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Entertainment & Life

A modern day 'Hamlet' kicks off Eugene Ballet's 40th anniversary...

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On Saturday, Eugene Ballet will open its 40th anniversary season with the West Coast premiere of a contemporary telling of the classic Shakespeare drama "Hamlet."

Created by Stephen Mills, artistic director of Ballet Austin, this version of "Hamlet" features modern sets, contemporary choreography, costumes by Christopher McCollum inspired by Giorgio Armani, and an emotional score by American composer Philip Glass.

"To see this work is to know that classical dance is very much alive, healthy, thought-provoking and visually stunning," Eugene Ballet Artist Director Toni Pimble said of Mills' creation.

The company shared a peek at the ballet on Tuesday evening during a private rehearsal in The Studio at the Hult Center for the Performing Arts.

Playing Hamlet is Reed Souther, a company dancer who has been with Eugene Ballet since 2010. The Oregon native has gotten insight into his role through discussions with Mills to learn his vision for Hamlet and by listening to the audio book, "which helps sort through the emotions as there is more inflection," Souther said.

Company dancer Vivien Farrell, in her second season with Eugene Ballet, will play Ophelia. She's said she's grateful for the challenge to bring a high level of stage acting to the role. "Dance has always felt like meditation," she said. "So it's tricky trying to bring raw emotion into rehearsals and eventually in front of an audience."

The performance, appearing on the Silva Concert Hall's stage, is the first in the ballet company's season that has a loose literary theme. Upcoming performances include "The Nutcracker," "Romeo and Juliet" and "The Firebird."