a woman been in charge, Ms. Davis refuses to speculate. She admits that it “makes sense” for “females to have a more caring approach to leadership,” but remains unconvinced. Offering Hillary Clinton as an example of a “shrewd, high-powered” woman, she says, “Stereotypes don’t hold.”

Premiering *Greed* in the present economic climate is both a calculated move and a fortuitous coincidence. Ms. Davis wrote the libretto last summer but had wanted to create a piece about Enron ever since news of the scandal broke. At the time, she was majoring in entrepreneurship at Temple University’s Fox School of Business. “I thought, ‘Oooh! This would make a great ballet,’” she recalls.

A firm believer in the power of the arts to involve audiences in contemporary issues, Ms. Davis sees



widespread relevance in the tale of Enron. The effects of the scandal extend far beyond the financial collapse of a single company. Instead, corporate corruption has an impact on the entire fabric of society, not just the lives of employees and stockholders. “We’ll hold each other to higher standards once we understand this,” she says.

“When 6,000 people are fired,” Ms. Davis continues, “then 6,000 people have lost faith in corporate America, in American institutions, in the American economy. That faith is what binds us together.”

Enron also raises the issue of individual responsibility. The protagonists in *Greed* find themselves in identical situations, yet each behaves differently. Skilling embraces corruption while Lay remains indifferent and Baxter attempts to resist. Rather than indulge in feelings of moral superiority to these characters, Ms. Davis hopes the audience will relate to them. Ideally, viewers will see themselves in similar circumstances and ask: “What would I do?”

Often, like the production’s ensemble characters, people fail to assert themselves. “There are times,” Ms. Davis emphasizes, “when a decision needs to be made. *Greed* asks us to actually make decisions and to envision their consequences.”

Ms. Davis acknowledges that prospective ticket buyers might question the appropriateness of her subject matter or ponder the logistics of translating it into dance. Referring to productions she has based on the life of Helen Keller and the genocide in Darfur, she says philosophically, “We’re used to that by now. People will come or not come because of Enron.”

*Louise E. Wright can be reached at [lewright2@verizon.net](mailto:lewright2@verizon.net)*

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