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FINE ARTS PREVIEW

Choreographer keeps his dance true to its Hungarian heritage

The Budapest Ensemble

What: The folk troupe from Hungary performs "Csárdás The Tango of the East."

When: 4 p.m. Sunday. **Where:** Medina Performing Arts Center, 777 E. Union St., Medina.

Tickets: \$25-\$45. Call 330-636-3400 or go to www.mcsoh.org/pac.

Also: The Csárdás Youth Ensemble will perform in the lobby at 3 p.m.

"Csárdás The Tango of the East" could be called "Csárdás The Celtic Tiger of Central Europe." Just as Michael Flatley uses Irish step dance to trace the history of Irish-Americans in his dazzling new spectacle, so **ZOLTÁN ZSURÁFSZKI** weaves the national dance of Hungary into the story ballet he choreographed for the Budapest Ensemble.

While Flatley is a spotlight-grabbing superstar who transforms ethnic dance into a glitzy Las Vegas-style show, **ZSURÁFSZKI** is a meticulous ethnographer who values authenticity of steps, costuming and music. The 22 dancers in his touring company wear gorgeous costumes handmade in Hungarian villages. The six musicians play fiery Gypsy songs and dances on traditional instruments.

"Csárdás (pronounced Char-dahsh) received its Northeast Ohio premiere five years ago at Lakewood Civic Auditorium. Since then, it has been tweaked, tightened and toured throughout Europe. The current 6½-week tour to 38 North American cities ends with a performance Sunday at the Medina Performing Arts Center.

The production is set in a contemporary Hungarian *táncház*, a type of dance club that developed during the communist era. There, a game-master invites couples to participate in a "play-party." As the dancers don costumes that he pulls from an old trunk, they become characters in a girl-meets-boy folk tale.

The women, dressed in virgin white, pretend to collect morning dew and brew it into a love potion. Their male partners improvise vigorous dances involving boot-slapping and heel-clicking. A beautiful young girl is courted by two rivals and chooses one to be her husband. While the chosen man dances for joy, the rejected suitor abducts the bride-to-be and throws her into a circle of rough men.

The groom sets out to find her. Stopping in various villages, he joins the local folk in regional dances. When he catches up with the abductors, he confronts them in an athletic stick dance and challenges his rival to a showdown of virtuoso dancing. He wins, of course, and the production culminates in a traditional wedding that incorporates solemn rituals and comic turns.

In the last scene, the characters return to the *táncház*, resume their contemporary identities and end the evening dancing improvised Csárdás steps.

Producer Kalman Mágyár says the show is subtitled "Tango of the East" because people outside the Hungarian community are not familiar with Csárdás a couples dance that can be as simple as two steps to the left, two steps to the right or as complex as some of the jumping-and-turning numbers in the production.

"It's a thought-provoking idea," he said by phone from a tour stop in Vancouver, Canada. "Like tango, Csárdás is a social dance, a couples dance, a love duet, an improvised dance, a dance of the people. The movement is different. The music is different. But both dance forms have an exciting history. Both are a manifestation of freedom.

"It's wonderful to let people know that Csárdás is a living tradition."

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