

## Entertainment

### Dance group, pianist Kairy Koshoeva, present world premiere of “Goldberg Variations”

June 9

**BY LIBBY HANSSEN**

#### **Special to The Star**

The Owen/Cox Dance Group, with pianist Kairy Koshoeva, concluded their season with the world premiere of a delightfully inventive evening-length ballet set to J. S. Bach’s “Goldberg Variations,” performed in the University of Missouri-Kansas City’s White Hall.

“The Goldberg Variations,” one of Bach’s monumental keyboard works, consists of an aria and its thirty variations. It is a testament of endurance, technical ability, theoretical understanding and interpretation for the performer.

Koshoeva displayed warmth, versatility and a considered understanding of the structure and demands of this presentation, with clearly delineated melodies and diverse emotional characteristics. She performed this challenging work with fluency and an easy grace.

Choreographer and co-artistic director Jennifer Owen based the movement on the music’s intricate theoretical structure and delicate ornaments. Owen’s idiosyncratic vocabulary refreshingly deviated from balletic expectations. Phrases turned from graceful to thorny within a beat, and she worked whimsical asides (such as high-fives, shimmies, and jaunty kicks) into otherwise conventional lines. She also created vignettes within an overall abstract treatment, with dancers’ sweetly romancing, or strutting like preening peacocks, or reenacting schoolyard jealousies, tantrums, and clichés.

Most of the variations used small groups or pairings, suited to the piece’s intimate nature and canonic phrasing. The two ensemble pieces served as miniature finales: Variation 14 recapped the first portion, with a madcap pace and expansive, whirling arms, and Variation 30 “Quodlibet” was a stately court dance of measured steps and unison turns.

The performance level was high throughout, with many of the dancers also members of the Kansas City Ballet. Notable performances were the men’s quartet in Variation 10, Geoffrey Kropp with Owen in Variation 18’s follow-the-leader, the buoyant gesture and vertical energy of Variation 24 and the sensitive partnering of Michael Davis with Sarah Chun.

Variation 25, the work’s heavily-chromatic emotional peak, was stunning and gently controlled, as a quintet featuring Owen, Allyson Ashley, Juliana Bicki, Christen Edwards, and Logan Pachciarz.

The ballet relied on spare but elegant design elements. The dancers wore simple costumes, designed by Lily Walker, leotards with short, gauzy skirts or leggings, colored in an array of muted jewel-tones: opal, jade, amethyst and garnet. The stage was subtly lit, with primarily sidelight on the dancers and a spotlight always on Koshoeva, who performed downstage right, facing center. Lighting design by Rachael Shair also included color variances on the backdrop ranging from slate to bronze to mauve, contributing to the dusky, dreamy presentation.

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## **Honoring Bach’s music through movement**

By [Laura Vernaci](#) *Tue, Jun 11, 2013*

Owen/Cox Dance Group's presentation of "The Goldberg Variations" represented a collaboration with pianist Kairy Koshoeva and a fresh new style and subject of performance for the innovative Kansas City dance troupe.



On Saturday night at UMKC's White Recital Hall, Owen/Cox Dance Group's only showing of *The Goldberg Variations* boasted a worthy turnout. Not known for lavish costumes and rarely relying on props or scenery, OCDG gave a performance based on pure movement and music. The decision to stage the nearly two-hour, full-length presentation of J.S. Bach's Aria plus 30 variations stemmed from an earlier demonstration at ArtSounds at the Kansas City Art Institute last fall. Kairy Koshoeva proposed the collaboration to Owen, who accepted the challenge.

The two artists, along with a corps of 11 other dancers, brought to life the diversity of Bach's slow and methodical, and contrastingly speedy variations. Koshoeva dexterously switched between the two, setting the mood for both the dancers and the audience. Although audience members weren't physically involved, a subconscious level of engagement was unavoidable.

Owen's distinctive style of ballet with a modern à la carte flair was ever-present. Her short stature does not prevent her exceptional use of space, especially in this work which consisted of dizzying formation changes throughout. Variation 24 took this to another level, resembling an intricate Maypole dance sans actual pole. As a dancer, Owen always is pleasant to watch. She exudes confidence and humility, while rendering her spirit. Although she has mastered speed and comedy, she looked especially peaceful in her soliloquy at the beginning of Variation 25, so much so that it was a shame she didn't continue the remainder of the section by herself.



Each variation stood alone distinctly but together they complemented and built on one another. The dancers were dispersed among them in different combinations, some successful and others lacking cohesion and excitement.

Kansas City Ballet dancer Molly Wagner stood out in several variations. She and Geoffrey Kropp danced with ease in Variation 3, and later in Variation 6 she joined Catherine Russell for an exquisitely harmonious and agile allegro in which both women demonstrated athletic dynamics. Wagner united with Michael Davis in the extended Variation 14 that began as mirroring solos, eventually joining together. The couple created a beautiful balance and made for suitable counterparts.

Logan Pachciarz also emerged from his group sections displaying elegant form and classical technique, an opportunity he rarely receives. Another highlight of the show was Variation 22, featuring Owen, Russell, and Sarah Chun. The three women dazzled the stage with bright ballet sequences.

Variation 10, a four-piece fughetta, inspired a quirky and ultimately comical men's piece. Rounding out the program, Variation 26 was another all-male section that received exorbitant applause for its succession of impressive tricks.

The best trick of all though had to be when Koshoeva's sheet music fell from the piano and she continued to play the demanding score without missing a beat. While the dancers found reprieve in their breaks offstage, Koshoeva effortlessly executed Bach's comprehensive composition with flawless fingers.

The change of pace and backdrop for the Owen/Cox Dance Group was a nice surprise with an amusing disposition and a gratifying conclusion.

#### **REVIEW:**

#### **Owen/Cox Dance Group**

#### ***The Goldberg Variations***

Saturday, June 8, 2013

White Recital Hall, James C. Olson Performing Arts Center, UMKC Campus

4949 Cherry St., Kansas City, MO

For more information, visit [www.owencoxdance.org](http://www.owencoxdance.org)

Top Photo: Geoffrey Kropp and Jennifer Owen (Photo by Charles Stonewall)

By [Laura Vernaci](#)



#### **Dance Contributor**

Laura is a Kansas City native who always has been passionate about the arts, particularly dance. She began dance lessons at age five and trained in numerous styles, including ballet, jazz, tap, contemporary, and modern. After high school, Laura attended Butler University in Indianapolis, IN where she pursued a degree in dance. She later transferred to Truman State University in Kirksville, MO and received a degree in Journalism. While at Truman University, Laura danced in student ensembles several times with the Missouri Contemporary Ballet. She has also danced with the Kansas City Ballet and the Minnesota Ballet.

Laura loves writing for KCMetropolis, which allows her stay connected to the arts community while sharing her passion for and knowledge of dance. She also teaches dance locally and continues to take class in her free time.

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