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With every issue of *Dance International*, you, our readers, are on my mind. My goal each time is to introduce you to something new, something surprising or informative, or maybe just plain delightful or fun. As my team and I enter into production, assembling the many words and images that fill our pages, we all work hard to give you the best read possible.

Now, as we enter the final months of our 40th anniversary year, *Dance International* is reaching out to make a more tangible connection through our reader survey.

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Please visit [danceinternational.org/survey](http://danceinternational.org/survey). If you need a paper copy, you can call the office at 604-681-1525.

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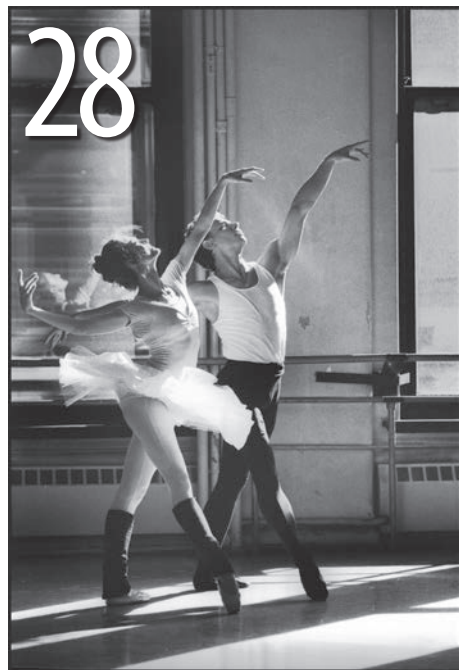
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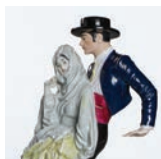
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# Dialogues with Rothko

Marie-Agnès Gillot  
dances Carolyn Carlson

by Maggie Foyer





The Menil Collection in Houston was, in some ways, an unlikely setting for the premiere of Carolyn Carlson's *Black Over Red (My Dialogue with Rothko)*, but it also made perfect sense. Just a stone's throw away is the Rothko Chapel where 14 of the painter's later works hang, monumental in size, painted in hues of dark purple, maroon and black, and overwhelming in their depth of emotion.

Carlson is a choreographer and philosopher or, in her words, "a poet in space and time." The idea for this solo was conceived when she was commissioned by the Pompidou Centre in Paris to write about a painter. She chose Mark Rothko. Words became movement, and *Dialogue with Rothko* was born. It is a very personal solo for Carlson and has previously only been danced by the choreographer herself. However, Nancy Henderik, artistic director of the Dance Salad Festival and a champion of Carlson's work, suggested that the Paris Opera Ballet's Marie-Agnès Gillot dance a shortened version of the work for her 2017 festival last April. So it happened that in the austere white space of the Menil gallery, without the benefit of stage lighting or set and only a few props, Gillot, accompanied by composer and cellist Jean-Paul Dessy, created one of those dance moments that remain seared on the memory.



Carolyn Carlson in her solo *Dialogue with Rothko*  
Photo: Laurent Paillier



Above: Marie-Agnès Gillot in Carolyn Carlson's  
*Black Over Red (My Dialogue with Rothko)*  
Photo: Amitava Sarkar

Right: Marie-Agnès Gillot and Jean-Paul Dessy in Carolyn  
Carlson's *Black Over Red (My Dialogue with Rothko)*  
Photo: Amitava Sarkar



A few days later, on the festival's opening night, Gillot performed the same version in the more traditional setting of the Wortham Center with the benefit of stage lighting, and the equally potent power and presence she had generated in the small gallery space. The music composed and played live by Dessy was a major part of the impact, the austere unembellished notes of the cello setting the tone and occasionally giving way to recorded spoken words and electronic sounds of high emotion.

Rothko, a painter of the New York School, was an idealist who never lost his belief in the absolute freedom of expression. He wrote his philosophy in oil on canvas, concealing as much as he revealed, and Gillot, weaving shapes with her body and writing calligraphic messages in the air, added the choreographed layers.

Designer Chrystel Zingiro's costume, a severe black dress that reached to the floor and covered bright red trousers, had similar complexity, with uneven length and pockets that serve as levers to lift the skirt into new shapes. A workmanlike painter's apron daubed with smudges of paint was tied around her waist, a length of canvas becoming angel wings while utilitarian rubber gloves, a pair in blue and, later, a single red glove, brought other accents to the conversation. Carlson is minimal in her use of props, but each was an essential element.



Gillot's tall, angular shape dominated the space, and Carlson's choreography makes full use of her unique physicality. Her long arms make Gillot an eminently suitable choice for this solo that focuses so strongly on arms and hands. An étoile of the Paris Opera, she has every technical skill required, but here she was pure expression. It shone through in the intensity of her dark eyes and eloquent hands.

Her professional relationship with Carlson goes back to 1997 when the choreographer created *Signes* for the Paris Opera Ballet with Gillot, then a sujet, as one of the women. It was after dancing the lead role in 2004 that Gillot was promoted to the rank of étoile, the first time in the history of the Paris Opera that this honour was granted for a performance in a contemporary work.

Among classical dancers, Gillot is rare in her affinity with a more modern style of movement. When we spoke, she described the freedom she experienced in her early dance classes in Normandy before her formal training at the Paris Opera. While she relished her training at the school, she said frankly that it was twice as hard for those who were seen to have talent. On graduating into the Paris Opera Ballet, she was immediately selected for contemporary works, though her repertoire includes the title role in classics such as *Swan Lake* and Mats Ek's *Giselle*.

Gillot is forthright about the value of contemporary dance. "Contemporary is more concrete. In classical, the choreographers are all dead, so you are working with ghosts, but in contemporary you are in front of the creator. This is the big difference," she says. "When I worked with Bêjart, Pina or Carolyn,

first entrance, I look toward the table and I have to see Rothko. Many times I think I see him, but Carolyn says, 'No, you don't see him. OK, start again.' It seems easy, but it's not. Also, you have to wait before you feel, not be too quick and pretend you understand. You have to wait to receive and only then can you give back what you have found."

Although she was born in the United States and began her professional career in the New York-based Alwin Nikolais Company, Carlson built her career in Europe, predominantly in France and Italy where she has been a key player in developing contemporary dance. She was instrumental in the GRTOP, the Paris Opera Ballet's Groupe de Recherches Théâtrales, and at Teatro La Fenice. She was artistic director of the dance section of the Venice Biennale from 1999 to 2002 and, in 2006, was rewarded with the first-ever Golden Lion for Lifetime Achievement given to a choreographer by this illustrious organization.

Carlson is unusual in that her choreography often germinates from her writing. In preparation for the award-winning *Dialogue with Rothko*, she wrote a series of poems including one titled, *What is the Sound of Black on Red?* When Marie-Agnès Gillot started to work on the solo, Carlson gave her these poems and two pieces of writing from John Berger: *Ways of Seeing*, a seminal work published in 1972 that changed how we look at art, and his essay, "Why Look at Animals?"

"She gave me these to help to approach the solo; she educates you at the same time as she introduces you to the choreography," Gillot says.

"I am lucky to have worked with two women of genius, Pina Bausch and Carolyn Carlson ... two women who raised me to another level because of their art." – Marie-Agnès Gillot

they knew the image they wanted to see. In classical, all we have is the impression of some apostle. It is always second-hand and, for Petipa, it comes from a dozen hands — so we don't know."

Gillot is passionate about the debt she owes Carlson. "With Carolyn, I learned to improvise. You know how difficult it is for classical dancers to forget all the technical codes. I have in my body 20 years of trying to be perfect. Then you meet a woman like this and it's like, 'OK ... forget everything you learned.'"

She relates how the atmosphere in the rehearsal room had an almost spiritual quality. "Carolyn taught me that when you do a movement it's there, it's done and it's for eternity. She always comes in with something ... an idea for a costume, a colour or a movement, and we start from this. For me it seems to come from nowhere, but not for her," Gillot says.

The curation of the solo for Dance Salad Festival was more than just teaching the steps; rather it became a creative process. "From my improvisation many things changed. I would improvise, and Carolyn would shape the movement how she liked."

Carlson has created around 10 solos in her distinguished career. They are long — over an hour each — and in performance she shares her solitude, finding both depth and focus. Gillot describes how important it was for her, in performing *Black Over Red (My Dialogue with Rothko)*, to find that focused moment. "I try to visualise the piece in my head, like a journey I will make. The best I can do for the public is to be in the right moment."

The simplicity of the work presented many challenges. "At the

Colour is another source of inspiration, notably in *Signes*, where Olivier Debré's huge canvases form a backdrop and his vivid colours illuminate both stage and costumes. In *Black Over Red (My Dialogue with Rothko)*, the hues are more sombre. Gillot says, "I used to listen to Carolyn speaking about the colours. She said, black is the spirit of eternity. For me that was very strange and something different. I never thought of black as eternity."

Gillot is reaching the end of her time at the Paris Opera; this season will be her last. She spoke of how she had built her knowledge of dance. The material she learns from each new work is another step on the way. "What I learn in contemporary I may use in classical. Once you touch on something new, you cannot discard it. My dance comes from many observations and much knowledge." This knowledge will not be lost as Gillot is making her mark as a choreographer, including *Sous apparence*, which was staged at the Palais Garnier in 2012. She has taken on the artistic direction of Orsolina28, a dance centre in Italy's beautiful Monferrato countryside where she can express her motto, "Dance for me is freedom."

When Gillot takes her final bow on the Paris Opera stage, she said she would like it to include *Black Over Red* and also something by Bausch. "I am lucky to have worked with two women of genius, Pina Bausch and Carolyn Carlson. I want to close this chapter of my life with the two women who raised me to another level because of their art." <sup>01</sup>

# Kindred Hip-Hop Spirits

by Victor Swoboda

Tentacle Tribe's Elon Höglund and  
Emmanuelle Lê Phan



Emmanuelle Lê Phan and Elon Höglund in  
Tentacle Tribe's *Nobody Likes a Pixelated Squid*  
Photos: Panda



Victoria Mackenzie, Marie-Reine Kabasha and Emmanuelle Lê Phan in Lê Phan's *Origami Mami*  
Photo: Alexandre Gilbert



Above and right: Emmanuelle Lê Phan and Elon Höglund in Tentacle Tribe's *Fractals of You*  
Photo: Malin Grönborg



Despite having only a few works in the repertoire since being founded five years ago, the small Montreal troupe call Tentacle Tribe is nonetheless in the forefront of the city's emerging companies. Co-artistic directors Elon Höglund of Sweden and Emmanuelle Lê Phan of Ottawa draw choreographic inspiration from hip-hop, breakdance and martial arts, transforming these pop culture forms into shapes that have emotional depth and philosophical reflection.

Höglund and Lê Phan, both 36, are accomplished breakdancers and hip-hop artist who had worked together previously at Cirque de Soleil, Cirque Éloïze and Rubberbanddance. A chance offer to create a duet for the 2012 edition of *Short and Sweet*, a show of three-minute works on a small Montreal stage, brought the duo to the attention of the director of the summer dance series *Quartiers Danses*. Under their newly named company, Tentacle Tribe, and with a distinctive octopus logo, Höglund and Lê Phan appeared at *Quartiers Danses* in a 10-minute duet, *When They Fall*



Invited back the following year, they presented an extended version of the same piece at an outdoor venue downtown, accompanied by a live trumpeter. The 16-minute *When They Fall Revisited* had twisting limbs, interlocking bodies and controlled falls. The piece was enticing enough to encourage Pierre Des Marais, artistic director of the Danse Danse series, to invite Tentacle Tribe to perform at Montreal's most prestigious arts showcase, Place des Arts. The gig and the accompanying publicity campaign were a boost for the young company.

For Danse Danse, Tentacle Tribe created *Nobody Likes a Pixelated Squid*, a 40-minute work whose complexity subverted hip-hop and breakdance moves into an overriding stylistic whole. Unlike breakdance or hip-hop battles where individual moves are praised for originality and virtuosity, *Nobody Likes a Pixelated Squid* drew meaning from the relations among the moves. In this way, the duo was able to show the attraction and repulsion of a developing male-female relationship. Locking and popping moves resonated emotionally.

Two years later, they pushed their discoveries further in the hour-long *Fractals of You*. Refining their dance vocabulary still more, they showed in gestures how two people can come under each other's influence, moving at times at the will of one or the other, now in tandem, now out of step. With impressive elegance, the two executed some intricate partnering, donning, removing and exchanging knee-length trench coats as a kind of metaphor for the ways in which people in a relationship mark each other and then leave those traces behind.

*Fractals of You* unfolded by implication and suggestion, leaving it to the spectator to discover the many sides of the dance narrative. Although it was abstract, the piece had a carefully defined architecture so that its significance defied arbitrary interpretation.

Underlying Tentacle Tribe's choreography is an understanding of aesthetics as the artistic resolution of opposites, a notion at the root of great works of art throughout history. For Höglund and Lê Phan, it is the contrasting circular and angular patterns of geometry that provide a foundation.

"Sacred geometry tries to explain our world through geometry," says Höglund. "The circle is the womb, feminine, creative, unpredictable. It also expresses chaos. Masculine energy is the square or angular shapes that are born out of feminine shapes. For me, it's always been about opposition — how you combine masculine and feminine energies."

Throughout Tentacle Tribe's creations, the performers' bodies are shown first in opposition to each other, then in harmony. What makes the works so rich is that the tension created by opposing forces is resolved in surprising ways. Höglund says: "I like subtlety. The beauty of our work is that the moves are unexpected."

Moreover, the forces in opposition are not always seen in consecutive order. Sometimes an element introduced early in the piece stands in contrast with another element later on. As a consequence, works by Tentacle Tribe offer much to discover over multiple viewings.

Lê Phan's and Höglund's artistic awareness grew out of their personal histories and creative encounters. "My dad was a musician and my mom was an artist, so I always had a creative environment," says Höglund, who grew up in Stockholm. "I've always been a physical person — my mom said I was dancing as a baby."

At six, Höglund was running home from school to watch and imitate the moves in Michael Jackson's *Thriller* video. A few years later, he became intrigued by two movies, *Beat Street* and *Breaking*, featuring B-boys and poppers. At 12, he met a pioneer Norwegian breakdancer, Bjorn Johannesen who taught him basic technique, showed him breakdance videos and took him to his first battles between breaking crews. For the next several years, Höglund taught himself breakdance while also pursuing taekwondo, kung fu and capoeira.

"Most B-boys are self-taught," says Höglund. "Technique is within us. It's just studying and understanding your own body. I had injuries that made me learn, and I was lucky to meet people who gave me pointers on different techniques, like gymnastics, martial arts, breaking."

His real hip-hop mentors were the members of Concrete Kingz, a Swedish breaking crew he joined in 1999. His peers encouraged him to audition for a show that Cirkus Cirkör was planning at the Royal Dramatic Theatre in Stockholm, a wild mix of aerials, dance and gymnastics.

"I remember the day of the audition very clearly because I had stage fright. I said to myself, 'Either you try it or you don't.' So I put fear aside." When they hired him, he says, "It ignited a new purpose. I started learning aerial acrobatics, contemporary dance, training more seriously and thoughtfully."

His performance drew an offer to audition for Cirque du Soleil, but Höglund felt it was too early. Only after freelancing for five years in various circus and dance gigs in Scandinavia did he reconsider the Cirque's proposal to try out in Montreal. "I was there for a week, tried many things, and first met Emmanuelle. She was a kindred spirit, also mixing forms."

Lê Phan had moved from Ottawa to Montreal to study dance at Concordia University and to taste the city's vibrant dance scene. "As a child, I was hyperactive, but very shy. My mom put me in a lot of things — ballet, which I didn't love, and jazz, which wasn't me. I kind of liked modern dance and when I was 10 or 11, I went to the School of Dance in Ottawa. But there were no hip-hop classes."

Lê Phan entered the francophone De La Salle High School because of its strong dance and arts program. "I was so antisocial that I would sometimes not go for lunch and just stay in the studio and make choreographies." School trips to the National Arts Centre revealed artists like Louise Lecavalier, who became Lê Phan's idol, and Les ballets C de la B, which she dreamed of joining. In her final high school year, Lê Phan attended raves. "I discovered breaking and thought, 'Oh, I need to do this!'"

She started breaking outside school, formed a small female crew called Upside Squad and participated in battles in Ottawa's fledgling breaking scene as well as at bigger competitions like the B-boys' Pro-Am. "Two guys from a group called Canadian Floor Masters taught me basics like the six step, but that was it. I often watched VHS tapes, fast-forwarding and

interplay of limbs. Quijada, with dancer and co-artistic director Anne Plamondon, used hip hop and breaking as the basis for a refined vocabulary that could sustain a lengthy choreography.

During the 2000s, Lê Phan was also an integral part of Montreal's first all-girl hip-hop troupe, Solid State. Bringing together as many as 14 B-girls, Solid State's shows had exuberant energy and daring that compensated for the somewhat raw quality of its choreographies.

"After seeing me in Rubberbandance's *Slicing Static*," says Lê Phan, "a Cirque du Soleil director asked for a video, so I sent him a 17-minute demo. Cirque auditions can be cattle calls, but mine had only about 15 people." Around the same time, Höglund was also auditioning for Cirque du Soleil; both were successful.

In Las Vegas, Lê Phan and Höglund performed in Cirque's *Love* show 10 times a week. Höglund, recalls Lê Phan, had an "amazing solo, a mix of capoeira, acrobatics, contemporary dance and hip hop, with four women swinging overhead in harnesses." Before and after shows, they worked on their own dances and style.

"There are so many performers [in Las Vegas] who do so many shows that they get tired of it," says Lê Phan. "After a two-year contract, like many others we were ready to go on to something else."

Back in Montreal, Lê Phan rejoined Rubberbandance and Höglund followed her, dancing in 2011 in Quijada's *Gravity of Center*. "Most of my career, I created my own work. I thought it might be interesting to be in a company where I was an

## Elon Höglund and Emmanuelle Lê Phan draw choreographic inspiration from hip hop, breakdance and martial arts, transforming these pop culture forms into shapes that have emotional depth and philosophical reflection.

rewinding. I wanted to learn other styles, but there were no locking or popping classes."

By necessity, Lê Phan, like Höglund, had to develop a personal technique and style largely on her own. "It was like that for our generation, but now there are schools for learning hip hop," says Höglund, who feels he has learned from everyone he has ever worked with. One lesson in particular stays with him. "It's never good to be negative about yourself. I trained a lot and would be unhappy if I didn't master something. Later, I learned that if you train, you should just be happy that you did something."

At Concordia, Lê Phan studied dance under Sylvie Panet-Raymond. "She helped me a lot and steered me toward choreography where I thought about how to integrate breaking." A Montreal B-boy was her boyfriend at the time. "He was very power driven, which is where I got my power. His group, Tactical Crew, performed in the Just for Laughs festival and in street shows. I loved battling — we went to Toronto, San Diego. The scene was very exciting."

In 2003, Lê Phan joined a new company called Rubberbandance, whose founder, Victor Quijada, had a varied background in breaking and contemporary ballet. Over the next decade, Rubberbandance became a major troupe with a distinctive style that emphasized off-centre moves and intricate

interpreter," says Höglund. "Rubberbandance has more ballet influences than my work, but their approach is similar. It was an easy transfer." Lê Phan and Höglund did just one Rubberbandance show together, as well as one with Cirque Éloize before going out on their own.

In the years since its founding, Tentacle Tribe has performed in Canada, the United Kingdom, France, Mexico and Sweden. Lê Phan and Höglund also hold workshops and creation sessions. "Our classes are about body-and-mind connections, playing with oppositions, angles, finding circular movements, popping, isolation," says Höglund.

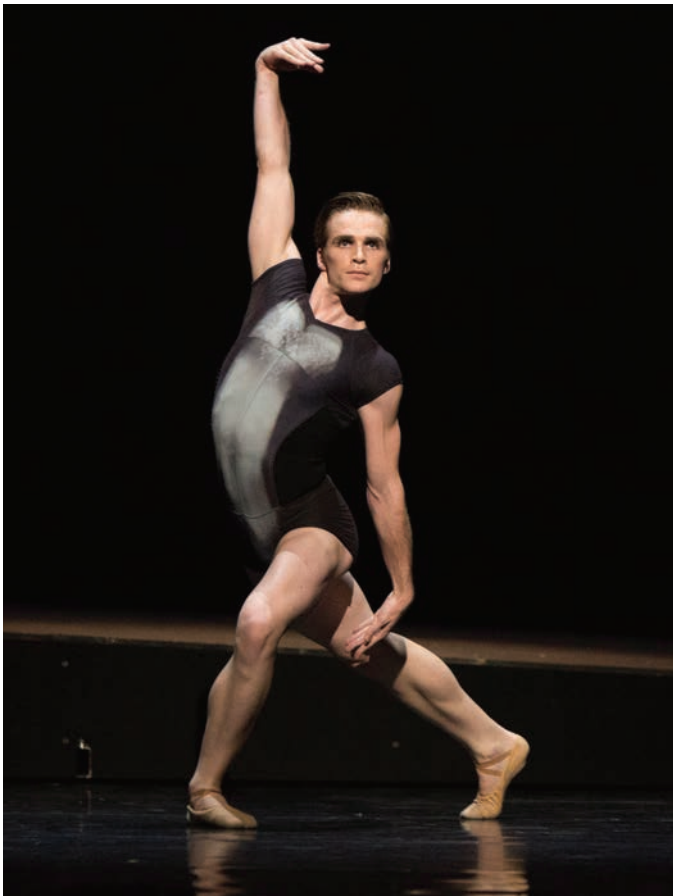
Tentacle Tribe expanded to a quartet in 2017, when Victoria Mackenzie and Marie-Reine Kabasha performed with Lê Phan on a tour of her trio, *Origami Mami*, which included London, England. The company grew further for a sextet called *Threesixnine*, which premiered at the 2017 Festival des Arts de Saint-Sauveur in August.

The founding duo hopes to expand to the point where Tentacle Tribe can have two separate groups. "Either Emmanuelle or I will always perform in a work," says Höglund, "but we'd like to teach new dancers the old works and have two touring companies." Having more dancers, they feel, will allow them to devote more time to creation. *DI*

# Dancers to Watch at the National Ballet of Canada

Principal Harrison James and first soloist Emma Hawes

by Michael Crabb



## Harrison James on the Fast Track

A man with the good looks and bearing of a prince who can also make his ballerina shine is a godsend to any classical ballet company. If the man also has a thoroughly respectable technique, instinctive musicality and an unostentatious yet appealing stage personality, you've more or less hit the jackpot. Yet, when you ask choreographer Christopher Wheeldon what he thinks of National Ballet of Canada principal dancer Harrison James, whose artistry comprises all of the above, he starts somewhere else.

"The first and most important thing you need to know is that Harrison is a lovely human being and a very generous, caring spirit," says Wheeldon. As to practical matters, and no doubt a natural extension of Wheeldon's initial observation, he adds: "Harrison takes good care of his partners. It's not just a technical thing. He's a great asset to the National Ballet."

It's hard to imagine anyone seriously questioning the amiable New Zealander's value to the company. A virtual unknown to Toronto audiences when he entered the corps in 2013, James has accumulated leading roles at a prodigious rate. He skipped a rank to become a first soloist in June 2015 and was made a principal a year later. By today's standards that's a speedy progression. On the other hand, he did not arrive out of nowhere.

James was born in 1991 in Paraparaumu, a seaside town on the southwestern coast of New Zealand's North Island, an hour or so north from the capital city, Wellington. He describes his early years in a decidedly non-artsy family — think camping, fishing and hunting trips — as a "wildly incredible childhood." Somewhere in his lineage, however, there must be a powerful performance gene. James recalls dipping into a dress-up box and dancing at home with such enthusiasm that at age five his mother suggested he might like to take dance classes. This he did locally and, as James summarizes, "things just snowballed."

Still, it was a decade before James began full-time professional studies in Wellington at the justly admired New Zealand School of Dance. (Christopher Gerty, a National Ballet of Canada corps member who in June danced the Prince to Emma Hawes' *Odette/Odile* — both debuts — in *Swan Lake*, graduated from the same academy.)

In 2008, James packed his bags and headed east across the Pacific to take up a traineeship at the San Francisco Ballet School. Two years later, he was offered a place in the company. He would have accepted it gladly if the needed visa had materialized. Instead, James found himself ready to work, but jobless. Thankfully, the ballet world is small and connected, and one of his teachers knew the Royal Winnipeg Ballet was looking for men. Thus, for the first time in his life, James found himself in a land-locked city.



“As a partner Harrison has an innate sense of what you need. He makes everything feel easier for you.”

— Chelsy Meiss



**Top left:** Harrison James and Jack Bertinshaw (background) in rehearsal for Robert Lepage and Guillaume Côté’s *Frame by Frame*, premiering June 2018  
**Photo:** David Leclerc

**Left:** Jurgita Dronina and Harrison James in August Bournonville’s *La Sylphide*  
**Photo:** Aleksandar Antonijevic

**Above:** Jillian Vanstone and Harrison James in Kenneth MacMillan’s *Manon*  
**Photo:** Aleksandar Antonijevic

James was soon given featured roles, was promoted to second soloist for his second season, was chosen to create the title character in choreographer Mark Godden’s *Svengali* in October 2011, made his Albrecht debut in *Giselle* the following February and was promoted to first soloist mid-season, which is an artistic director’s way of telling a dancer to stick around. The Royal Winnipeg Ballet’s André Lewis clearly expected James would oblige. James’ image, costumed as the Prince in *The Sleeping Beauty*, was used in promotional material for the company’s 2012-2013 season. A fast track to principal was clearly in the cards, but James was soon almost 7,000 kilometres away in Switzerland, dancing with Béjart Ballet Lausanne.

“I wanted to keep extending my artistic boundaries,” he explains.

A year later, eager to return to Canada for personal romantic reasons, James was tapping on Karen Kain’s electronic front door,

reasoning that the internationally known National Ballet of Canada had just the mix of classical and contemporary repertoire that match his professional aspirations. Having watched his audition, Kain says hiring James was a “no-brainer.” Her assessment has proved resoundingly accurate.

In person, James has a relaxed, easy-going manner. Inside the company, he’s known as a hard worker. He comes with natural gifts, but does not take them for granted. And, for all the exterior poise and apparent calm, he’s subject to the same nervous demons as any other dancer. Ballet is an exacting and unforgiving art, and James knows and respects that fact.

Where work is concerned, he tends to talk in practical terms. He is modest almost to a fault. When complimented on his impressive unscheduled June 2015 opening-night debut as the Prince in *The Sleeping Beauty*, James self-deprecatingly quips: “At least I didn’t fall on my ass.”

He knows he's not a flashy "see how many pirouettes I can do" kind of dancer, but perhaps underestimates the impact of his refined elegance. James' dancing has a touch of the unaffected, well-mannered understatement that used to be a treasured hallmark of Britain's Royal Ballet before the company went international. The technique is clean and precise, but never gratuitously showy. There is a poetic undercurrent and dramatic sensitivity that contrasts with the coarseness all too prevalent on ballet stages today.

James' first season with the National Ballet of Canada, blighted by injury and lost opportunities, was not auspicious, but he caught up fast. He likes to joke that he's the go-to guy whenever the company is left in the lurch because of injuries among more senior dancers. Several of his major role debuts or opening-night appearances have been triggered by such situations.

"I've been very lucky when it comes to timing," says James. "I was there when injuries happened. It was kind of my shtick for a while. 'Oh, Harrison is around. Let's stick him in there.' So it's 'we need you now,' and you've got to run with it."

The first such occurrence really made audiences pay attention. When casting went up for the National Ballet's November 2014 revival of Kenneth MacMillan's *Manon*, James was only down to learn the role of Des Grieux as understudy, with Jillian Vanstone as the title character. Anthony Dowell, the original Des Grieux in 1974, flew in to coach the leads. You could tell Dowell was impressed as he worked with James and Vanstone, by the electric communication of Des Grieux' intemperate passion for Manon.

As the injury dice fell, James and Vanstone did get to dance the roles and won a standing ovation. The two had worked together the previous summer as part of the Banff Centre's former professional summer dance intensive, and Vanstone made no bones about her admiration for James. "I've told Karen [Kain] I'll dance anything with him," she confides.

The following March, James and Vanstone were reunited when Wheeldon chose them as his first cast for *Carousel (A Dance)*. That fall, Wheeldon cast James as opening-night Polixenes in *The Winter's Tale*.

Unfortunately, even when there's an obvious chemical connection that translates into stage magic, the logistics of casting — practical and political — don't necessarily favour the development of dedicated partnerships. Anyway, Vanstone is not the only ballerina to appreciate James' reassuringly attentive and dependable partnering.

For his November 2015 title debut in Alexei Ratmansky's *Romeo and Juliet*, James was paired with Chelsy Meiss. "As a partner Harrison has an innate sense of what you need," she explains. "He makes everything feel easier for you." Meiss adds, "He's a dreamboat. He makes me feel all girly; perfect for a teenaged character falling hopelessly in love."

In March 2016, again by dint of necessity, James found himself making another unscheduled opening-night debut, this time as the fictional James in *La Sylphide*, with Jurgita Dronina as the spirit-creature who lures him to his doom.

In June 2016, James made his company debut as Albrecht, partnering former Bolshoi star Svetlana Lunkina in the title role of *Giselle*. As the wheel turned, James ended up partnering three different ballerinas during the run; quite the hat trick.

## Audience Favourite Emma Hawes

As the most senior members of the National Ballet of Canada's sorority of principals move inexorably toward retirement, the company has little cause for concern. Fans naturally lament the departure of particular favourites, but no ballerina is irreplaceable; and fans are also fickle. You can already sense shifts of allegiance as they begin to take note of tomorrow's stars. Witness the ovations that hailed newly minted first soloist Emma Hawes' debut performances as Odette/Odile in *Swan Lake*. Hawes is a versatile dancer with a luminous stage presence and an ability to deliver even the most technically challenging steps with almost conversational naturalness. As Magdalena Popa, the National Ballet of Canada's principal artistic coach, observes: "Emma's body just speaks."

Hawes has an ability to deliver even the most technically challenging steps with almost conversational naturalness.

The male leads in these two surviving relics of the Romantic ballet suit James admirably. He makes both *La Sylphide*'s James and *Giselle*'s Albrecht seem real and immediate — and far more sympathetic and likeable than they probably deserve to be.

Most recently, in early June, James revealed yet another aspect of his dramatic range when, cast against type, he made a thoroughly convincing debut as the detestable Stanley Kowalski in John Neumeier's *A Streetcar Named Desire*. James must have dug very deep indeed to find his inner brute.

The worry for his growing body of fans is that a dancer as accomplished as Harrison James could be lured away from Canada. Happily, at present he shows no particular eagerness for a change of company. Having established a sterling professional and artistic reputation at the National Ballet, James can now look forward to reaping its full rewards.





Left: Emma Hawes in James Kudelka's *Cinderella*  
Photo: Aleksandar Antonijevic

Below: Emma Hawes in James Kudelka's *Swan Lake*  
Photo: Aleksandar Antonijevic



Hawes' exceptional talent was evident during her final years at the National Ballet School in Toronto. "I saw this incredible instrument," says National Ballet artistic director Karen Kain, "those beautiful long legs and well-arched feet; everything you could want in a dancer."

On graduation in 2011, the American-born Hawes, at age 17, was hired into the company corps, skipping the more typical year or two as an apprentice. Not unusually, the physical pressure took its toll. Hawes ended her first season with a torn meniscus but recovered well. By November 2012, she was chosen to represent the National Ballet in the invitational company-hosted Erik Bruhn Competition, for which she won the Audience Choice Award.

The next season she was called in to understudy the title role in James Kudelka's full-length *Cinderella*, but any chance Hawes might have had to perform it was thwarted by a stress fracture that kept her out for almost a season. Yet, despite these setbacks, Hawes' career has soared.

Already, Hawes' repertoire is impressive: Snow Queen and Sugar Plum Fairy in *The Nutcracker*, Effie in *La Sylphide*, in *The Sleeping Beauty* a principal fairy and Princess Florine and, in November 2016, the role she'd learned more than two years earlier, *Cinderella*. And now with Kudelka's staging of *Swan Lake*, Hawes has scaled the most iconic of classical ballerina roles.

Hawes appears to have an affinity with Kudelka's choreography and relishes working with him. "James' choreography is incredibly musical, but also full of fast-paced direction changes and physically demanding partnering," she explains. "The coordination is complex. You have to do it a million times to get it into your body. James also expects a high level of work. He knows what he wants and makes sure he gets it out of you."

Although Hawes' physical and emotional attributes ideally suit the traditional classical repertoire, she has also performed impressively in a wide range of neoclassical and contemporary work. The gentle femininity she can project as *Cinderella* at the ball or a *Sleeping Beauty* fairy bestowing a blessing can transform into the steely dynamic extremes and angularity of form fashionable among today's choreographers. She relishes those opportunities.

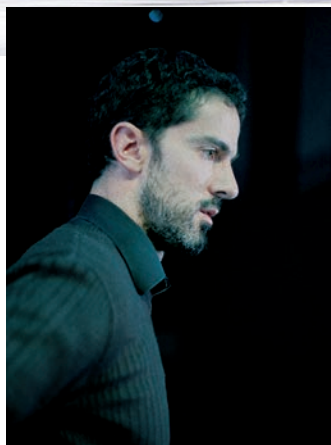
"I still love and value classical ballet," says Hawes, "but I'm so excited by the new and by the wealth of interpretation that comes with it." ❖

# The French-Algerian Connection

Hervé Koubi explores his roots in *What the Day Owes to the Night*



by Jenn Edwards



Hervé Koubi  
Photo: Marie-Aimée Mercier

It was only at the age of 25 that French choreographer Hervé Koubi finally learned of his Algerian roots. His father showed him a photo of a grandfather he had never met, a man who spoke only Arabic. He was shocked to find out that his parents had emigrated from Algeria and, until that moment, hidden their heritage from him. A few years later, in 2009, Koubi travelled to Algiers, the country's capital city, and held an audition, determined to turn this personal revelation into art.



Fayçal Hamlat and artists of Compagnie Hervé Koubi in Koubi's *What the Day Owes to the Night*  
Photo: Ahmad Daghlas

Last April, when *What the Day Owes to the Night* closed the DanceHouse season at the Vancouver Playhouse, the athleticism, fearlessness and sheer joy of the dancers were hypnotic and energizing, culminating in a lengthy standing ovation. But while the head spins, flips, windmills and stalls were impressive, it was just as captivating to see the dancers move in slow motion together, blending each other's unique rhythms into one shared stream of movement.

During a pre-show chat, Koubi explained that the work was titled after an Algerian novel by Yasmina Khadra. For Koubi, the "day" signifies his life in France and the "night" is his family's mysterious past in Northern Africa. The legacy of French colonialism, as well as his family's secrecy, had created a disconnect with his own past, a sense of Algeria as "other." The process of creating this dance was a way of closing the gap of mystery. When he crossed the Mediterranean, Koubi didn't seek out traditional North African dance forms, but instead worked with what was right in front of him: athletic young men with a passion for street dance.

According to Koubi, Algerian dancers who are interested in contemporary forms learn from YouTube videos and practise outside at night. Because of the dangers of being out late on the street, there are few female dancers and only one showed up at the audition.

When asked how he chose the 12 dancers out of the 250 who auditioned, Koubi replied that he was interested in how they interpreted his contemporary movement with their informally trained bodies. In the choreography, rather than forcing the dancers into a tight ensemble with uniform shapes and timings, Koubi opted to highlight their individual strengths, respecting their diverse movement backgrounds. At times, the stage becomes a high-urgency pandemonium of distinct solos, with limbs barely missing each other.

Beyond aesthetics, Koubi also speaks of an indescribable connection, calling these dancers his "found brothers." This bond within the group is clear onstage. In a climactic moment, one dancer climbs a mountain of bodies toward the sky, before falling epically back into the steady arms of his fellow performers.

The success of *What the Day Owes to the Night* also lends itself to a certain alchemy. Its deeply personal origin story, the athleticism of the dancers and the bridging of cultures between two countries with a love-hate past have all struck a chord with audiences. But perhaps most pertinent is Koubi's exploration of a contemporary Muslim identity, free of stereotypes and speculation, and infused with powerful, elated movement.

The piece ends with one dancer reciting a poem, written by Koubi and translated into Arabic. The refrain is simply, "I went there." ▫

This trip became the inspiration for *What the Day Owes to the Night*, which features 11 male dancers from Algeria and one from Burkina Faso. The work is a mosaic of breakdance, capoeira, contemporary dance and Muslim imagery. Wearing billowing white pants, the dancers fly through the space with impressive speed and vigour to a musical score mixing Western classical music with traditional Sufi rhythms.

One of the most impactful images features dancers spinning on their heads for what seems like an impossible amount of time, while others do so on their feet, reminiscent of Sufi whirling dervishes. Since the work's premiere in 2013, Compagnie Hervé Koubi has been touring the globe, including North America throughout 2016 and 2017.

# Looking Back at Parade

Picasso designs the Ballets Russes' 1917 premiere

by Karen Barr



When Pablo Picasso was first invited to design sets and costumes for Serge Diaghilev's Ballets Russes production *Parade*, the Spanish-born artist declined. Perhaps it was the chance to work in Italy, a country Picasso had never visited, which finally lured him in. Or maybe it was the opportunity to work with writer Jean Cocteau, choreographer Léonide Massine and composer Erik Satie. In any case, he did finally join them in Rome, in February 1917. The ballet would premiere in May that same year at the Théâtre du Châtelet in Paris.

Cocteau's libretto, about a sideshow or parade used as a way to draw paying customers inside a fairground, had numerous film references that set the tone for the ballet. The premise revolved around the character of the Little American Girl (Maria Chabelska), who was dressed like Hollywood film star Mary Pickford, with a navy and white sailor top, white pleated skirt, black socks and shoes with bows. Her movement evoked the shuffling walk of Charlie Chaplin in *The Little Tramp* and Pearl White escaping adventures in *The Perils of Pauline*.

Massine's choreography featured flickering jerky movements typical of early films and Satie's music, which included sounds of typewriters, sirens and revolver shots, was scored in short choppy blocks, similar to the way silent film stories were told. The dancers entered from behind Picasso's large-framed screen in the centre of the stage, their shadows both from behind and in front giving the impression of moving images.

The drop curtain displayed during the overture — 45 kilograms of canvas painted with tempera, measuring 52.5 by 39 feet and made up of a red, blue and white colour palette — includes a white

Pegasus on the left side, nuzzling a mare. To the right, harlequins and circus performers are sitting down together for a meal. The fairy dressed in white is thought to be ballerina Olga Khokhlova, who was in *Parade* and who Picasso fell in love with while in Rome; they would marry soon after the premiere.

These pictorial scenes could not have prepared audiences for the shock of heavy Cubism when the curtain went up.

The backdrop featured a landscape of tall looming buildings, whose unlit blacked-out rectangles suggested eerie windows. The two Manager costumes were, essentially, Cubist sculptures. The American Manager, who tries to convince the crowd to come inside, was dressed in an oversized piece of solid cardboard. He appeared more than 10 feet tall, with a cityscape of tall buildings jutting out on top, and carried a megaphone, although the character remained silent.

The French Manager was a mustached, pipe-smoking Cubist form, with trees and beautiful homes surrounding his head. His role was to provide a mimed commentary about the dancers, and his dance, in which he would stomp his feet and cane for emphasis, was like an Irish jig.

The Chinese Conjurer, danced by Massine, wore a bright red-orange and yellow hip-length kimono jacket, with a puff of smoke in the middle. Leaping and gliding in short jerky bursts across the stage, he mimed fire coming out of his mouth or, seeming to swallow an egg whole, pressed it in through his body and extracted it from his foot.

An acrobatic couple, one of which was star ballerina Lydia Lopokova, wore blue and white unitards, with stars, some striping and swirling patterns.

At the premiere, many booed at the presentation of film, considered a frivolous art form, within the scope of the sophisticated high art of ballet, especially with such bizarre costumes and avant-garde music. Yet *Parade's* blending of high and low art, blurring art and entertainment, was considered by many to be a masterful achievement.

When Robert Joffrey restaged *Parade* for the Joffrey Ballet in 1973 at New York City Center, it had never been presented in North America. The project was heartfelt, since Joffrey had always credited the Ballets Russes with inspiring his career; it was after seeing the touring company in Seattle, Washington, in the 1930s that he began ballet lessons.

For the remount, Joffrey flew to Paris where most of *Parade's* sets and archival information still remain. Massine was convinced to join him in the reconstruction of the choreography.

In his *New York Times* review of the production, Clive Barnes wrote: "American dance — partly through policy, partly through poverty and partly through whim — has neglected the decorative aspect of the ballet. And when we see Picasso dominating the stage in this way, the sheer surprise of it gives our spirit a special lift. We see great painters or sculptors on our stages far too rarely." <sup>1</sup>

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## The Quat-z-arts Ballet



Georgette, costume design for *Orphée of the Quat-z-arts*, c. 1912. Gouache and lace on paper on wood, 45.7x32.7cm. The Museum of Modern Art, New York. Gift of Miss Ettie Stettheimer  
Digital Image © 2014 MoMA, N.Y.

In 1912, Florine Stettheimer attended a performance in Paris of the Ballets Russes' production of Vaslav Nijinsky's *L'Après-midi d'un faune*, inspiring the American painter, poet, and costume and set designer to create her own ballet, *Orphée of the Quat-z-arts* (or, *Revellers of the Four Arts Ball*). Stettheimer hoped to have Nijinsky dance the title role, but the ballet was never produced. The New York Jewish Museum's exhibit of her work, on view until September 24, is drawn from the 1890s to the Second World War. Curator Stephen Brown says, "Stettheimer has sometimes been typecast as a lightweight feminine artist with a whimsical bent. This view is belied by her powerful rethinking of portraiture and her astute adaptation of European vanguard ideas to uniquely American imagery."

## Nureyev Postponed

The Bolshoi Ballet's premiere of *Nureyev* was cancelled just days before opening on July 11, postponed until May 2018. The ballet was choreographed by Yuri Possokhov and directed by Kirill Serebrennikov, with an original score by Ilya Demutsky, the same trio responsible for the Bolshoi's popular *A Hero of Our Time* in 2015.

The ballet is based on the life of legendary dancer Rudolf Nureyev, who defected from Russia in 1961, in Paris. A flamboyant personality, Nureyev directed the Paris Opera Ballet from 1983 to 1989, dying of an AIDS-related illness in 1993 at age 54.

At a news conference, Vladimir G. Urin, general director of the Bolshoi, reportedly stated that, after watching a dress rehearsal, management felt the choreography was not ready to premiere. Reports around the world speculate that the real reason is the ballet's frank portrayal of homosexuality. In 2013, Russia passed a controversial law making "propaganda" about homosexuality among minors illegal.

In recognition of outstanding Indigenous leadership for their initiation of the 2014 ballet *Going Home Star – Truth and Reconciliation*, André Lewis, Royal Winnipeg Ballet's executive artistic director; Tina Keeper, a Cree activist, producer and actor; and the late Elder Mary Richard, an Aboriginal and human rights activist, were honoured by the Governor General of Canada.

Produced with the support of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada, the ballet is a choreographic representation of the many stories, both told and still unravelling, by Indian residential school survivors and their families. The Presentation of Canadian Honours ceremony took place in June in Ottawa's Rideau Hall.

## Going Home Star



Sophia Lee and Liang Xing in the Royal Winnipeg Ballet's *Going Home Star – Truth and Reconciliation*  
Photo: Samanta Katz

Barry Ace  
Bandolier for  
Wiikwemkoong (2017)  
Mixed media,  
234 x 38 x 8 cm

In the Anishinaabe custom, bandolier bags are also known as friendship bags since they are traditionally gifted to strengthen friendship and family relations. Barry Ace's bandolier bags are richly embellished with electronic components (capacitors, resistors, light emitting diodes) and glass seed beads, replicating Great Lakes' floral motifs and designs. Embedded into this bandolier bag is a digital tablet displaying historical archival silent film footage of Anishinaabe dance performances and re-enactments taken on Manitoulin Island, Ontario in 1925.

Photo: Courtesy of  
Dance Collection Danse



## By Invitation Only

While Canada's Fathers of Confederation toiled at the table of nation making, two voices were not invited to the discussion: women and Indigenous peoples. Dance Collection Danse's exhibit, *By Invitation Only: Dance, Confederation and Reconciliation*, illuminates their stories.

Women and dance were essential to networking during the 1864 Confederation conferences in Charlottetown and Quebec City when wives and daughters of the Fathers of Confederation were invited to several social balls. Prince Edward Island's Edward Whelan wrote of his fellow delegates: "They know if they can dance themselves into the affections of the wives and daughters of the country, the men will certainly become an easy conquest."

Within two decades of Confederation, the dances of Indigenous peoples were banned in an attempt to suppress their culture and assimilate them into colonial society. This law drove the dancers underground; oral tradition allowed the dances to survive until the ban was lifted in 1951.

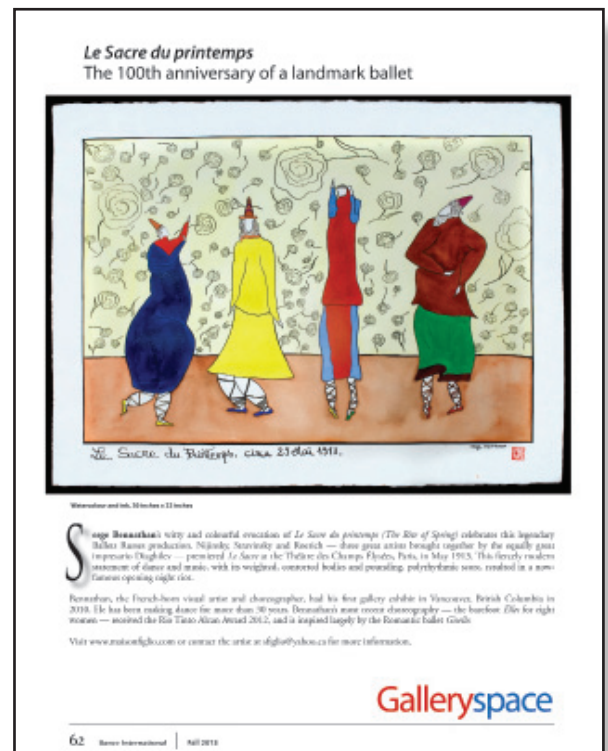
Curated by Amy Bowring, director of collections and research at DCD, and Troy Emery Twigg, a Blackfoot from the Kainai Nation in southern Alberta, and an artist in movement and choreography, this exhibit is at the DCD Gallery in Toronto until December 22.

## The Dancing Piano

In September, Nicki Williamson will conduct the Dancing Piano in London. The course provides training for pianists to develop the skills needed to become a professional pianist for dance. The temptation to dispense with live music in the dance studio can be great, yet this is, for many dancers, the first and possibly only time they will have the life-affirming experience of dancing to the music of a live musician.

## Celebrating 40 Years

*Dance International* mounted an archival exhibit in the lobby of its home at Vancouver's Scotiabank Dance Centre in May 2017. In addition to a selection of black-and-white covers from the early years the exhibit featured the magazine's more recent Galleryspace department, launched in Fall 2013. Pictured here is the first one, showcasing artwork by French-born choreographer and artist Serge Bennathan. The watercolour and ink painting evokes the iconic Ballets Russes production of Vaslav Nijinsky's 1913 *Le Sacre du printemps*.



# Prix Benois de la Danse



by Silvia Poletti

The Prix Benois de la Danse is a child of Perestroika, created in Moscow in 1992, when cultural exchanges began again between the West and the former Soviet Union. Over the last 25 years, the awards program has recorded changes in taste and trends in choreography. It has consecrated masters of the art, and pointed out talents on the rise. Above all, it has affirmed the primacy of classical ballet, along with its technical evolution.



It's no surprise that Benois de la Danse was born inside the Bolshoi Theatre. Its founders are two former Bolshoi dancers, Nina Loory and Regina Nikiforova, a current ballet master-repétiteur with the Bolshoi, and the jury president is Yuri Grigorovich, Bolshoi's ballet master, who, at 90 years old, displays the energetic manners of a true leader.

What is puzzling, however is the method of nominations for the annual categories (best male dancer, best female dancer, best choreographer). Usually nominees are linked with the members of the jury — artistic directors or resident choreographers from

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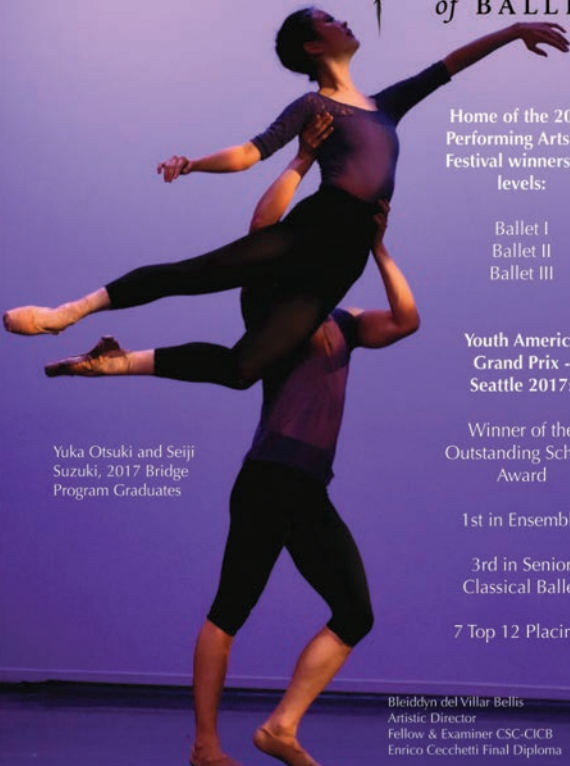



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Photo: Alan Austin



Mats Ek and Ana Laguna in Ek's *Memory*  
Photo: M. Logvinova



all over the world — which sometimes makes the list of names limited.

The 2017 jury was formed by Vienna State Ballet director Manuel Legris; former director at Paris Opera Ballet Brigitte Lefèvre; Julio Bocca, director of National Ballet of Uruguay; Boston Ballet resident choreographer Jorma Elo; Bolshoi star Svetlana Zakharova; Washington Ballet artistic director Julie Kent; and Korean National Ballet director and former Stuttgart ballerina Kang Sue-jin. The 2017 winners did indeed reflect the jury's inner dynamics: the awards for best female performers went to Paris Opera étoile Ludmila Pagliero and principal dancer of Uruguay National Ballet María Ricetto; and for best male, to Paris Ballet rising star Hugo Marchand and Bolshoi principal Denis Rodkin. And the award for best choreographer went to Crystal Pite for her acclaimed Paris Opera creation *The Seasons' Canon*.

Beyond the awards themselves, the two evenings of Benois de la Danse on the Bolshoi stage, including one devoted to past winners, provide a useful outlook of the state of the art. By all accounts, classical ballet technique is being taught and shared among dancers from all parts of the world, creating a common heritage. Take, for example, the overwhelming performance of Agripina Vaganova's acrobatic duet *Diana and Acteon* by the lovely Japanese Aya-no Kimura and the African American Brooklyn Mack (both Washington Ballet dancers). Mack danced with a flamboyant but refined virtuosity, purity of lines and stylistic mastery that took the Moscow audience by storm.

Ballet repertoire is globalized, too. A Soviet masterpiece like Grigorovich's *Spartacus* now is programmed by companies with no ties to that cultural tradition, such as the Royal Ballet of Flanders, directed by Sidi Larbi Cherkaoui.

At the Benois gala, it was amazing to see the slender, long-limbed Lee Jae-Woo from Korea play *Spartacus*; with impressive approach, he lifted his ethereal partner Seul-Ki Park (both of them were 2017 nominees for best performers) in the celebrated acrobatic portés of the love scene.

If globalization starts to meld repertoires and styles, the greatest challenge of today's choreographers is to find and define their own language. Surely this was Pite's winning card, with her own poetic vision and expressive body language. Whereas the excerpt from *Dido and Aeneas* by Cherkaoui (one of the competitors) featured spectacular and complex combinations in partnering that seemed too complaisant and predictable for a choreographer of such fame as a researcher.

Those who want to choreograph might follow this suggestion: have your own language — coherent, honest and meaningful. This notion was confirmed by watching the severe but touching *Variations for Two Couples* by Dutch maestro Hans van Manen, performed with elegance by San Francisco Ballet soloists. Or by watching *Memory*, conceived and performed by 72-year-old Swedish genius Mats Ek with his muse and wife Ana Laguna; his topics — married life, the tiny emotions of daily life

— mix with the reality of the relationship of these two giants of dance.

It is a message we would like to suggest to Ivan Vasiliev, who premiered his *Souvenirs* during the Benois winners' gala. This was a dark, mournful duet about loss and death performed by his wife Maria Vinogradova and himself, both in black, but his roaring leaps and incredible tricks strayed too far from the elegiac theme he wanted to convey.

Moscow-trained Yuri Possokhov, after blossoming as a choreographer in San Francisco, seems to be becoming the darling of the Bolshoi after the success of his full-evening *A Hero of Our Time*. For the Silver Jubilee of the Benois Award, he created a lovely duet, *Toi Moi*, inspired by the two figures sculpted by Igor Ustinov (son of actor Peter Ustinov and a great-nephew of Alexandre Benois), which is the famous symbol of the award. It was one of the surprises of this edition.

But the greatest part of this year's Benois was to applaud a true legend of the ballet world, Marcia Haydée, who was given the Lifetime Achievement award. A master in dance acting, Haydée, now 80 years old, is also a master in life: "Every day I wake up and say to myself that the best has yet to come," she said while accepting her award. ▫



**Kloe Dean**  
Photo: Hannah Furness

London's pre-eminent hip-hop company, Boy Blue, selected two young people to premiere their work as part of Boy Blue's Barbican Takeover, held recently at the Barbican Centre, Europe's largest multi-arts and performance venue. The opportunity, packaged as the first of a series called NeXT, was a vote of confidence in emerging artists and Boy Blue dancers Kloe Dean and Tyrone Isaac-Stuart by company founders Kenrick 'H2O' Sandy and Michael 'Mikey J' Asante.

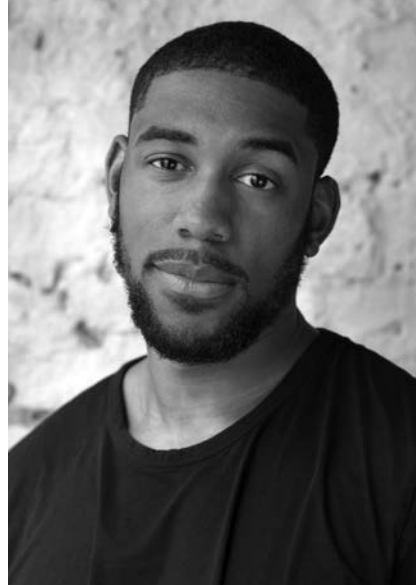
Dean's *Journey of Growth* built on themes of female empowerment and self-worth, and was performed by the 11-member, all-female dance collective, Myself UK Dance, which she founded at age 18. Now 27, her movement vocabulary has matured considerably from her early battle dancing days when she crammed as much as possible into a three-minute solo. Following the philosophy that less is more, *Journey of Growth* explored choreographic simplicity. Transitions were fluent and the general movement more lyrical, though her punchy declarative quality was still evident.

Some of the new vocabulary was a result of learning funk styles from Sandy over the 10 years she has been in Boy Blue, and "urban moves and grooves" during trips to New York and Los Angeles, when she trained with legendary hip-hop, poppin' and locking progenitors Fred Folkes, Mr Wiggles, Popin' Pete

# Hip Hop's Barbican Boost

## Presenting Kloe Dean and Tyrone Isaac-Stuart

by Carole Edrich



**Tyrone Isaac-Stuart**  
Photo: Lisa Gilby

and Greg Campbelllock Junior. Performing in the high-energy street, nightclub and tap dance show *Blaze* since 2012 has also introduced her to new ideas from a range of colleagues. The London-based show has taken Dean on 12 worldwide tours, including visits to Sydney, Taiwan, Bangkok, Russia and Dubai.

The NeXT series gave her more, much appreciated, onstage time, with her show running 45 minutes. "Choreographing for a longer period of time enabled me to stretch my creativity and to explore where the movement or idea could go in ways that aren't possible in shorter sets," Dean says. "I've discovered I really like building a feeling and creating a journey for the audience."

As a musician-dancer with a lyrical bent, Tyrone Isaac-Stuart's approach is all about the story and melding live music, dance and spoken word. Isaac-Stuart, 25, is also part of a longstanding musical collective, Parshmaune (a name invented to reflect their jazz sound), and he has been exploring music and street dance since secondary school. When he moved from Southwest England to

London in 2011 to study jazz music at Middlesex University, he had planned to take a break from dance, but a chance conversation led to a successful Boy Blue audition.

Working with Boy Blue brought a sense of home, and it became his "university for dance." Isaac-Stuart explains, "Being in my first hip-hop theatre piece with Boy Blue, I wanted to be Kenrick, just like I had wanted to be Soweto Kinch," referring to the British alto saxophonist and rapper who has a unique way of blending the two art forms.

A teacher had introduced him to Kinch's music when he was 17, and he had joined a jazz music program at which Kinch taught. That, combined with Kinch's association with Breakin' Convention, led to Isaac-Stuart dancing with him in 2012. Isaac-Stuart says Kinch showed him by example that it was possible to fuse multiple skills. This gave him more confidence in exploring his own integration of vocals, dance and jazz saxophone, the results of which show clearly in his current work.

His Barbican show, *An Earnest Life*, was a 45-minute story involving a journalist and a musician, and explored ideas about funding for the arts and the politics of public relations. Isaac-Stuart danced and performed spoken word as Earnest, the jazz musician, joined by three more dancers, a dancing violinist, an actor and a jazz trio. Isaac-Stuart was the principal composer as well as choreographer, using a vocabulary of krump and hip-hop contemporary fusion.

NeXT was a great platform for Dean and Isaac-Stuart. "We want to help young artists who just need a little bump," says Asante. "We can shine a spotlight on them, give them tech and rehearsal time, do what can be done to help." Boy Blue plan to continue showcasing emerging artists with a similar drive to develop. "There are others like Kloe and Tyrone and it's beautiful to see them shine." *DI*

# Michael Crabb's Notebook

In the May issue of *Write* magazine, the quarterly organ of the Writers' Union of Canada, an issue highlighting Indigenous authors, editor Hal Niedzviecki wrote: "In my opinion, anyone, anywhere, should be encouraged to imagine other peoples, other cultures, other identities." Provocatively, and perhaps facetiously, he suggested there should be a prize for best appropriation job.

A number of well-positioned writers, editors and executives who should have known better threw their support, and in some cases offers of cash, behind the proposed prize. That's when things began to heat up in the mainstream and social media. A flurry of high-level apologies, resignations and re-assignments of perceived offenders ensued.

Despite the opprobrium heaped on Niedzviecki, we should at least accord him indirect credit for triggering a needed debate about what constitutes cultural appropriation.

The column is worth reading in full because, wrong-headed as it may seem, Niedzviecki's manifesto is a broadside aimed against the appalling lack of diversity in Canadian literature. However, as his critics quickly pointed out, encouraging white, middle-class writers to imagine themselves into the heads of minority or marginalized cultures is probably not the most appropriate solution.

As the debate continued, it became increasingly confused with issues of identity politics, racial stereotyping and freedom of artistic expression, none strictly relevant to any useful concept of cultural appropriation. For a definition of a somewhat porous concept, Kanien'kehá:ka journalist Jessica Deer, in an opinion piece for the CBC News website, offers something concrete to work from.

"Cultural appropriation," Deer writes, "occurs when elements of a marginalized culture are taken and used by another culture with a huge sense of entitlement attached. That unhealthy sense of entitlement is obvious when an individual cannot even accept criticism from members of the culture they're appropriating."

It is worth noting Deer's deployment of the word "elements." She is not issuing a blanket proscription, but referring to the entitled appropriation by a dominant culture of "elements" that have profound social, spiritual or symbolic significance for a historically besieged and endangered one.

What does any of this have to do with dance?

Canada's contemporary dance scene has a long and honourable history of Indigenous performers, some trained in Western dance, presenting either theatricalized versions of their native dances or personal dance-dramas in Western or hybrid forms, highlighting the experience of an Indigenous person in an unwelcoming secular, materialist, urban culture. The authenticity of these endeavours cannot be argued and no sane person would contend that Western dance forms were being "appropriated" in the process. The scarcity of classically trained Indigenous dancers places ballet in a more sensitive and potentially problematic position.

When in October 2014 the Royal Winnipeg Ballet first staged its subsequently much-toured production, *Going Home Star – Truth and Reconciliation*, some observers felt uneasy watching a non-Indigenous cast dance a ballet made by a non-Indigenous choreographer (Mark Godden) about the iniquitous Indian residential school system. There were even whispered suggestions that it smacked of cultural appropriation. Emphatically it did not.

The process of prior consultation with Indigenous leaders and face-to-face encounters between cast members and those they strove to portray, and the fact that the project proceeded with the support and endorsement of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission, removed any possible taint of what Deer meant when she referred to "a huge sense of entitlement."

This was not the RWB's first embrace of Indigenous subject matter. In 1959, long before anyone had coined "cultural appropriation," the RWB presented Robert Moulton's *Brave Song*. It was billed as an authentic evocation of the dance and music of the Plains Indians, "heightened, re-choreographed and coloured," according to an ingenuous program note, "to be more meaningful as theatrical work." In the RWB archives, you'll find a photograph showing the non-Indigenous cast in a variety of horned and feathered

headdresses and sporting someone's conception of Plains Indians ceremonial dress.

There was also Norbert Vesak's 1971 adaptation of George Ryga's play, *The Ecstasy of Rita Joe*, the tragic saga of an Indian girl who leaves the reserve for the big city, only to find herself alienated from both cultures. Apart from the recorded voice of Chief Dan George of the Tsleil-Waututh Nation, who'd played Rita's father in the original 1967 Vancouver Playhouse production, the ballet had no Indigenous participants. However, its making had been spurred by a request from the Manitoba Indian Brotherhood, and 46 years ago audiences were deeply moved by a dance-drama that prompted profound sympathy for the plight of its tragic Indigenous heroine.

In the midst of the current fevered discourse, the range of acts, artistic or commercial, that apparently qualify as "cultural appropriation" is being extended to comprise just about anything to which some aggrieved group takes objection. This is not helpful. What we should really be talking about is power and entitlement, about who is wielding it, for what purpose and at whose cost. Exploiting a historically repressed culture's soul is an abuse of power. Honouring and respecting it is not. <sup>DI</sup>

*Correction: Sincere apologies to Hamburg Ballet artistic director John Neumeier. In my Summer 2017 column, I incorrectly stated that he is 78. In fact, John is a spry and youthful 75!*



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# Photographers in Black and White

Gabriel Davalos and  
Rosalie O'Connor

by Toba Singer

With the advent of quality camera phones, colour photographs of dance abound. Yet black and white still holds aesthetic allure for many. We asked three photographers who specialize in dance — from Cuba, the United States and Canada — to share three favourite black-and-white photos from their own archives. Two of the photographers are featured here, while the third, Michael Slobodian, will be in the Winter issue. The format, as is evident in the following pages, remains relevant and vibrant even in our colourful digital age.



## GABRIEL DAVALOS, HAVANA

**Gabriel Davalos is a Cuban photographer** based in Havana. In 2001, when he was 20, he saw renowned Cuban ballerina Viengsay Valdés dance. “She connected me with dance in a profound way,” he says. “I immediately wanted to take photographs, but had no camera and no money to buy one.” Almost a decade later, in 2010, a family friend gave him a Nikon D200. That same day, he hid behind a column at Havana’s Gran Teatro and shot 300 photos during a performance of *Swan Lake*. “None of them came out well,” he says. “So I spent months attending performances and engaging in conversations with dancers.”

For Davalos, black-and-white images carry a magnetic charge. “The challenge in black and white is not to overplay its dramatic force,” he says. “It’s so easy to

make people look either denigrated or exalted. You risk imbalance, even misrepresenting the subject. Also, we learn from childhood that black-and-white images return us to the past, so they often come with overwhelming nostalgia.”

Davalos considers it important to know the history of photography and design, including trends in technique and composition. He talks about “interrogating technique” in order to understand the physical laws involved in his work, such as how objects reflect light. He prefers to shoot documentary style, in natural conditions, without artificial light.

He is tense before each shoot, which is usually physically and emotionally exhausting. “It’s a life and death commitment to create!” The chemistry between the camera, and the body and mind of

I took the shot of Amaya Rodriguez (a Kansas City Ballet principal dancer) and Grettel Morejón (a National Ballet of Cuba principal dancer) the day after deciding to finally pursue this career in 2010. Amaya captivates by doing a big leap, projecting Cubans’ strength. Grettel’s jump is smaller, but her eyes are closed as she jumps from a one-metre-wide seawall, opposite four-metre-high reefs!

— GD

the photographed and the photographer, can be intense.

*Intimate Havana* is Davalos’ current project, featuring nude dancers in street settings, which he hopes to publish in book form. “This project is a debate about the body, eroticism, prejudices and the disguises we accept at face value,” he says.

Davalos often shoots National Ballet of Cuba dancers, but he has worked with others from companies such as Les Grands Ballet Canadiens de Montréal, Holland’s Introdans and English National Ballet.



Arianni Martin (an Arizona Ballet principal) and Edward González (a Sarasota Ballet principal) perform their lift just as a wave is breaking over the Malecón seawall, where the land ends. The rest of the world starts with the sea; I wanted to capture all the meaning that the sea holds for Cubans. This photo appeared on a main-artery billboard in Havana.  
— GD

Since I want to tell my people's story, when I came across these pipes — which mean repairs for the neighbourhood — I wasted no time in setting this shoot up with Dayesi Torriente (now a Pennsylvania Ballet soloist). In the photo, I wanted to show the conflict between wanting to do more for your country, yet being resigned to life in a city such as Havana that sometimes makes you feel dispensable.  
— GD



# ROSALIE O'CONNOR, NEW YORK



I'd photographed this final moment in *Swan Lake* many times before and from every angle; for this 2001 performance by American Ballet Theatre, I was tucked away directly above the stage manager's desk. I captured this wide shot first, though was convinced a tighter shot of a single swan would be the ideal image. Later, I was surprised to see the wider shot was stronger, with the power of the diagonals surrounded by swans disappearing into the mist. The lesson here is to always try to capture several perspectives — you may surprise yourself with which one is the strongest!

— RO

In 1996, Rosalie O'Connor, then a dancer at American Ballet Theatre, self-timed a shot of colleagues and herself reading *Dance Ink* magazine along the side of the Metropolitan Opera House. She entered it into a *Dance Ink*-sponsored contest and won. Later, she was invited to shoot the gallery photos on American Ballet Theatre's website. O'Connor hesitated, afraid to send mixed messages about her career intentions to company artistic director Kevin McKenzie, but then borrowed a Nikkormat 35mm camera and began to shoot. Soon after, she says, "I invested \$1,500 earned from guesting as the Sugar Plum Fairy in a Canon."

When a major foot injury sidelined her, she says that photography helped her

"separate from the misery of watching others dance roles I'd worked for."

"Backstage shooting is intoxicating; I can't think of anything I'd rather do," O'Connor adds. "You're at the mercy of stage lighting, though, and it is especially difficult to photograph the white acts in classical ballet. *Swan Lake*, *La Bayadère* and *Giselle* have inherently low light, the costumes are white and the principals dance under spots, but after 20 years of experience, I can work with the tremendous contrast in these ballets, though it's not always easy."

Colour provides vibrancy, but she prefers black-and-white photos, especially sepia tones. With black and white, she says, "I

want contrast, nothing too muddy, unless I'm going for a blur." She says that some of her greatest successes in black and white are of former principal dancer Julie Kent, and attributes this to Kent's line and natural beauty.

Key to O'Connor's career is the trust that comes with having been a company member. "I edit with a very observant dancer's eye, and I don't let pictures out that don't meet the company's high standards." She also has a sensitivity to dancers' needs. "I asked Amanda McKerrow, 'Does shutter noise distract you?' She said she could barely hear it, and that on the contrary, it was comforting. 'I knew it was you,' she said, 'and felt supported.'"

In this 1999 photo of Julie Kent and Keith Roberts, you see them just before their glissade and lift in the pas de deux from *Le Corsaire*, which they were rehearsing for a repertoire program. American Ballet Theatre's Studio 5 is my favourite studio because of how the afternoon light arrives like a slow-motion tidal wave, reaching across the floor. The light made Julie's tutu seem as if it had caught fire. I love the symmetry of the dancers' front legs, the identical reach of their top hands as they prepare to travel. You sense something exciting is about to happen. An unexpected bonus was that Julie's profile is reflected in the window behind her, cradled by her back hand. — RO



I photographed Alicia Alonso and Vladimir Malakhov in *Spectre de la Rose* during a dress rehearsal for the 1997 American Ballet Theatre Gala. Alonso is a legend I knew of from childhood, when my teacher gave me a Cuban postage stamp with her image. I like the circling arms, the motion. A slower shutter gave a slight blur to hand and head, but not the back foot. I like the angle of her face and the ecstasy in her expression. He's in sweat pants, since this was a stage rehearsal. It was thrilling for me to document them, and surely moving for Malakhov to perform with Alonso, whom we all admire for her virtuosity, longevity and the company she built in Cuba. — RO





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# The School of Dance



# The Very Irish Ballets of Joan Denise Moriarty

## A pioneering cultural presence

Joan Denise Moriarty was one of the most important figures in dance in Ireland during the latter part of the 20th century. By setting up her professional and amateur companies, and pioneering dance in education, she sought to make dance an integral part of the Irish cultural scene. Throughout her career, she strived to create a uniquely Irish expression of ballet and many of her works explored Irish themes, myths and legends.

Moriarty was born around 1912; exactly when and where is not known. Her family had left Ireland in 1907, and she was brought up in England, returning with her parents to Mallow, County Cork, at around the age of 20. By this time she had studied ballet with Marie Rambert and been named Champion Irish Step Dancer of England in 1931. She had also won prizes playing the warpipe (a type of Irish bagpipe) in Irish competitions. In Ireland, she began to devote herself to teaching ballet classes, first in Mallow and then expanding to Cork.

During the Second World War, her students performed in musicals and light opera productions at Cork Opera House, but it was not until 1945 that Moriarty really began to be involved in creating ballet performances. That year, she was invited to play the warpipes in a composition by eminent composer, musicologist and professor Aloys Fleischmann, who had heard Moriarty perform at his university summer course. Thus began the lifelong artistic collaboration that

by David Wallace



would give Ireland two professional ballet companies — Irish Theatre Ballet (1959-1964) and the Irish Ballet Company, later renamed Irish National Ballet (1973-1989) — as well as the amateur Cork Ballet Company (1947-1993) and Cork Folk Dance Group (1957-1967).

She would collaborate with many other well-known Irish composers of the day, including A.J. Potter, Elizabeth Maconchy, Seán Ó Riada and John Buckley, but it was her collaboration with Fleischmann and their mutual interest in Irish culture and

traditions that proved most rewarding. Moriarty and Fleischmann produced production after production of standard repertoire such as *Giselle*, *Sleeping Beauty* and various classical pas de deux, as well as original Irish dance-infused ballets through to Moriarty's death in 1992.

Moriarty's works involving a fusion of ballet and Irish dance steps had some precedent in the amateur ballet world of Dublin in the early 20th century, but she refined the style and brought it to the professional scene. She had remarkable international

success with *The Playboy of the Western World* (1978), with music from the band the Chieftains. The ballet was based on the 1907 comic classic by Ireland's John Millington Synge and explores the idiosyncracies of Irish peasant life at the time. As well as performances at the Dublin Theatre Festival in 1978, the ballet was presented and received with enthusiasm at both New York City Center in 1979 and at London's Sadler's Wells in 1980.

Possibly the most remarkable aspect of Moriarty's choreography is its musicality. Her choreographic notebooks demonstrate that she worked closely with the music and favoured working with minutage — timings according to minutes and seconds, rather than actual scores — especially with traditional music where scores would not have existed. When she did use scores, her notebooks highlight bar numbers and work closely with the given time signatures, sometimes creating counterpoint by giving the dancers different counts to that in the score.

*The Táin* (1981), based on the great Irish epic of the same name and set to a composition by Fleischmann, provides fascinating evidence of counterpoint between dance and music. The movement vocabulary is heavily influenced by ballet with interjections from the Irish tradition. Depending on the context, Moriarty uses steps such as tipping and battery, and jig and reel steps, particularly travelling steps from these traditional dance forms.

Through analysis of the video recording of the dress rehearsal of *The Táin*, it is clear Moriarty uses the stage space well, and her crowd scenes are fascinating to watch in both *The Táin* and *The Playboy of the Western World*, as layers of character and drama are cleverly arranged. (A particularly fine recording of *Playboy* exists in the archive.) One often gets a sense of fragility in the solos, which favour simple steps and clear lines that, for the most part, gave Moriarty the vocabulary she required to create. Unfortunately, no remount of any of Moriarty's works has yet been undertaken in Ireland or abroad. The particularly poor recording of *The Táin's* dress rehearsal has gaps in the action, but *Playboy* and *Lugh of the Golden Arm*, an earlier work, would be possible to remount, if not in a fully realized recreation of Moriarty's exact steps.

Moriarty's penchant for dramatic gesture is deployed to great effect in *Lugh of the Golden Arm*. The ballet for six dancers was created in 1977 for Moriarty's professional

Irish Ballet Company, to music by Ó Riada and Éamon de Buitléar. A recording of this work was made when it was broadcast by Ireland's national broadcaster, RTÉ, in March of that year and Lugh's solo is now freely available on YouTube.

Lugh was the Mercury of the Celtic gods — light-footed, nimble, skilled in crafts and an inventor, he was a protector and champion of the downtrodden. In the ballet, he comes to the aid of a young widow, Fidelma of the Long Hair, whose husband has been murdered by a warrior from an invading clan. With mourners bearing his sword, shield and cloak, she laments his death. When the Invading Warrior bursts in to kill her, too, Lugh appears and in single combat defeats him. Fidelma dances in gratitude for her deliverance; she folds her husband's cloak, and, as she does, the burden of her grief is eased, for his dying request has been granted — he has been avenged.

The fusion of ballet and Irish traditional steps is particularly evident in the choreography for Babil Gandara as Lugh, a dancer of considerable skill, sharp footwork and impressive elevation. *Lugh of the Golden Arm* very successfully showcases his talents: the battle scene between Lugh and the Invading Warrior is an exciting mix of grand allegro and allegro steps paired with dramatic gestures, free movement and steps from the Irish tradition.

The movement for the three mourners and Fidelma of the Long Hair, with its stark and bleak nature, creates a striking contrast with the allegro steps executed by Gandara, building dramatic tension onstage. The mourners carry the cloak, shield and sword of Fidelma's dead husband, bringing our attention to the function of the women in depicting the death theme of the ballet. Their upper bodies are twisted and contorted, and the arms further accent this: they seem to reach out into the air as if to seize something that is not there, searching and reaching. Sometimes the arms are contained across the chest, fist over the heart with the head turned away as if the women are compelled by the force of their grief to avert their eyes from onlookers. Their movements look heavy and laboured, especially with the appearance of Fidelma. The cloak Fidelma wears is used to expand the space that she occupies as she moves with wide sweeps low on the floor, marking circles in a ritualistic, yearning way.

Once the mourners have left the stage, Fidelma begins her lament. Accompanied by harp, she weaves around the stage,

stopping in various arabesque poses, again stretching out from her chest, but always contained within the cloak in which she envelops herself as she moves cautiously around. Her hands frame her face in various ways, highlighting its lack of expression during moments of stillness.

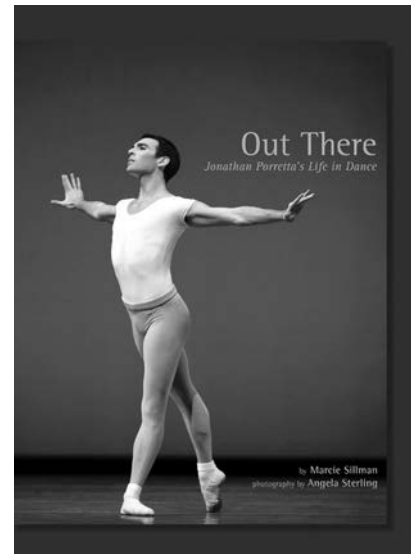
In contrast, the duet by the two male characters — Lugh and the Invading Warrior — covers the whole stage, facilitated by the use of travelling steps, many from the Irish tradition, and wide leaps. The choreographic language here seems grounded and real, suggesting that the world of the men is highly affected by gravity, occupying a reality that the movement for the women avoids. This provides an interesting counterpoint to the actual characters; Lugh, a demigod, is presented like a mortal, while Fidelma and her mourners become otherworldly beings.



*Lugh of the Golden Arm* demonstrates a choreographer of skill and intelligence, especially where music and drama are concerned. In much contemporary ballet, emphasis is put on the steps: on getting them right, higher, sharper, quicker; what Moriarty does in all her work is challenge us to look beyond the steps, to look into the movement and see the character. It is this element of her choreographic output that will endure and it is the strong Irish influence that gives her and her work a unique place in the pantheon of ballet creators. ▯

*An earlier version of this article appeared in Joan Denise Moriarty: Ireland's First Lady of Dance, edited by Ruth Fleischmann. It has been revised by the author for Dance International.*

**Excerpt from  
OUT THERE: JONATHAN PORRETTA'S  
LIFE IN DANCE  
By Marcie Sillman  
Photography by Angela Sterling  
Seattle Scriptorium, 2016  
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“When I joined Pacific Northwest Ballet, *Agon* was one of the first ballets that they were doing here. I was taught the male solo at School of American Ballet and dreamed of dancing it. I guess I was very ballsy: I went and asked Franca [Russell, then PNB co-artistic director] if I could come to rehearsal. At 18. I wasn't really in a 'cast'; I just went into the studio to learn it.

One day, there happened to be time left at the end of rehearsal, and Franca asked me if I wanted to rehearse the solo with her. And so I did. It was really amazing she took the time to do that. It was everything to me.

I hadn't picked up the small changes PNB did, and so I did the version that I had learned at SAB. Franca let me finish, and then we went through and just polished it and changed it to the version we were doing here: little changes, like one arm was down instead of up, things like that. I was blown away that I got to rehearse with her at 18, on a role I wasn't even cast for.

A few years later, the ballet came back and I was Third Cast for the solo. I was still in the corps!

The whole ballet in general is just so fierce without trying to be anything except ballet. It's just straightforward — intricate, but not trying too hard. It's brilliant. The main pas de deux is one of the most amazing pieces of choreography; to this day, it is incredible. It was so ahead of its time. And it's sexy — and beautiful. To dance in a piece that is so brilliant feels just amazing.

I had seen City Ballet do it numerous times and dreamed about doing the Peter Boal part [the first pas de trois]. He was technically fierce; I wanted to dance it. I had no idea what was in store for me with the counts!

I prefer not to count — though I don't mind for a Balanchine ballet. (I have a clause in there for a Balanchine ballet!) They are so complex, and somehow the counts and the choreography work in unison. I don't feel it's like that for all ballets, which is why I would prefer to listen to the music and dance to it, usually. But for the Stravinsky and Balanchine combo, it works just perfectly. ”

— **JONATHAN PORRETTA**

Jonathan Porretta performed George Balanchine's *Agon* seven times at home with Pacific Northwest Ballet (2005, 2007 and 2013) and four times on tour with PNB (2008 Sante Fe, and 2013 New York and Victoria, B.C.).

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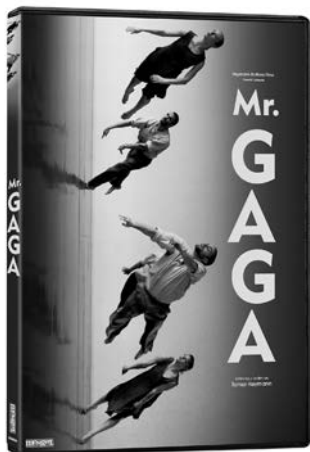
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“And now that you’re tired, keep going. And let’s say it together: piece of cake!”

If I had to choose one quote from *Mr. Gaga*, the film chronicling the life and work of Ohad Naharin, this would be it. It reveals the intensity and sense of humour of the Israeli choreographer and Batsheva company artistic director, and his unflinching interest in the social animals that are humans. And it touches on the central tenet of his movement language, Gaga, which unearths the pleasure in effort.

Director Tomer Heymann has created a film in which we are unsure of what is real and what is fabricated. As we move through it, we come to understand that this is a bit what Naharin himself is like: some kind of international man of mystery, full of contradictions, with a dry sense of humour and an intensity that is missed by no one who is interviewed in the film.

Naharin is expert at revealing only what he wants to reveal. When he discusses how he came to dance, he evades the question and simply explains that dance has always been a part of his life, and that he never decided to become a dancer. Instead, he says, “The idea of physical pleasure from physical activity is totally a part of how I conceive myself as being alive.”

The film is seamless in its transitions and nuanced in the way it pairs the dialogue with clips of Naharin’s work. Great effort was made to find a particular excerpt of a particular work that somehow illustrates, in dance’s magical non-verbal way, what the interviewee is speaking about in that moment.

The opening scene provides an immediate window into how Naharin works, walking a fine line between showing compassion to his dancers and demanding the impossible. A dancer repeats a falling movement over and

over as Naharin provides detailed corrections. At one point he says, “Are you stressed?” She answers, “No,” so he says, “Then do it again.” Later in the film, dancer Reggie Wilson reiterates, “Ohad showed you, and you did it. And you did it over and over again until he said ‘yes.’”

The film reveals several personal stories and anecdotes that provide context for the excerpts of work shown. We learn of Naharin’s life on the kibbutz in Israel, and how upset he was to leave communal living when his family moved away, comparing it to being torn from a conjoined twin. This sense of togetherness is deeply evident in his choreographies, which are nearly always large groups that include some hint of unison, tribalism and collective consciousness.

The film touches on his deep relationship with the late dancer Mari Kajiwaru, a union that was both personal and professional, another blurring of the lines between life and art. This part of the film brings to the forefront an interesting contradiction within Naharin: he shows great reverence for Kajiwaru and for the female body in movement in general, describing how he accesses a feminine energy in his own dancing, yet he has a reputation as a womanizer. The latter is not addressed in the film beyond Naharin’s own passing comment about falling in love with many of the women with whom he has worked.

About two-thirds of the way through *Mr. Gaga*, an important piece of biographical information shared earlier in the film is revealed to be a fabrication. This immediately follows a close-up of Naharin singing a song describing advice from parents not to lie, including his response, “We have to lie sometimes.” The juxtaposition appears simultaneously insightful and ominous, providing one of the stronger links between his life and his work, reinforcing the sense of uncertainty about what is truth and what is fabrication in both instances.

As the film progresses, we observe the beginnings of Naharin’s rock-star status in Israel. When he takes over and begins to

overhaul the Batsheva Dance Company in 1990, it becomes the target of criticism from religious conservatives, and the film takes an interesting look at censorship. Demonstrations erupt in support of Batsheva, and Naharin becomes a cultural hero. Many of these scenes show footage of him walking briskly with Israeli politicians, his black trench coat catching the wind, looking every inch a dance rock star.

The film eventually lands on Naharin’s major spinal injury, leading him to the development of Gaga. He recounts a story of his elderly father struggling to get out of a chair. Naharin remembers saying to him, “Let’s try that again, but this time when you do it, just say ‘piece of cake.’” When his father took his advice, Naharin says with wonderment, he stood up “like a 15-year-old boy.”

Along with his own rehabilitation, this experience helped him form the movement language of Gaga, which seems to have provided him with a way of linking what he knows and loves about movement to a broader community. Naharin says of Gaga, “There is no one, regardless of ability level, that can’t be connected to physical sensations. There is no one that isn’t capable of connecting effort and pleasure.”

The scenes showing hundreds of people partaking in community Gaga classes, led by Naharin and his dancers, are particularly moving, including one where a huge group of people are dancing together and repeating after Naharin, “piece of cake,” in perfect unison.

**KATE STASHKO**



Ohad Naharin  
 Photo: Gadi Dagon, courtesy of Mongrel Media

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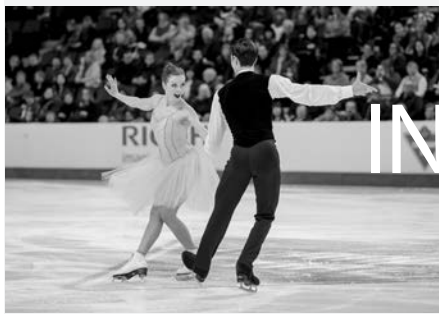
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# INSIDE ED

## Skaters at the Barre by Jacquelyn Thayer

While ballet is a default course of study for figure skaters in Russia, off-ice dance is not

an officially mandated component of skater training worldwide. Yet ballet technique is widely considered to be a foundational aspect of the sport of figure skating; across North America, athletes at both a developing and elite level will typically include ballet lessons two to three days a week in their training regimen, especially in the summer off-season. For those who compete in ice dance, off-ice dance training often also includes lessons in ballroom and maybe hip hop or modern.

In teaching ballet to skaters, the intention is to help develop well-rounded athletes. Toe point, good body line and balance are the primary emphases for young students building a foundation. Experienced athletes may address more specific technical needs. For competitive singles and pairs skaters, ballet is a multifaceted instructional tool. Even a simple plié can serve as a strength and training exercise for the knee bend that underpins most facets of skating, from the set-ups for those high-flying rotational jumps and multiple spins, to the simple strong push to glide across the ice.

For ice dancers, ballet hones fundamentals like proper alignment, core strength, and good upper body extension and movement. Daria Kruszel, who teaches ballet to skaters at Montreal's Gadbois Centre, works on improving strength and control for male ice dancers by having them jump slowly, in half time. Ballet lessons are also an opportunity for athletes to partner with someone new for supported jetés and temps levés, exercises that can enhance a skater's body awareness in lifted elements and better prepare them for potential mishaps in lifts.

Kruszel revises her syllabus to suit the changing needs of her athletes,

putting emphasis on dégagés and ballonné, which are particularly relevant to a skater's range of one-foot movements. Modified rond de jambes require skaters to more fully lift the free leg off the floor, similar to the extension demanded in ice dance.

A skater's typical ballet lesson might include standard exercises such as tendus, pliés and other barre elements, though some teachers prefer to shift those exercises to the floor. With skaters constantly engaged in maintaining balance on blades across the ice surface, the idea is that executing these movements without relying on a barre can improve stability when in that more treacherous environment.

A handful of skaters competing at a high level have studied ballet seriously, evident in their excellent carriage, exceptional extension and fluidity of movement, and added ankle strength courtesy of pointe work. Most skaters, however, approach ballet as just another form of off-ice training. In these cases, Veronique Breen, who works in the Detroit area, has learned to meet skaters on their own turf. On the ice, skaters typically train with constant, individualized feedback, with each practice of a particular movement followed by discussion with a coach — in contrast with the more traditionally regimented, focused style of a group ballet class. Breen works to acclimate athletes to the necessity of steady repetition of balletic exercises, along with mastery of general concepts and terms from ballet.

Once skaters have forged a basis in dance, ballet terminology can provide a linguistic shorthand to activate muscle memory. A coach who asks a skater to execute a back jeté is really asking that skater to demonstrate certain proper free leg extension and hip positioning once on blades. Strong port de bras is a universal demand, relevant to good on-ice carriage as much as it is to dance — even if the five foot positions on ice may include far more freedom in arm positioning.

From some of the world's best skaters to under-the-radar talent, the classical fundamentals and discipline conferred by proper ballet training are apparent on the ice today. ▫

*Jacquelyn Thayer is a journalist who specializes in the relationship between figure skating and off-ice dance for outlets including Two for the Ice and Ice-Dance.com.*



# GLOBAL REPORTS

## Winnipeg

by Holly Harris



Winnipeg's Contemporary Dancers closed its 52nd season by honouring its roots, presenting the premiere of former artistic director Tedd Robinson's cryptically titled *Cotton Handkerchiefs and Dog's Tears*. The mixed repertoire show featured a trio of works performed at the Rachel Browne Theatre, April 27-29.

The now Ontario-based Robinson created an elegiac "Godot-esque" world in which dancers Robyn Thomson Kacki and Susie Burpee appeared as co-conspirators. Dressed in black suits, white shirts and pedestrian shoes, the duo gingerly examined three Japanese tea bowl boxes and tiny doll-house furniture, establishing a sense of ritual purpose with Robinson's gestural movement vocabulary, ranging from suspended lyricism to angular body isolations. There were animalistic touches, as Burpee held splayed fingers to her head as though they were antlers, as well as flashes of Robinson's idiosyncratic humour that saw Thomson Kacki delicately balancing a tea box and a white handkerchief on

her head. An original score by Charles Quevillon was infused with sounds of canine whimpering — Robinson's real life dog, Stella — as the work built to a thunderous climax. I felt Robinson's latest creation to be a metaphorical post-modern treatise on "home." At the end, when Burpee finally opens a tea box to reveal its emptiness, its implied message devastates.

The Winnipeg premiere of Montreal-based Janelle Hacaault's *Falling*, featuring herself with Jason Martin in a visceral, narrative-based duet, explored intimate relationships, set to Vivaldi's *The Four Seasons*. The Flin Flon, Manitoba-born artist's no-holds-barred choreography included propulsive leaps, lifts and unflinching nudity with her strong final cadence seeing each dancer repeatedly dropping hard to the ground while held by the other — a metaphorical image of falling in love with all its emotional perils. Hacaault also goes for the jugular as she plays with power differentials, as when she tenderly cradled Martin in her arms, their trust palpable, only to violently fling him off her body to lay sobbing on the floor.

For the first time in its 17-year history, Gearshifting Performance Works featured a guest choreographer in its latest production held April 21-22 at the Gas Station Arts Centre. Toronto-based Marie-Josée Chartier remounted her fascinating *petites danses* (2016) for an expanded 15-member ensemble spanning multiple generations and levels of expertise.

The nearly two-hour production, which explores the idea of perception, featured eight evocative dances in as many different ensembles. Notably, Chartier's choice of four works composed by Rodney Sharman, Linda C. Smith, Nick Storrington and James Tenney reappeared after intermission in new choreographic guises. In that way, the viewer was forced to examine their own response to the influence of music on dance, and vice versa.

The most compelling works were the ones with the greatest emotional resonance, rather than the more abstract pieces. Chartier also pushes the boundaries of physical risk and emotional trust, such as during the duo performed by bare-chested Winnipeg actor Arne

McPherson and a nude Hélène Le Moulllec Mancini. Is this duet about power? Love? Chartier leaves the question wide open.

She excels at arresting theatricality. The opening solo featured Natasha Torres-Garner whirling like a dervish, while the sextet featured dancers scuttling across a large white dropcloth like furtive clams. In the equally memorable quintet, the dancers swayed below a large suspended steel mesh that loomed like omnipresent danger in Chartier's world of wonder.

Mid-May, the Royal Winnipeg Ballet premiered James Kudelka's *Vespers*, inspired by 16th-century French philosopher Michel de Montaigne, as well as by Monteverdi's *Vespro della Beata Vergine 1610*, which was performed live by vocal group Camerata Nova with the Winnipeg Symphony Orchestra. The nearly two-hour production featured the RWB's former prima ballerina Evelyn Hart, at age 61 performing in soft ballet slippers, her luminous artistry still burning bright.

Kudelka created a fantastical, other-

worldly kingdom where humans and beasts leap, love, mate and spar as equals. Following a suggested, apocalyptic "Fall," their two worlds splinter apart, until Hart's Everywoman, joined by principal dancer Dmitri Dovgoselet's male figure, seek reconciliation — or, at least, peace.

The two halves of the ballet are distinctly different, with the more paradisiacal Act I introducing the show's 10 animals, with dancers wearing Karen Rodd's wonderfully sculptural animal masks. Denis Lavoie's costumes range from sartorial vests and tailcoats for the beasts and birds, to neutral black shirts and trousers for the mortals. Act II locates the action in a domestic scene, including an oversized farm table created by set and prop designer Nick Blais, in the shadow of an overhanging, gnarly tree branch.

Kudelka's choreography ranges from rustic, folkdance-flavoured steps and stomps, to courtly promenades heightened by the genteel score. His trademark patterning features larger ensembles seamlessly morphing into solos,

duets, trios and quartets. A series of tableaux are embedded into the overall choreographic texture, providing momentary repose from seeing 20 dancers executing complex waves of movement.

Once onstage, Hart never leaves. Her character is a pivotal presence that propels the loosely based narrative toward its resolution, and she inhabits her role with utter commitment. One of the show's most tender moments comes as she first encounters corps de ballet member Liam Caines' Horse — arguably the animal protagonist — as her benevolent protector.

Much of the ballet is dense, and the score begins to bleed into one sonic texture. At times, the fleeting images become obfuscated by the introspective show's stream-of-consciousness ethos. Its final scene is cryptic. Yet Kudelka's newest creation is one for a brave new age of global warming and increasing environmental tension, while recalling an idyllic past in which all lived harmoniously on this big, beautiful planet we call home. *DI*

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PHOTO: KHAREN HILL

by Kaija Pepper

Vancouver



With the film *Mr. Gaga* drawing audiences around the world, Israeli choreographer Ohad Naharin is having a bright cultural moment. Ballet BC, to good effect, jumped on the bandwagon and remounted Naharin's popular *Minus 16* to end its final show of the season in May. This work — a compilation of excerpts from three previous pieces — was surely the perfect warm and witty finale to send audiences home with. There's even audience interaction that is superbly choreographed into the proceedings: on opening night, several people brought onstage were good-natured and brave about being expected to dance free-form alongside the professionals on the Queen Elizabeth Theatre's large stage.

I've enjoyed seeing Naharin's own company, Batsheva, perform the *Echad Mi Yodea* section, a Passover song set to a heavy rock beat (by Israeli group Tractor's Revenge), and loved it once again on Ballet BC. The movement is rhythmically compelling, yes, but more than that, it's choreographed with a potent mix of abandon and tension. Sixteen men and women, in the same loose-fitting black suits and hats, sit on chairs placed in a semi-circle, and from this straightforward setup Naharin creates a whole cultural atmosphere, slightly oppressive (that heavy music, the black clothes, the twitching

limbs), but then over and over bursts of blissful release take the dancers in impossibly long arches back over their chairs — one by one, white shirt fronts flashing, in a wave that always ends with the last dancer's fall to the floor.

Emanuel Gat, another Israeli, premiered his *LOCK*, an insider piece that takes a "look into dance making, individuals and the way they come together." The Ballet BC dancers (12 company members and four apprentices) performed in the austere black box space (the stage was contained by black curtains on three sides) with quiet concentration, oozing and hunkering down into the odd little shapes and steps. The somewhat eerily lit piece grew on me partly because of its coherence — it was what it was all the way through, in every body. Andrew Bartee was the only one not in grey shorts and top; instead, he wore bright green skinny jeans, which didn't seem to indicate any sort of soloist role, but acted more abstractly, like a splash of colour.

The middle offering was artistic director Emily Molnar's recent Ottawa premiere, *Keep Driving, I'm Dreaming*, set to an original score by Canadian new music composer Nicole Lizée. The project was part of a National Arts Centre evening celebrating Canada's 150th anniversary, and the score had an almost retro feel with massive orchestral movements, and

recurring pops and squawks. The hardy group of eight dancers mustered their individual power to successfully hold their own against the music's large scale. Throughout, they ran on and offstage like athletes; while they were on, powerful shoulders and backs took them into Molnar's dynamic scenarios.

On the final weekend in May, two smaller local companies performed in black box theatres — Wen Wei Dance, run by ex-Ballet BC dancer and longtime choreographer and artistic director Wen Wei Wang at Scotiabank Dance Centre, and the up-and-coming Ouro Collective at the Orpheum Annex. Both featured a group of talented young dancers with a range of experience and, also for both, urban forms provided the glue and the glitter, too.

Wang's *Dialogue* was a dark kind of cool featuring six male dancers clad in black, a few spotlights crashing through the gloom. The energy was often hard and propulsive, as in Ralph Escamillan's duet with Arash Khakpour. It's a solo, really, with Khakpour acting as a support for Escamillan, who, precarious in stilettos, balances on one leg, the other flickering and jabbing in provocative tango fashion.

*Dialogue* is built on a series of mini-scenes; another is one in which Khakpour — who immigrated to Canada from Iran as a youth — tells a story about being called a terrorist. The most direct dialogue came in the sleek solo turns by each of the dancers, their bodies telling stories in the way that only dance can.

Ouro Collective's *Tangent* featured lots of solo turns, and also many ensembles that relied on teamwork by the three women and two men to create their overall shape, bodies interconnected like cogs in a machine. Though the structure was too episodic — it was set to nine tracks by Matt "Kutcorners" Perry, TroyBoi and Amon Tobin, among others — the snap, crackle, pop of their urban-styled moves was dramatic, polished and carried a clear rhythmic pulse both with and apart from the music. *Tangent* was an optimistic evening, with the dancers wearing mostly white on a bright stage. The duet between Maiko Miyauchi and Rina Pellerin (both ballet trained before immersing themselves in street dance) was both elegant and witty, a refreshing combination that was emblematic of the evening. *DI*

Harbourfront Centre's World Stage, launched in 1986, was once a high-profile festival. It introduced Toronto to a host of major international theatre artists, but, as corporate sponsorships began to dry up, the festival adjusted by becoming a more modest although still artistically adventurous series. This year there was no new programming at all. Instead, as Harbourfront Centre re-evaluates its place in the local cultural landscape, it chose to dip into its past with World Stage Redux, a compact festival of encore appearances.

Dance highlights among the eight productions included local dancer/choreographer William Yong's; American Kyle Abraham's, a raucous fusion of street, house and contemporary dance; and by Denmark's gift to dance expressionism, Kitt Johnson.

Other notable visitors to Toronto included Montreal's Marie Chouinard with her whimsical and magical, Eifman Ballet of St. Petersburg with one of the Russian choreographer's most compelling works, and, on a more modest but no less gripping scale, Melbourne-based dance experimenter Antony Hamilton.

Hamilton pitched the choreographer and fellow Australian dancer, sound designer and self-taught instrument maker Alisdair Macindoe amidst the latter's "percussion orchestra" of 64 tiny robotic instruments. It was an hour-long tour de force of stamina, memory and precision movement, although its theme of man as machine was not always clearly focused.

If tap could talk, which of course in a way it can, it might echo comedian Rodney Dangerfield's celebrated complaint, "I don't get no respect!" — at least from the mainstream dance community. Taking a page out of Vancouver's book, local tap artist Allison Toffan in June launched the first Toronto International Tap Dance Festival with marquee artists such as experimentalist Heather Cornell and the more traditional Big Band-accompanied Ted Louis Levy sharing the spotlight with local artists. It was a modest but enthusiastically received start to what Toffan hopes will be a widening recognition of tap's place in the broad spectrum of dance expression.

The main feature of the National Ballet of Canada's spring season was the Cana-



dian premiere of John Neumeier's Tennessee Williams-inspired *Until the Lions*. Like the 1947 play, Neumeier's R-rated ballet tells of Blanche DuBois, a dilapidated Southern belle. Having "lost" the family plantation and effectively been run out of town because of her unsavoury romantic entanglements, Blanche arrives at her sister Stella's rundown New Orleans apartment. There she falls prey to Stella's alpha-male husband, Stanley Kowalski, while fatefully dallying with the affection of his buddy, Mitch. Blanche ends up being unceremoniously carted off to a mental asylum, uttering those now immortal and tragically ironic words: "I've always depended on the kindness of strangers."

While in Neumeier's ballet the sentiment is conveyed through gesture, you still hear the words in your head. Generally, however, he eschews literalism. Neumeier deals with Blanche's backstory by flipping the chronology. He starts with her in the asylum. In her delirium she recalls past events, particularly her early marriage to a confused young man. When Blanche discovers him lip-locking with another man, she denounces him. He shoots himself. She feels forever guilty. Neumeier's Act 2 more closely follows the play, although

Stanley is presented as a keen amateur boxer rather than a poker aficionado, prompting a match with Mitch that the chest-thumping, gorilla-channeling Stanley wins.

Sonia Rodriguez as Blanche, at 44 close in age to Marcia Haydée's when she created the role in Stuttgart in 1983, ably captured the complexity of the character's disordered psyche — emotionally fragile, delusional, manipulative and erotically self-indulgent. Guillaume Côté did his best to tap his inner demons as Stanley, although it must have been a struggle to suppress his more familiar likeable stage persona. Jillian Vanstone's Stella was suitably Stanley-besotted, never quite knowing what to do about her crazy sister. Evan McKie was an ardent and gullible Mitch, his crumpling disappointment deeply affecting when Stanley reveals the truth about Blanche. As the National Ballet season moved toward its close, the 11th edition of Toronto's Luminato Festival welcomed the return of Akram Khan and his acclaimed, a semi-abstracted rendering of an episode from the *in* which a spurned princess is reincarnated as a vengeful warrior.

It was not the only dance offering. Indigenous company Signal Theatre unveiled *in*, a new dance-opera about the lasting impact of Canada's residential school system, co-directed by Michael Greyeyes (Plains Cree) and Yvette Nolan (Algonquin). [See separate review on page 57.] Montreal freestyle skating collective Le Patin Libre brought its unique style of ice-dancing and, on a similarly populist front, there was *Breakin' Convention*, a Canadianized edition of an International Festival of Hip Hop Dance Theatre pioneered more than a decade ago by London's Sadler's Wells Theatre and Jonzi D, the legendary British hip-hop artist. Apart from the exciting displays of hip hop and street dance on the huge Sony Centre stage, there were workshops and art displays in the lobby areas and an outdoor public jam.

If Luminato wants to shed its not entirely justified but lingering elitist artsy image, there's nothing better than a hip-hop festival to make it more inclusive. *or*



**B**alloons. Hugs. Heartfelt speeches. At Théâtre Maison-neuve on May 25, Les Grands Ballets Canadiens de Montréal paid homage to 79-year-old Gradimir Pankov following a performance of his last program as artistic director. It marked the end of an 18-year era at Quebec's largest dance company.

The triple bill was characteristically Pankov. Two works by old friend Jiri Kylián were local premieres. First, the sweet folksy *Evening Songs* (1987) set to Dvorak's live choral music, then *Falling Angels* (1989), whose eight female dancers ably executed Kylián's thorny, precision choreography set to the syncopated sounds of Steve Reich's *Drumming*, splendidly played live by four percussionists. The closing piece was Stephan Thoss' psychologically fascinating *Searching for Home*, first seen here in 2011. Sharply and with verve, the dancers executed its many entries and exits, symbolic of the way that conscious and unconscious thoughts play in our minds.

Pankov leaves the company in excellent shape. Sold-out local shows. Many successful foreign tours. An achieved \$600,000 goal at its recent fundraising gala. Impressive new studios near its performing venue at Place des Arts. Unfortunately, because of a construction strike, the studios' official opening on June 5 was postponed until September when Pankov's successor, Ivan Cavallari, will preside. Cavallari's first season will largely continue in Pankov's European vein with works by Uwe Scholz, Edward Clug, Bridget Breiner, Étienne Bécharde and Colombian-born Netherlands-based Annabelle Lopez Ochoa. But whereas Pankov typically hired and coddled young dancers, Cavallari's first hire is Stuttgart Ballet's Montreal-born principal Myriam Simon

Mechaiekh. Will the Stuttgart star fit into Les Grands' non-star culture, or will that culture change?

Ballet BC presented its own wide-ranging triple bill in Montreal, revealing many merits. Artistic director Emily Molnar's *16 + a Room* (2013) was a skilful agglomeration of off-balance moves, imaginative body positions and long extensions. But dancers rushing on and off the stage seems overused nowadays, and handheld signs like "This is a beginning" and "This is not the end" appeared too coy.

With Ballet BC dancers in body-hugging white suits, Sharon Eyal and Gai Behar's 2010 *Bill* was eye candy inspired by the couple's extensive background in Israel's nightclubs, featuring choreography with a fashionably pop appeal.

Ballet BC's gem was *Solo Echo* made by Crystal Pite in 2013 for Nederlands Dans Theater. Brahms' early, youthful cello sonata suitably accompanied the vigorous initial half, leading to a dancer resisting what looked like the inexorable pull of death. The second half to Brahms' more sombre, late cello sonata had a more deliberate tone. The cast finally exited, each in turn bidding farewell until one last person fell to the floor and lay still. They seemed to make peace with mortality. Such a life/death vision was profound art.

Cai Glover of Montreal's Cas Public has forged a dance career despite being virtually deaf. [See *Dance International's* Summer 2017 issue for a profile on Glover, "Breaking the Sound Barrier."] Inspired by Glover, who is a splendid dancer, company founder Hélène Blackburn created *9*, an ensemble work to re-orchestrated motifs from Beethoven's *Ninth Symphony*. To contrast sight and sound, Blackburn used visual ploys — tiny chairs, a scurrying toy car, blackouts, sign language — and audible ones

from the dancers — grunting, barking, shouting. Made with humour, her point was clear enough, but overall the work was stylistically baffling. At times, under cones of light and gesticulating madly, the five dancers brought to mind the style of Édouard Lock. A sequence in which young spectators were invited to sit on-stage generated little interaction.

Montreal choreographer Sylvain Émard returned to the stage for the first time in 15 years in a new solo, *Le chant des sirènes*. The simple set — a slightly inclined bench and a leaning pillar — suggested a world slightly askew. In everyday clothes and with a benign look of innocence, Émard was everyman, casting about for a place in the universe. At times, videos flashing across the pillar implied life's inevitable turmoil. Émard's hand and arm gestures expressed his relation to this world as he moved in and out of shadowy corners created by André Rioux's lighting. With video images flowing across his body, Émard seemed at one point about to fade into oblivion. But big, bright lights behind him suddenly blazed, resurrecting him. A touching figure, Émard was perhaps too relaxed to leave a deep emotional trace.

Another Montreal veteran, Ginette Laurin, collaborated with Dutch choreographer Jens van Daele in *Tierra*, a work for five female dancers. A crane-mounted spotlight went slowly around the perimeter of a circular stage, putting the dancers under scary scrutiny. From an initial military style lineup, various groupings followed, which suggested that marching in formation requires no imagination, whereas making decisions in unpredictable circumstances demands strength of character.

Among the dance offerings at the annual Festival TransAmériques (FTA),

May 28 to June 8, was Brussels-based Mette Ingvartsen's ode to sensuality, *7 Pleasures*. Before the start, loud, incessant drumming made an annoying prelude for no apparent purpose, after which several audience members, including the woman next to me, abruptly rose, nonchalantly doffed their clothes and walked naked to the stage. For the next 20 minutes, nude bodies literally rolled as one mass across a couch, table and other objects of the living room décor. One can only imagine the rehearsals. For the next hour, the group simulated sexual desire in many forms, investigating potted plants in sexually charged ways, exploring body parts in couples and threesomes, shaking violently in "orgasm." The movements' stylization allowed viewers to contemplate this suburban orgy with some degree of objectivity, removing the stigma of a

purely voyeuristic spectacle. It wasn't porn, but it wasn't emotionally moving or revelatory either.

Sensuality was also at the core of *Principle of Pleasure*, a solo by Gerard Reyes, a former dancer with Compagnie Marie Chouinard. A slim, bearded man in a transparent bodysuit and stiletto heels, he strutted like a runway model in his personal version of voguing. With calm authority, he invited the audience of 70 men and women standing in a circle to express their own sensuality. One woman pawed Reyes' thighs during a lap dance. A man enthusiastically sprawled with Reyes in an impromptu dance on the floor. More suited to cabaret than theatre, *Principle of Pleasure* managed briefly to unite people of all sexual stripes.

Also at FTA, France's artistic collective (LA)HORDE assembled 11 dancers

in *To Da Bone* featuring jump style, a dance form that over the past decade has grown throughout Europe online. Dancers jump on a supporting leg and weave patterns with their free leg, at times slapping and tapping the floor. The group's ensemble patterns were impressively coordinated. Soloists shone, too, with rapid leg changes. But patterns tended to repeat in predictable ways, begging the question whether jump style is sufficiently adaptable to support a wide emotional range. The sole woman, Quebec's Camille Dubé Bouchard, was a solid addition in what is a male-dominated style.

All three FTA shows and Émard, too, featured a long moment when the performers stood staring into the eyes of the audience. Does this staring contest really create an audience-performer bond? *DI*



  
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# San Francisco | by Allan Ulrich

Blessed be the choreographer capable of surprise; the best of them are never predictable and the same applies to repertory dance companies. Examples of both abounded in the Bay Area this spring. Since the death of founder Michael Smuin several years ago, Smuin Contemporary American Ballet's artistic director Celia Fushille has attempted to enrich a repertoire in danger of succumbing to triviality. Fushille has established relationships with emerging and prominent choreographers, including resident artist Amy Seiwert who has flourished in these circumstances.

Yes, there have been a few disasters, but there has also been the relationship with Trey McIntyre, which began when the choreographer was disbanding his Idaho-based company and going freelance a few years ago. Happily, McIntyre's second piece for the 23-year-old Smuin company, *Be Here Now*, was unveiled this spring and my first experience with the piece on May 12 at Walnut Creek's Leshner Center suggested it will hang around for a while.

Audience members who attended the performance in hopes of wallowing in the nostalgia generated by the 50th anniversary of the Summer of Love in San Francisco were probably satisfied. But *Be Here Now* (title courtesy of a book by Ram Dass, an author of the period) is a complex work that, for all its swagger, looks back at the past with mixed emotions. There is no other dancemaker currently working in this country who so winningly translates popular music into the classical vocabulary, especially with large ensembles. Those ensembles can really captivate, but here McIntyre has more on his mind than looking back through rose-tinted glasses.

There is nothing nostalgic about the opening of the piece; scratchy film footage of atomic bomb blasts, with a mushroom cloud metamorphosing into a huge ice cream cone and the 12 dancers kicking out to a vintage recording by the Mamas and the Papas. The men are bare-chested, the women sport period fringe (costume design by Sandra Woodall), and the group dominates. But McIntyre's prologue suggests that it was not 1960s idealism and the search for a better world, but an undeniable fear of nuclear annihilation that prompted the Summer of Love. There's undeniable sadness and even desperation



among all the simulated drug experimentation and group gropes in *Be Here Now*. When, to the sound of the Jefferson Airplane's *White Rabbit*, a bulbous parade float deflates into a dancer wearing a shirt that reads "UR God," one senses that the era has corroded from within.

It is too easy to accept the piece at face value, grooving to the pop music of the period (also Janis Joplin, Steve Miller and the Youngbloods). Ironically, a new recording of an African American choir singing *Which Side Are You On* inspires the best choreography, a muscular love duet for Jonathan Powell and Ben Needham-Wood, two of the beautifully trained dancers whom Fushille has attracted to the company. If *Be Here Now* misses the insouciant charm of McIntyre's earlier *Oh, Inverted World*, it's a more thoughtful and ambiguous creation.

Meanwhile, the same week on the other side of the bay, the Yerba Buena Center for the Arts presented in the round the premiere of Kyle Abraham's *Dearest Home*. When this gifted young African American choreographer made his local debut in 2015, it was with *Pavement*, a gritty, hip-hop-influenced, sardonic exploration of the urban jungle.

*Dearest Home* couldn't be more different. This is a chamber piece for the six dancers of Abraham.In.Motion, exploring through a mixed vocabulary nuances of feeling in a series of solos, duets and one pansexual trio. The barefoot dancers hail from diverse areas of the dance spectrum, and, in performance, a postmodern stretch is followed by a *ronde de jambe*. Abraham supplied a commissioned score by Jerome Begin (available as an option to audience members via ear buds), but he prefers to have the work experienced in silence because that is the way he rehearsed it.

*Dearest Home* is slow, austere and often fascinating. Entries are stately, almost ritualistic. At some point, most of the dancers remove their clothes ceremoniously, folding their garments into nearby piles (perhaps a tribute to Anna Halprin's iconic *Parades and Changes*). What unites the movement forays is a kind of sleek sobriety. Every gesture stands out in its austerity.

We finally get a catharsis of sorts. Near the end, dancer Matthew Baker strips down to his undershorts. His fingers tremble obsessively and a series of sobs erupts from his throat. The overt and well-earned emotionalism of the moment stayed with me for days. I can't wait to see what Abraham does next. ▯



by Robert Greskovic

American Ballet Theatre's annual spring/summer season at the Metropolitan Opera House reached its midpoint with five out of seven multi-act narrative ballets from its full schedule having been shown. The final week of the run (which came after my deadline for this report) also had six one-act works programmed for various mixed bills to music by Tchaikovsky, each one billed as a Tchaikovsky Spectacular.

The five ballets making up the season's start included ABT standards: its three-act *Don Quixote*, two-act *Giselle* and three-act *Le Corsaire*. Additionally, there were two ballets by Alexei Ratmansky: *The Golden Cockerel*, in two acts and new to ABT last year, and, fresh from its world premiere in Costa Mesa, California, the two-act *Whipped Cream*, a re-imagined version of a 1924 Viennese ballet to a Richard Strauss score, which had a brief half-week run in advance of being offered later on for a week. Taking the full measure of this comedic spectacle ballet, with its luscious designs by Mark Ryden and its multiple-role casts, must wait until later performances.

Of the "warhorses," *Giselle* best showcased ABT's dancers, especially so this season as the company has now eschewed its bent toward bringing in guest artists to lead its big ballets. The presentation of full-time company members leading its eight-week season gave more of its personnel a chance to shine and develop as performing artists.

This is not to say that ABT's eight *Giselles* came and went as workaday

affairs, given that previous runs might have showcased such guests as Natalia Osipova and Alina Cojocar, for example. One *Giselle* this time became extra-newsworthy as it brought back, after a lengthy absence due to a career-threatening injury, David Hallberg. (Hallberg made his official return earlier in the run when he danced Prince Coffee in *Whipped Cream*.)

As Albrecht opposite Gillian Murphy's *Giselle*, Hallberg looked more mature physically, with impressive, often finely detailed dramatics as the philandering aristocrat amid a rustic situation. However, comebacks are known to take time, especially in cases of dance artists whose careers unfolded with uncommon celebrity. Hallberg's case is now one of these. While his ability to make himself fleet and airborne appeared as notable as ever, his way with securing, negotiating and finishing turns, once another hallmark of his, revealed he has a way to go with regard to form and finesse.

As *Giselle*, making her New York debut in ABT's production, Murphy turned in a performance somewhat under her full powers, following an injury sustained as Kitri in *Don Quixote*. Though her acting and essentially physically secure dancing worked harmoniously and affectingly with Hallberg's, she opted for choreographic compromises, for instance, in *Giselle*'s act-one solo that kept her from executing the dance's pique-arabesque-into-arabesque-penchée sequence as usually set.

In other casts, both Cory Stearns and Alban Lendorf as Albrecht offered fresh

and memorable takes on the flawed, noble character written into the Théophile Gautier libretto and into the Jean Coralli, Jules Perrot and Marius Petipa choreography arranged for ABT by artistic director Kevin McKenzie. Stearns offered youthful warmth and shimmering physicality to his portrayal of the infatuated swain and the repentant noble. Though his *Giselle*, Hee Seo, had striking moments of lithe physicality and sweetness, she danced with intermittent confidence.

Lendorf, playing his part as that of contemplative prince, exemplified, as a product of the Royal Danish Ballet, the fine art of natural-seeming pantomime, long a hallmark of Denmark's best ballet tradition. Opposite a bright-faced and free-acting Misty Copeland, whose dramatic efforts outshone those of the pure dancing built into this role, Lendorf's individual and subtle Albrecht helped make Copeland's *Giselle* extra-memorable.

Elsewhere, arguably the best danced and dramatized *Giselle* was that of Isabella Boylston. With a springing vertical jump of pure joy and a streaking horizontal one of notable power, Boylston made her village woman a character of fresh innocence and intriguing depth. Though her Albrecht, James Whiteside, supported her well and danced with outgoing energy, he lacked a matching poetry.

As *Giselle* in yet another cast, soloist Sarah Lane gave a youthfully winning and luminous portrayal. Hampered a bit by the conventional acting and shallow characterization of Daniil Simkin as her Albrecht, Lane found herself in hands, literally, that were not always comfortable. Though Simkin, a slight and short-statured dancer, has improved over the years as a partner, too often his support of Lane suggested more worried work than solicitous attention.

Overall, the role of Myrta, queen of the wilis, has less than star-turn impact in McKenzie's *Giselle*. Stella Abrera turned in the most affective of the performances during this run, with a striking sharpness and dramatic sense of force. Elsewhere, in roles that can be seen as stepping stones to bigger and better opportunities, soloists Skylar Brandt and Cassandra Trenary in the Peasant pas de deux, and corps de ballet dancers Katherine Williams and April Giangeruso in wili solos, make their featured roles stand out and command notice. ▀



The annual Spanish Dance and Flamenco Choreography Competition that has taken place in Madrid for the last 26 years is one of the few events in Spain still giving young Spanish choreographers a platform. Dancers get about 10 or 15 minutes to dazzle in a new work, and over the years many have outshone expectations.

The competition is always a mixed bag when it comes to styles and quality, and, sadly, the 2017 edition, June 8-11, was greatly lacking in the latter. There were dancers who performed on a technical level on par with students, and although it is the choreography being scrutinized rather than the dancers, surely that can only be fairly judged if performed by technically proficient dancers. For this reason, some of the works that made it to the semi-finals seemed out of place.

Also this year, several pieces focused more on staging and dramaturgy than actual movement. Gabriel Aragú's *Eneagrama Flamenco* was a perfect example. With more than a dozen props scattered across the stage and nearly a dozen black-outs, Aragú acted out key moments of his life relying more on props and ham-fisted acting than dance. Everything about this work screamed rookie mistake, yet Aragú — who in no way even demonstrated dance proficiency — made it to the finals. Was this because he was the only

international contestant, hailing from Chile, thereby allowing organizers to call it an international competition?

The competition's 5,000-euro first prize was shared by two pieces that should have — for very different reasons — never made it past the semi-finals.

Guadalupe Torres' group choreography *La Rosa de Gerineldo* (Gerineldo's Rose), inspired by a medieval romantic poem, appeared to draw from none of the lyricism or romance of its source material. The piece was a paint-by-numbers choreography that resembled a series of footwork warm-up exercises. This type of sophomoric work has long plagued flamenco productions that have unsuccessfully tried to marry what is traditionally a solo dance style with the corps de ballet format.

The co-recipient of the first prize, Carmen Muñoz, presented *Catalina Mía* (My Catherine). Many flamenco aficionados thrive on seeing how young artists are bending the rules and pushing the limits of the art form, but some artists seem to think the only way to do this is by negating tradition and searching for artistic merit in disparate, more internationalized genres. Many superficially executed attempts have been made to fuse contemporary dance and flamenco, creating a jarring combination of contemporary clichés and poorly dissected flamenco. *Catalina Mía* is the worst example of this.

Muñoz's duet opens with dancer Indalecio Séura sprawled on the stage singing the old flamenco rumba *Catalina Mía*, a song of lost love with a chorus that translates to "Place your hand here because it's cold / Place your hand here, my Catherine / Look, I'm going to die." Slowly, Muñoz awkwardly taps her way across the stage, stopping only to drag her hand to her crotch as the song's chorus is repeated. Upon finishing the song, Séura gets up, crosses to the front of the stage and puts on his dance boots as he speaks about the rumour that Catherine the Great of Russia had a contraption designed that would allow her to have sexual intercourse with her horse. It's somewhat obvious that this is meant to be comedic, but instead it's both vulgar and pretentious.

Muñoz uses only two old recordings of flamenco songs as accompaniment in this performance short on music and dance. The singers, Canalejas de Puerto Real and Porrina de Badajoz, are lauded members of the early 20th century flamenco musical canon. Séura danced a clownish solo over the first of the recordings, limply teetering forward and back, appearing to be mocking both flamenco dance and the music accompanying it.

As the second recording began, Muñoz lowered in a squat; as Séura stood on her back, she lifted her head and widened her mouth, making grotesque facial expressions while lip-synching. It's now clear that the goal is to mock, but mock what? Artists who left an indelible mark on the history of an art form that two inexperienced dancer/choreographers now think it is appropriate to denigrate?

*Catalina Mía* insulted both my intelligence and my love of traditional flamenco, which was ridiculed by two artists whose hubris, bad taste and inexperience should never have been awarded a first prize.

It came as a small comfort that the excellent group choreography, *Danzas Fantásticas*, by Alejandro Lara — named after a group of compositions by Spanish composer Joaquín Turina — was awarded second prize and 2,000 euros. Subtle and elegant, Lara seemed to channel legendary choreographer and ex-director of the Spanish National Ballet María de Ávila, with a Spanish classical dance piece that surrendered to an imposing score and grand sweeping lines. ♦



Alejandro Lara's *Danzas Fantásticas*  
Photo: Jesús Vallinas



Still only 31, Liam Scarlett has been artist in residence at the Royal Ballet for five years already. It was the assured musicality of his plotless pieces that first caught attention, but his more recent narrative works (*Frankenstein*, *Hansel and Gretel*, *Sweet Violets*) have been altogether shakier. *Symphonic Dances* returns to his earlier mode, showing what an inventively musical choreographer he can be.

Created as a tribute to principal dancer Zenaida Yanowsky, who is retiring after 23 years with the company, *Symphonic Dances* may be plotless, but it surges with dramatic currents that the narrative works sometimes lack.

Following the movements of Rachmaninov's score, Yanowsky appears in three guises. At first she is imperious, stalking the stage in a voluminous crimson skirt, topped with a dash of black, while James Hay is an appeasing, boyish figure who coaxes her into a tentatively tender pas de deux.

The rhythms of the waltz — so often used to evoke both doom and desire — drive the second and best of Scarlett's scenes. Here, it's the eight bare-chested men who are wearing big red skirts, while Yanowsky herself appears in a tunic, slashed to the thigh: she skirtless, they shirtless, the angled colours of their costumes echoing a rakish slant in the shoulders. It's a gorgeous composition, Scarlett sending the men into restless swirls around Yanowsky's elusive figure, like rootless harmonies around a wander-

ing melody.

The sporty final movement sees the dancers in red-and-black gym wear, pumping away at their steps. It's stretched thinner than the preceding sections, but gives Yanowsky her due: she's a powerful, out-of-the-mould dancer who can do athletics as readily as drama, gut-driven emotion as well as sure-footed lyricism.

While Scarlett gathered his choreography around a singular dancer, Scottish Ballet's bold double bill over at Sadler's Wells was all about the group. Angelin Preljocaj's *MC 14/22 (Ceci est mon corps)*, made for his own company in 2000 before being taken on by the Paris Opera Ballet, is a work for 12 bare-chested men that loosely references the Last Supper.

The imagery is clearest in a painterly series of tableaux vivants, the men taking up dynamic postures variously indicating feasting, toil (scything arms, hammering fists) or war (crossbow stretches, spear-throwing stances); if the feel is Biblical, the look is of a *Physique Pictorial* magazine spread.

Elsewhere in Preljocaj's montage, the tables become morgue slabs for fleshy carcasses; a countertenor sings while two others impassively prod and constrict him so that his angelic voice keeps cracking; and one man, increasingly incapacitated by wrapping tape, gamely struggles to continue repeating his dance phrase. The final image — of the men as corporeal units in a kind of choreographic conveyor belt — strikes a resonant note, but overall there's too much portent for

too little coherence.

Crystal Pite's *Emergence*, created for the National Ballet of Canada in 2009, is all about coherence. As in other works (*Polaris*, *Flight Pattern*), Pite shows her compositional command of large groups of dancers, the choreography here drawing on the behavioural patterns of social insects to populate the stage with all manner of swarms, clusters and trails.

Large ensembles can often end up looking regimented, but here they merge and splinter and lace in a way that is simultaneously unpredictable and crystal clear. Sometimes the groups split — most notably by gender, the women whispering counts as they face off the men (bare-chested, again). But the thrill of the piece, very confidently danced by Scottish Ballet, lies less in these dramas than in the way it holds extremes together: we apprehend both the fine detail of individual actions — the antenna-tremble of an arm, a locust leg-fold — and the teeming patterns that contain them, like a kind of choreographic hive mind.

Sadler's Wells also saw two performances of Anne Teresa De Keersmaeker's *Rain*, created in 2001 for her company Rosas (and notably taken into the repertoire of the Paris Opera Ballet). It's another work that deals with emergent patterns, but here the imagery is not of insects but of weather: cyclonic circlings, butterfly-effect cascades, build-ups of pressure, flurries of turbulence, the tug of tides. The backdrop is an arc of cords, hanging like ropes of rain; surreptitious changes of costume flush the initially pastel scenes with sunset pinks.

De Keersmaeker has long had an affinity with Steve Reich, and here she uses his *Music for 18 Musicians* (played live by the marvellous Ictus Ensemble) as the evolving sonic environment for her own elemental, minutely articulated patterns. The material — echoing the tectonically shifting basslines and top-note sprays in the score — combines plain runs, walks and leans with highly textured formations of spins, swoops, darts and tumbles.

As with Pite's *Emergence*, the material is sometimes split by gender (there are eight women and three men — only one bare-chested, by the way, and then only briefly). But, again, what we register is the bigger picture, the sense of an uplifting, expansive intelligence at work. True, the piece feels as if it could easily be shorter; but all of it is genius. ▀

A gala of note took place at the Palais Garnier on April 4, gathering young student dancers intent on making us forget they're not yet seasoned professionals. Director of the Paris Opera Ballet school Elisabeth Platel showcased her students as well as those from several other schools worldwide in an evening of short duos or trios to celebrate the 40th anniversary of the annual school show, which took place earlier, on March 31. Platel had come up with this concept in 2013 for the celebrations of the 300th anniversary of the French dance school's founding.

The Paris Opera Ballet naturally took pride of place. They presented a longish extract from Rudolf Nureyev's production of *Raymonda*, complete with Raymonda's solo performed with exquisite femininity by a young student, as well as William Forsythe's *The Vertiginous Thrill of Exactitude*, essentially a trio performed with sizzling excitement.

In *Raymonda*, the girls were mostly able to combine refined Paris Opera technique with artistic maturity. The boys, typically lean and long-legged, also exhibited some very fine ballet skills, but were at pains to incarnate the characters — especially the hot-blooded Abderrahman — convincingly.

This was no competition, yet some students impressed more than most. At the top of their game was a duo from England's Royal Ballet in a stunningly mature and emotional performance in a pas de deux from Kenneth MacMillan's *Concerto*. Russia's Vaganova school presented the Black Swan duet, also creating quite an impression; with ultra-professional technique, Odile was danced like an impersonation of a super-diva.

On a vivacious and more contemporary note, Stuttgart students delivered a twitchy, athletic *Bach Suite II* by John Neumeier with charm and gusto. So did Canada's National Ballet School students

in a compelling *Chalkboard Memories* by Demis Volpe. This great evening ended with the traditional défilé, a solemn parade with infinite charm.

Short-lived artistic director Benjamin Millepied had announced his intention to make ballet great again at the Paris Opera, but there were comparatively few bona fide classics in this last season of his. (Not that there will be that many more next season headed by Aurélie Dupont.) Balanchine, however, reigned supreme with five pieces, including a full-length *A Midsummer Night's Dream*. More Balanchine was on offer in May with *La Valse*, a gloriously sombre and enigmatic piece set to Ravel from 1951 with luxurious Barbara

aided by performance artist Marina Abramovic who came up with the idea of a huge tilted mirror as the main set piece. Previously created at the Garnier, this is a short and great closing piece successfully developing one essential idea — relentless spinning onstage against that gigantic mirror that reflects and duplicates even more spinning — pretty much like Ravel's repetitive score itself. The crowd-pleasing element in Ravel's score is, of course, its climactic momentum, which Béjart notably developed in his *Boléro*. Cherkouvi, however, deliberately shied away from such rising passion and keeps the pace invariably equal, which constitutes his work's very originality; yet it can be disappointing once you realize nothing will happen.

Some dance pieces become instant hits, much like Crystal Pite's *The Seasons' Canon* earlier in the season. Others are more acquired tastes, like Merce Cunningham's 1968 *Walkaround Time* shown in April at the Garnier along with Forsythe's *Herman Schmerman*, long overdue as an addition to the Paris Opera repertoire. (His masterful *Quintett* would be a fantastic addition, too. Created in 1993 as his wife was dying from cancer, the piece is a poignant celebration of life set to Gavin Bryar's dirge-like *Jesus' Blood Never Failed Me Yet*.)

*Herman Schmerman*, which is dizzy, dazzling Forsythe, was sensually performed by étoile Amandine Albisson and premier danseur Audric Bezar. It probably served as relief

for many in the audience from Cunningham's mathematical mechanics and Marcel Duchamp's paraphernalia and irksome prose in *Walkaround Time*. It is, however, quite beautiful Cunningham if you allow the magic of it to grow on you, but some in the audience just could not wait and left before it was over. It was, in any case, very aptly performed by the Paris Opera dancers, who are surely less accustomed to the postmodern style than that of Forsythe's exhilarating athleticism. ▯

## Paris | by François Fargue



Karinska costumes and a touch of Gothic thrown in. The ballet parodies aristocratic decorum disturbed by death and tragedy, foreshadowed by the dark plum colour of the dresses and tutus. It was excellently performed by the Paris Opera dancers, including Dorothee Gilbert, who was grace incarnate, and her partner Mathieu Ganio, who is style on legs — long, beautiful and apt ones, too.

On a resolutely lighter note, Jerome Robbins' frivolous *En Sol* came next, followed by Sidi Larbi Cherkouvi's *Boléro*,

Ingrid Lorentzen, director of Norwegian National Ballet, has long been fascinated by the role of the ballerina in classical ballet. Wanting to give new life to these often royal or other-worldly beings, Lorentzen ordered four new works from four female choreographers, all with the same theme, *Sleepless Beauty*, but otherwise with no constraints.

The long evening, presented last spring, started off with a piece by Ina Christel Johannessen. She has been on the Norwegian and European dance scene for more than 25 years, and is known for extremely physical choreography; her premiere, *Desolating Persephone*, was no exception.

Onstage, scenographer Kristin Torp built a gangway standing on piles, under which she placed tons of black earth. When the curtain, raised in silence, is up, audience members can see something moving in the earth, but it takes some time before it becomes evident that it is a woman, Persephone. Camilla Spidsøe had the hard task of personifying this lead character; during the 45-minute performance, there are moments of pain that are difficult to watch. There is also a wealth of references to Greek mythology, not all of them easy to catch. Spidsøe did a fantastic job fighting to climb up into the house, but she was always pushed back into the soil by Hades and his helpers.

The younger Hege Haagenrud is known to use text as an inspiration for her choreography. *Picture a Vacuum* features English text by Kate Tempest, which was not easy to follow, and it felt wrong to have to master a foreign language in a Norwegian

theatre to have the full experience. Haagenrud does not visualize the text all the way, but movement and text are clearly linked.

The third choreographer, Melissa Hough, is a dancer with the Norwegian National Ballet. Previously, the American worked with both Houston Ballet and Boston Ballet, where she also did some choreography. Her work, *Epic Short*, was the only balletic one of the evening, using Aurora and the Prince from *The Sleeping Beauty* as her inspiration. The message in her work is that when two people try to find themselves, they are also able to find each other, because you have to be able to take care of yourself before you can connect with another person. She speaks from her own experience, she says.

Hough chose the music for the first movement from Tchaikovsky's Piano Concerto No. 1, played live by Norwegian classical pianist Håvard Gimse. The women are on pointe, covering the stage in challenging sweeps of movement. It takes some time before the Prince (Douwe Dekkers) and Aurora (Whitney Jensen) find each other, but it was Carabosse, performed by Sonia Vinograd with extremely strong stage presence, who was most memorable.

The last work on this marathon evening was *Mahlrmembran*, by Ingun Bjørnsgaard, who has been working for 30 years. From the ceiling, textiles hung down, separating the dancers, which were slowly removed during the piece. Once the room is empty, there is a big ensemble dance, in which one can see elements of what individuals have previously done alone. As a

whole, the evening was definitely interesting, but with a bit too much to take in.

At Dansens Hus in May, we saw another re-interpreted classic: the premiere of South African choreographer Dada Masilo's *Giselle*. This is not her first classical ballet; she has previously tackled *Death and the Maiden*, *Romeo and Juliet*, *Carmen* and *Swan Lake*. When she presented *Swan Lake* in 2016 at the Joyce Theater in New York, the theatre agreed to support her in a new *Giselle*. For the first time, Masilo had the resources to order new music; Philip Miller's score is built on the original music of Adolphe Adam, but also uses a lot of African percussion and vocalization. Both English and Xhosa can be heard.

Just as the composer uses tracks from the original score, Masilo stays close to the story we know. But the whole setting is placed in her South African world. She dances the title role alongside her company of 12 strong dancers, who have a solid classical ballet technique foundation as well as training in African dance. These two dance forms blended perfectly for the way Masilo tells the story, particularly in its tour-de-force second act where Masilo's *Giselle* is not the forgiving type. She introduces Myrtha in the first act, who appears as a warning that death is just around the corner, and danced by a man in the character of a witch doctor. It was a pleasure to see such a fresh and energetic reinterpretation of one of our most loved ballets.

Norwegian National Ballet also put Rudolf Nureyev's version of *Don Quixote* back onstage; the first time the company danced this ballet was in 1981, but it was still a pleasure to attend. There are not many full-length ballets that have so much dancing to offer in one night: Kitri and Basilio dance non-stop through all three acts.

Principal dancer Whitney Jensen has the technique to get through as Kitri, and the company brought in a Ukrainian guest artist, Denys Nedak, as her Basilio. He is tall and good-looking with the technique to match his partner, but the chemistry between them was not fantastic.

Unfortunately, Nedak landed badly in one of his solos in the first act. He continued dancing that act and the second, but was not able to go through with the third. The other dancer doing Basilio, Yoel Carreño, happened to be in the house so he performed the third act with Jensen, though they had never before danced together. In spite of everything, it went well, and the audience was thrilled. ▀

Artists of Norwegian National Ballet in Ina Christel Johannessen's *Desolating Persephone*  
Photo: Erik Berg



Oslo

by Fredrik Rütter



# COPENHAGEN & MALMÖ | by Anne-Marie Elmby

A 10-year-long wish came true for artistic director Nikolaj Hübbe when he succeeded in getting George Balanchine's complete three-part *Jewels* (1967) on the stage for the Royal Danish Ballet. A window in a jeweller's shop in New York inspired Mr. B to create the ballet, and the Royal Danish dancers sparkled in Karinska's jewel-adorned green, red and white costume designs.

Gabriel Fauré's melodious music offered fine accompaniment to Susanne Grönder's Romantic adagio solo in the first part, *Emeralds*, as well as for her long stride on pointe at the hand of the gallant Marcin Kupinski.

Rubies had J'aime Crandall and Jón Axel Fransson celebrating the jazzy humour of Stravinsky's Piano Concerto, while the statuesque Astrid Elbo was manipulated into impeccable high extensions by four gentlemen. In the second cast, Ida Praetorius' swirling hips made the rubies on her skirt jingle, and her playful partner, Jonathan Chmelensky, due to special circumstances one evening, mastered the different styles of both *Emeralds* and *Rubies*.

With Tchaikovsky's music for *Diamonds*, Balanchine epitomized his imperial mother country, Russia. It suited Holly Jean Dorger's regal stature in her ideal partnership with Gregory Dean.

The second cast had an adorable Caroline Baldwin in wonderful phrasing with Ulrik Birkkjær, who on May 19 danced his last performance with the Royal Danish Ballet, which has been his home base since he entered its school 25 years ago. A standing ovation assured him that he will be dearly missed. Starting next season, he will be joining San Francisco Ballet.

An extra farewell to Birkkjær occurred on June 3 at the Malmö Opera in Sweden, a half-hour drive across the bridge from Copenhagen. Together with Grönder, he had been called in to perform the Dance of the Hours intermezzo in Act III of Amilcare Ponchielli's opera, *La Gioconda*. In spite of the very limited space left by the scenography, the Danish dancers' performance in Tim Matiakis' virtuoso choreography, with many intricate lifts, triggered bravos from the audience.

At the end of May, Malmö Opera hosted a visit by the Royal Swedish Ballet in Pär Isberg's *The Dream of Swan Lake*, which had opened in Stockholm in April. The company already has Natalia Conus' traditional *Swan Lake* and Mats Ek's version, originally created for Cullberg Ballet, in the repertoire. Still, artistic director Johannes Öhmann wanted a third *Swan Lake*, and Isberg puts a fresh angle to the story.

In his version, a choreographer dreams

of creating a new *Swan Lake* and spots a new talent to cast as his swan princess. There is also a theatre director, with a satirically portrayed entourage, whose attitude hints at a previous affair with the premier danseur, who is enraged when he is only cast for the part of Rothbart. In Act II, the choreographer's vision for the ballet takes shape. He himself takes the role of Prince Siegfried, and falls in love with his Odette/Odile. When Rothbart appears, the young ballerina is torn between the two men, both in her role within the ballet and as a woman.

In a few places, Isberg changed sections of Tchaikovsky's score around to suit his purpose, which was only noticeable if one knew the score extremely well. Overall, he has successfully amalgamated the original choreography with new material of his own, and he deserves credit for making the familiar *Swan Lake* drama work within a new delineation of the characters.

On May 28, Calum Lowden danced the choreographer with pensive emotion, and Nadja Sellrup showed fine development in her journey from insecure apprentice to full-grown swan and woman, who makes her own decisions. As Rothbart, Vahe Martirosyan had a demonic streak in his temperamental outbursts, and as the theatre director Jenny Nilson conveyed sarcasm through her whole stance.

As part of the annual Jewish Culture Festival in Copenhagen, the 20-year-old Compas Dance Company from Israel visited with their flamenco ballet, *King David and Bat Sheba*, choreographed by artistic director Mijal Natan. This story from the Old Testament was well suited to the sensual style of flamenco. Natan's supple body language portrayed the female protagonist with initial evasiveness, but eventually yielding to her king. As the wilful King David, who insists on pursuing his passion, Spanish dancer Miguel Angel demonstrated a strong stage presence in his intense solos. Their duets had an appealing, balletic character. Ten dancers supported them in minor roles and formed a virtuoso corps in colourful costumes.

On June 11, Dance Science Denmark held its first symposium at the Royal Danish Theatre. The association is founded by physiotherapists and ballet teachers from the Royal Danish Ballet and Tivoli Ballet School. Treatment and recovery of dancers' injuries was the main subject. Other issues concerning medical and scientific aspects of dance will be addressed in future. ❖

Queensland Ballet's premiere of Ben Stevenson's *Swan Lake* had a 42nd Street quality to it as junior company member Joel Woellner was chosen to dance Prince Siegfried alongside principal artist Yanela Piñera's seasoned Odette-Odile.

Piñera laid out her credentials within seconds of taking to the stage with a pure, extended balance on pointe that was an eloquent expression of the Swan Queen's sorrow and entrapment. As the imposter Odile, she decorated the treacherous (for some; not her) fouetté sequence with triple pirouettes and gave a magisterial account of her solo. Havana-born Piñera, who previously danced with the National Ballet of Cuba, nailed the big effects that seem to be a Cuban birthright, including sky-high extensions and Odile's don't-mess-with-me grand pirouettes in Act 3. It was the delicate detail that lingered, however. Piñera's tiny flutters of foot against ankle as Odette in Act 2 were exquisite.

Woellner went out on the stage a courageous youngster, but had to come back a star, or at least as close to one as possible. Although the desperate, deep-seated passion that should drive Siegfried eluded him, resulting in a muted relationship with Odette, there was, nevertheless, gleaming beauty in almost all his dancing. Double tours were plush and precisely landed, and lovely air turns finished in stretched,

poised arabesques. It was impressive to see how much value he gave each moment, never smudging or cutting steps short. He was promptly promoted to the rank of demi-soloist after his final performance.

Stevenson's version was made for Houston Ballet in 1985 (Queensland Ballet artistic director Li Cunxin danced in it at that time) and is a conventional reading based on the 1895 Petipa-Ivanov staging. The beating heart of *Swan Lake* is the first lakeside act in which Siegfried comes across Odette and her retinue of swan maidens, here a corps of 24 that sensibly incorporated the two Big Swans and four Cygnets. The group, augmented by Queensland Ballet Academy pre-professional students, looked beautifully schooled and had the strength-in-unity power that makes Act 2 so captivating.

The fit wasn't always exact between Stevenson's vision and the luxurious, Renaissance-tinged designs by Kristian Fredrikson borrowed from Royal New Zealand Ballet. The white acts looked wonderful, of course, but in the first and fourth acts it wasn't always easy to get a grip on all-important distinctions of rank.

Also, with the production coming in at under two hours of dancing, Tchaikovsky's music sounded chopped back, to its detriment, although the Queensland Symphony Orchestra under Queensland Ballet music director Nigel Gaynor delivered a sympathetic account of what was there. Transcendence may have been hard

to come by, but there was plenty of fine dancing from the first cast, particularly from Lucy Green, Lina Kim and Victor Estévez as they whizzed and fizzed through the Act 1 pas de trois.

English National Ballet's Alina Cojocaru had been slated to return to Queensland Ballet as a guest artist but withdrew due to her pregnancy. It is a measure of the high regard in which Li is held that he was able to replace her for two performances with Bolshoi Ballet principal artist Evgenia Obraztsova.

In Perth, West Australian Ballet was uneven in its *Don Quixote*, a slimmed-down staging created in 2010 by Lucette Aldous, a celebrated Kitri in her day. It was mostly effective theatrically, albeit with one big, regrettable loss. *Don Quixote's* reverie, in which he sees lively village girl Kitri as his beloved Dulcinea, was ruthlessly pared back to feature only the leading characters and a limited amount of magic.

Some patchy performances in secondary roles didn't help the cause. *Don Quixote* is all fluff and high spirits — a fantasy rom-com that needs to be kept aloft with zesty personalities and confident attack wherever you look.

At the first performance, principal dancers Chihiro Nomura (Kitri) and Gakuro Matsui (impecunious barber Basilio) were sweet, charming lovers whose appeal was that of light playing on dappled leaves. Nomura and Matsui are both finely tuned classicists — and Matsui is a fine partner — who made light work of the barrage of small beaten steps and flurries of manèges and pirouettes that kept the principals very busy indeed.

In the second cast, Florence Leroux-Coléno and Cuban-trained newcomer Oscar Valdés, both soloists, brought the heat of the midday sun to the stage with a knowing and vivacious account of Kitri and Basilio. At times, Valdés' dash trumped finesse, but his ebullience and daring were exciting and he was well matched with Leroux-Coléno, whose good humour and spark made her a witty, flavourful heroine. Looking further down the ranks, corps de ballet member Carina Roberts continued to make her mark with a fleet, enchanting Cupid.

Minkus' score may not be a masterpiece, but it's cheerful earworm material, and West Australian Symphony Orchestra under the baton of Canadian guest conductor Judith Yan gave a rollicking account of it. ▯





Colours International Dance Festival

## Festival Roundup

In only its second edition, Stuttgart's bi-annual 13-day Colours International Dance Festival has already stamped its mark on one of Germany's major cities. Store windows and buildings sported the festival's multi-coloured logo downtown, where hundreds of people participated in a pre-festival open-air "Colours in the City" workshop with ebullient festival director Eric Gauthier, the Montreal-born former soloist with Stuttgart Ballet and head of Gauthier Dance company. Stuttgart Ballet (under another Canadian and Gauthier's mentor, Reid Anderson) was virtually the only game in town before Gauthier Dance launched in 2007.

Festival programming was left to Meinrad Huber, co-director of production house Ecotopia. Big names like Rosas, Christian Spuck and Louise Lecavalier were part of his 26-event lineup along with wheelchair performers, circus acrobats, workshops and a virtual reality voyage.

On opening night, a buzz energized young and old spectators at the Theaterhaus, a four-theatre complex shining in festive rainbow colours. Humorous opening speeches by Gauthier and Theaterhaus director Werner Schretzmeier had the audience in the 800-seat main theatre laughing. Gauthier Dance then performed *Mega-Israel*, a triple bill by Israeli choreographers, two of whom, Ohad Naharin and Hofesh Shechter, attended.

Shechter's 2006 *Uprising* for seven male dancers examined male aggression and cooperation amid a booming soundscape he designed himself. Kindly provided earplugs were welcome; surely choreographers can rattle audiences without shattering their

eardrums. Initially, two dancers tussled with a stage violence rarely seen. The ending offered a tight bunch hoisting a red flag, an ambiguous warning.

*Killer Pig* followed, a 2009 piece for six women that L-E-V's Sharon Eyal and Gai Behar shortened into a 30-minute work. In an extended opening sequence, skin-tight bodysuits emphasized the sensuality of the slow hip swaying and tiptoe walking to Ori Lichtik's steady beat. Anna Süheyla Harms, winner of Germany's 2013 Faust best dancer prize, performed a fetching solo exploiting her spider limbs. Conformist group formations gave way to individualistic displays — balletic jumps, a moonwalk and a long expressionist solo. Compactly adapted, *Killer Pig* was compelling.

The full 16-member Gauthier Dance had a ball in Naharin's *Minus 16* (1999). The opening *Anaphase* thrilled as dancers seated in a semi-circle repeatedly rose and sat, doffing clothes and shoes to the powerful rhythm of Tractor's *Revenge*. To Vivaldi's *Stabat Mater*, Nora Brown and Réginald Lefebvre performed *Mabul*, a slow duet in which each approached and retreated in turn. No interpreters over the years ever quite convinced me of the work's latent power, but Brown and Lefebvre made a well-matched couple. The evening ended with invited spectators dancing it up on-stage with the pros, a hit number wherever it plays. Here it vibrantly reasserted Colours' everybody-dance spirit.

*Cella*, a premiere, was a probing duet into dark psyches by Australians Paul White, a member of Tanztheater Wuppertal Pina Bausch since 2013, and Narelle Benjamin. *Cella* began in shadowy light with the two rolling on the floor, finally conjoining and rising to kiss, a fairy-tale moment but

ominous here. Lying atop one another, their bodies calmly passed over and under each other so that their arms and legs appeared to form a single body. Disturbing sadomasochism developed. At one point, Benjamin stood on her head inside a box-like structure while White stood on top of the box directly above her — a remarkable image. Later, she curled inside his T-shirt, dropping like a baby being born. *Cella* explored uncomfortable territory.

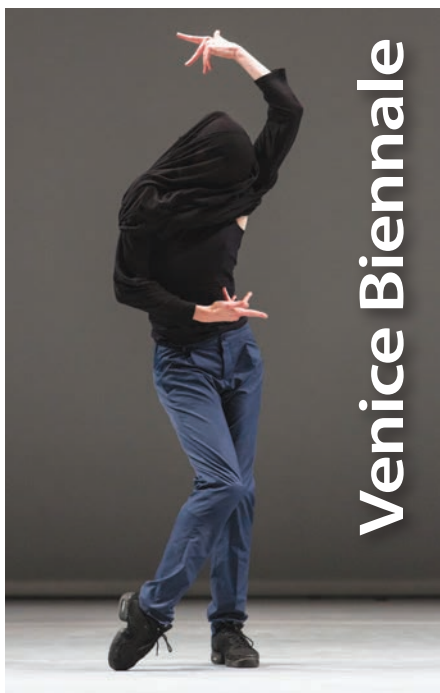
Bausch adored such territory and in a revelatory hour-long event, veteran Bausch dancer Cristiana Morganti explained and demonstrated Bausch's sensitivity to details and corrections, which took her more time than choreography. A head tilted slightly forward or back, Morganti showed, could utterly change a movement's meaning.

Russell Maliphant's four-part *Conceal | Reveal* (2015) emphasized languorous arms sweeping around the body under lighting designer Michael Hulls' moody spotlights. During Dana Fouras' opening solo ... Both, And... a transparent scrim reflected her enlarged shadow, suggesting a body/spirit duality. At times, Fouras disappeared into the dark background, reappearing elsewhere like a resurrected figure. Maliphant himself performed *One Part II* to Glenn Gould's pensively played Bach. Fluidly controlled moves and quick spins were interspersed with slow arm motions and abrupt deep-knee bends. The rise-and-fall contrast added needed tension to *Conceal | Reveal*'s pretty moves.

Australia's acrobatic troupe, Gravity, immensely pleased the crowd in *A Simple Space*. When not competing to see who could do the most backflips, the five men swung the two women like ropes or caught them in free fall. London-based dancers Esteban Fourmi and Aoi Nakamura offered a fascinating virtual reality trip, *WHIST*. Wearing high-tech 3D glasses, spectators followed signposts that led them along different paths. My trip traversed nightmarish places full of symbols — fire, bare flesh, children's cries — all significant to Freud, whose writings inspired *WHIST*'s various scenarios. Virtual reality looms over dance's future.

Other notable shows were presentations by Cuba's George Céspedes, Helena Waldman, Dorrance Dance, Jo Strømgren Kompani and Ireland's Teac Damsa. Thanks to Gauthier and Colours, Stuttgart now has a multi-hued contemporary dance palette.

— VICTOR SWOBODA



## Venice Biennale

### Festival Roundup

The Venice Biennale tide lifts all cultural boats, including dance. This six-month-long culturefest attracts international crowds, generates debate, and connects many disciplines and nationalities. Starting her four-year term as the Biennale's dance director, Montreal choreographer Marie Chouinard programmed 13 troupes, half from Montreal, in 30 shows, films and discussions over nine days at the end of June.

The extremes of dance's concepts and forms were shown in works presented by the Biennale's 2017 award winners, American Lucinda Childs (Golden Lion for lifetime achievement) and Canadian Dana Michel (Silver Lion for innovation).

In Childs' delightful *Dance* (1979), dancers hopped and turned in horse-and-carriage harmony with Philip Glass' music. Adding thrust was Sol Lewitt's background black-and-white video of the original cast performing the same steps, though the live cast frankly showed cleaner lines and lighter turns.

Michel's 2013 revelatory solo, *Yellow Towel*, had no music, much stumbling and shuffling, and mumbled texts. Michel portrayed a black woman desperately trying to conform to white society aesthetics, giving authentic voice to a troubled soul.

Humour informed a similarly themed solo by South Africa's Robyn Orlin, *And You See ... Our Honourable Blue Sky And Ever Enduring Sun ... Can Only Be*

*Consumed Slice by Slice ...* performed gustily by black actor Albert Silindokuhle Ibokwe Khoza. Initially wrapped in plastic, Khoza cut away his culturally imposed bonds with a knife, implying that radical change necessitates harsh measures.

Khoza's personage flamboyantly revelled in his ethnicity, revealing himself as gay, vain and imperious, commanding two spectators to wipe his bare body. Vladimir Putin appeared in a funny trumped-up video. "Better dance than make war," intoned Khoza.

A subtler warning about leader-types was found in *It's going to get worse and worse and worse, my friend*, a 2012 solo by Belgium's Lisbeth Gruwez created with sound designer Maarten Van Cauwenbergh. To prepare, Gruwez studied Mussolini and American evangelist Jimmy Swaggart. Calm ingratiating gestures led to megalomaniacal grandiose sweeping arms.

Compagnie Marie Chouinard appeared in *Soft virtuosity, still humid, on the edge*. In familiar Chouinardian style, zombie types crisscrossed the stage, tongues flaying, arms pumping. In contrast, Scott McCabe and Clémentine Schindler performed a ballet-type duet. After years of presenting characters as deformed or crippled, Chouinard can nonetheless create emotionally charged "classical" duets. Later, a nude female in a transparent white costume danced an alluring solo. Angel? Seductive devil? Both? The show ended with two dancers wearing painted wings, an intentionally silly note. A multi-faceted work, not fully integrated.

As Biennale dance director, Chouinard introduced fruitful innovations. One was a residency for young choreographers at the Arsenale, the former naval yard transformed into beautiful theatres where most dance shows were held. Another welcome innovation offered short outdoor performances in a tiny park, interactivity encouraged.

Now for a roundup of the other Montrealers presented, starting with Benoît Lachambre's ultra-interactive *Lifeguard* (2017). Spectators entered a large studio where Lachambre invited them, in English — the predominant language on Biennale dance stages — to walk randomly, a lesson in spatial awareness. To a strong musical beat, he inserted the handle of a broom down his shirt, swaying the brush above his head. Spectators swayed along. One woman improvised a duet. Lachambre got everyone moving, some more willingly than others. Fun with a free spirit.

Daina Ashbee's solo, *When the ice melts, will we drink the water?* (2016), had Esther Gaudette smacking the stage with her back, then lying still or slightly moving and finally, in total darkness, crying, seemingly in pain. Ashbee, who is part Cree, sought empathy for Canada's Indigenous peoples, but the work left spectators baffled.

Ashbee's second piece, *Unrelated* (2014), featured Paige Culley and Areli Moran depicting the ill treatment of Canada's Indigenous women and children. Their nudity suggested vulnerability. Both violently struck the back wall, indicating inflicted cruelty. In a conciliatory move, Culley offered a shawl to audience members, a gesture possibly relating to Indigenous traditions. More references would be welcome because Ashbee's abstract minimalism strained people's attention. *Unrelated's* super-slow finale intensified audience impatience.

Grimness permeated *Untied Tales* (2015) by Clara Furey and Peter Jasko. A study in couple dynamics, the work had her licking his boot, and featured many glum looks and sad-eyed separations. One lighter moment occurred when she carried him. But Furey, usually charismatic, could not carry this gloomy show.

Superwoman Louise Lecavalier could probably carry busses. Her 2012 duet with Frédéric Tavernini, *So Blue*, richly showed her ability to transform gestures into suggestive emotional states.

Among European offerings, France-based Alessandro Sciarroni evoked a softer whirling dervish in *Chroma* (2017), 45 minutes of smiling meditation. Belgian Ann Van den Broek's *The Black Piece* (2014) challenged audience's senses by being performed in virtual total darkness where footsteps, laughter and crying evoked frightful sensations.

João dos Santos Martins performed Xavier Le Roy's 1998 solo, *Self Unfinished*, with élan, twisting his nude body into shapes resembling insects and animals, suggesting the power of wilful transformation.

France's Mathilde Monnier and Spain's La Ribot performed *Gustavia* (2013), ridiculing feminine clichés with stylish patache.

Laughter, pain, boredom, delight, energy, puzzlement — Chouinard's Biennale program pretty much reflected dance today.

— VICTOR SWOBODA



## Yvette Nolan and Michael Greyeyes / *Bearing*

A much anticipated dance-opera collaboration, *Bearing*, from playwright Yvette Nolan (Algonquin) and theatre/dance artist Michael Greyeyes (Plains Cree), premiered at Toronto's Luminato Festival in June.

The production is typical of the trans-disciplinary work of Greyeyes' Toronto-based Signal Theatre, blending styles and sensibilities to convey a singular message. Nolan, also a respected dramaturg and former artistic director of Native Earth, and Greyeyes have collaborated before, on the well-received dance-theatre piece *from thine eyes* in 2011.

*Bearing* addresses the impact of residential schools on the Indigenous people of Canada (and, by extension, on non-native Canadians) and the inter-generational fallout from years of systemic oppression of Aboriginal culture. Supported by an orchestra and singers (notably mezzo-soprano Marion Newman), and with dance and non-dance performers shaping the narrative through text and movement, each of its three acts takes on a different aspect of this monumental topic.

Act 1 depicts the aftermath of damaging residential school policies such as removing young children from their homes and suppressing Indigenous language and culture. We see families in disarray, individuals shocked and hurt into dysfunction. The hymnal score — Bach's *Jesu, meine Freude* — set a sorrowful tone as actors Sophie Merasty (Dene/Woodlands Cree) and Brandon Oakes (Mohawk), and dancers Louis Laberge-Côté, Ana Groppler, Irvin Chow, Daniel McArthur, Aria Evans, Jillian Peever and Ceinwen Gobert fleetingly changed up costumes to inhabit personae ranging from siblings to clergy, lawyers and schoolchildren.

Act 2 contains scenes from the school experience — cinematic glimpses of charged moments (a potential suicide, a female-powered revenge fantasy, a young man using his left hand to forcibly write with his right) in quick succession. The music is Canadian composer Claude Vivier's foreboding and tense *Wo bist du Licht* (Where are you, light?), which underpins the frantic scattering of clothes, chairs and bodies. Vivier's score includes the recorded voice of Martin Luther King Jr. from the last speech he gave before his assassination — it is a potent reference.

Act 3 is a poetic call to arms, a plea for people to wake up and turn suffering into a positive legacy for future generations. The cast tidied the performance space as Newman, in a stately portrayal of a sojourner character, traversed the stage singing an original song by Spy Dénom-mé-Welch (Anishinaabe) and Catherine Magowan. "What light are you seeking/ whose light are you taking?," she sang, repeating a phrase heard throughout the show. The mostly uplifting arc of this act was interrupted by an outburst from Oakes who rages and swings chairs at the audience before being restrained and calmed.

Though *Bearing* is a pretty conventional blend of Western contemporary and classical theatrical forms, the story it tells is still shocking and raw. Yet the narrative power inherent in a story that is just beginning to be told to larger theatre audiences is not fully realized.

Some of that can be blamed on certain production decisions. The words projected on the floor of the performance space, for example, were not legible to everyone seated in the cavernous Joey and Toby Tanenbaum Opera Centre; I wish they had been projected on the surrounding walls as well. The words themselves were loaded — Biblical scripture, Indigenous names — and that they were obscured for so many diminished their impact.

The problem was larger than staging, however. At the conclusion of Newman's processional around the space in the final act, attendants unfurled a huge train from the back of her deep blue ballgown, and the cast positioned itself into a tableau. This ceremonial capstone to the

work rang hollow — as an audience, our journey hadn't been significant enough to warrant it.

Greyeyes has said Canadians don't need more history lessons; he is looking to create a more abstract, dramatic and visceral artistic expression of Indigenous experience, one that audiences can fall into and engage with — and it's true that we also need to understand in this way. But in *Bearing*, the abstraction provided by dance and movement fails to rise to a requisite complexity. Mostly the movement is used as a device for denoting tension, stress or rage. The cast coalesced into synchronized physicality only once, a brief moment of banal contemporary movement. This light choreographic hand strikes me as an opportunity mightily missed, considering the depths of emotion and meaning that dance movement can convey (especially as it might be performed by a cast of this calibre).

So many of us are eager to hear voices and stories from First Nations artists. These voices have been absent from mainstream culture for too long. And I hope that Indigenous artists such as Nolan and Greyeyes — both of them from generations of residential school survivors — continue to work with this material. At a post-show chat with the creators, the subject of touring the production internationally was broached. Greyeyes pointed out that stories like those being shared about the residential school era in Canada resonate in many countries around the post-colonial globe. Time will tell whether *Bearing* gets an opportunity to grow and speak on other, future stages.

— KATHLEEN SMITH

### Signal Theatre





## Grigorovich / *Giselle*, *Swan Lake* Ratmansky / *Flames of Paris*

When Makhar Vaziev took over the Bolshoi last year, he declared that classical ballet was and will always remain the company's lifeline. And so it was when the Bolshoi toured to Japan in June, where a program of classics — *Giselle*, *Swan Lake* and *Flames of Paris* — dominated over 12 days of performances at Tokyo Bunka Kaikan concert hall.

In *Giselle*, when Evgenia Obraztsova runs, her body sways laterally, arms rippling like bloomed heather rocked by gentle wind. There is a spring breeze in her step and she has an upper body for all seasons. In spectral afterlife she resembled a living Romantic lithograph. There were moments in Act 1, though, when Obraztsova's dancing seemed distant, filtered through the prettiness of her own enchantment.

That was partly because Yuri Grigorovich's production lacked narrative detail; if Act 2 is traditionally a metaphorical ballet blanc, his version also treats Act 1 as metaphor. Our protagonists appear like parting mist, we know little of their histories and the narrative never really builds. It's also partly because Igor Tsvirko, a fine partner, is a more natural demi-character dancer, and lacked distinction as the prince, Albrecht.

If Obraztsova took the more picturesque approach to *Giselle*, Ekaterina Krysanova strained for naturalism. With Krysanova, there were moments both private and irrepressible, but there were also phases when she seemed almost vacant, subdued. At the start of the Act 1 variation, she turned her face upward to gaze dreamily as if lost in

private reverie. You wished she sustained those thoughts. Without an illuminating inner life, much of her restrained inner passion felt like studied impressionism, something performed rather than inhabited. But no matter. Krysanova's time came at the end of the tour in *Flames of Paris*.

As her Albrecht, Vladislav Lantratov found the right balance between the character's arrogance and redemptive sincerity. He had the entitled air of nobility without being wholly unsympathetic; careless but not malicious. They were joined by Alena Kovaleva's debut as Myrtha. Kovaleva, a 2016 Vaganova graduate, is an intriguing dancer, whose exquisite physical gifts and épaulement come without a matching technical refinement. It should be interesting to follow her progress.

The lighter, more traditional treatment Grigorovich gives *Giselle* turns noir-ishly opaque in his *Swan Lake*. On the one hand, it indulges in casual truths — good versus evil, black versus white — and by eliminating mime it tries too hard for grand abstraction. On the other hand, it burdens an allegorical narrative with pop psychology; its *Othello*-like psychological play is a promising premise, but is executed without Shakespearean complexity. To transcend the production's limitations takes a special performance — and special Olga Smirnova and Semyon Chudin certainly were.

Smirnova has this extra dimensionality, a thorough body eloquence that is replete with pathos, and arms that are whisperingly beautiful. Chudin partnered with the silkiest of touch and danced with epicurean ease. For the length of the white adagio, neither the production's idiosyncrasies nor anything else in the world mattered.

That Smirnova and Chudin are a

seasoned pairing was yet more obvious when watching Yulia Stepanova and Artem Ovcharenko in a later performance. Individually, they were lovely. Ovcharenko had brooding elegance, and Stepanova, who generated drama with powerful, undulating arms and sculpted shapes, had both allure and freshness. But the duets felt laboured and musically unvaried.

Watching the St. Petersburg-trained Smirnova or Stepanova lead a flock of Moscow swans is a reminder, too, that despite centuries of crossover, real differences exist between the schools from the former imperial capital and its Soviet usurper. Dancers like these enrich any company, and the Bolshoi is large enough and its style broad enough to contain those differences. It shouldn't, though, forget its own identity.

*The Flames of Paris* is what the Bolshoi does best — exuberant spectacle. Drawing on the existing 25 minutes of Vasily Vainonen's choreography with a reimagining of the original libretto, Alexei Ratmansky's 2008 production is kitsch without nostalgia. In the original, moral binaries framed by class polemics drove the revolutionary cauldron; here the Bolshoi dancers give us the glory and heroism, but ask questions of it, too.

Krysanova, finding nuance within bravado, was a blazing Jeanne with Denis Savin in a touching Jerome. David Motta Soares and Margarita Shrainer made delicious work of the court divertissement.

There is one more thing. Character dances, a cherished tradition which Grigorovich's *Swan Lake* inexplicably dispenses with, are restored to their rightful place in *Flames of Paris*. Vainonen's production had both a martyr-like character, Marianne, and a classical lead, Jeanne, but Ratmansky combines the two, giving Marianne's passages — which would have been danced by a character specialist — to Jeanne. The use of weight in character and classical dance is different, and Krysanova brought to these passages less heroic weight in favour of a lightness, an ecstatic rapture. Lantratov's Philippe, more spindly than a Chabukiani, the role's originator, was the revolution's freewheeling spirit, an incarnation of populist joie de vivre.

Fervour and gravitas, these two dancers seemed to tell us, are different things. Ratmansky adds, through a twist of an ending, that we would do good not to confuse them.

— JOY WANG XIN YUAN

## Festival Roundup

During 11 days in May, Munich turned into a mecca for contemporary dance lovers at the biennial festival DANCE 2017, now in its 15th season. Seventeen artists presented 15 performances, with six world premieres, in a diversity of styles spanning modern ballet to tanztheater to performance art. Altogether, the festival offered 130 performances, as well as artist talks, lectures and an exhibition about the early days of contemporary dance in Munich.

Each festival puts special focus on a certain geographical area; this year, six artists from Montreal were invited because, as festival director Nina Hümpel explains, “For more than 40 years, Montreal has produced outstanding contemporary dance, extremely courageous, innovative and cutting edge, and its artists are an inspiration to the rest of the contemporary dance world.”

Opening night was dedicated to American-born Richard Siegal, who has been based in Munich since 2010, and his newly founded Ballet of Difference. The company’s first premiere, Siegal’s *Excerpts of a Future Work on the Subject of Chelsea Manning*, was inspired by the life of whistleblower Bradley Manning, who during a prison sentence underwent gender transition. In it, a man and a woman clad in long white dresses, and a man in a black dress, intertwine in a complicated ménage à trois, backed by a chorus like in a Greek tragedy. Siegal depicts the question of gender as a personal conflict about being in a body and suffering.

Another American, Trajal Harrell, put the gender question into a broader perspective in his *Caen Amour* (2016), playing with staged female sexuality. Inspired by the erotic hoochie koochie shows from the early 20th century — based on American ideas of the exotic East and performed by women or by men in drag — two men and a woman minced and capered in sexually provocative ways in front of a screen that looked like the façade of a house. Sometimes they wrapped their bodies in scarves, sometimes they wore contemporary male or female clothes, or held them up in front of their partially naked bodies as if gender identity were as interchangeable as a garment. Harrell

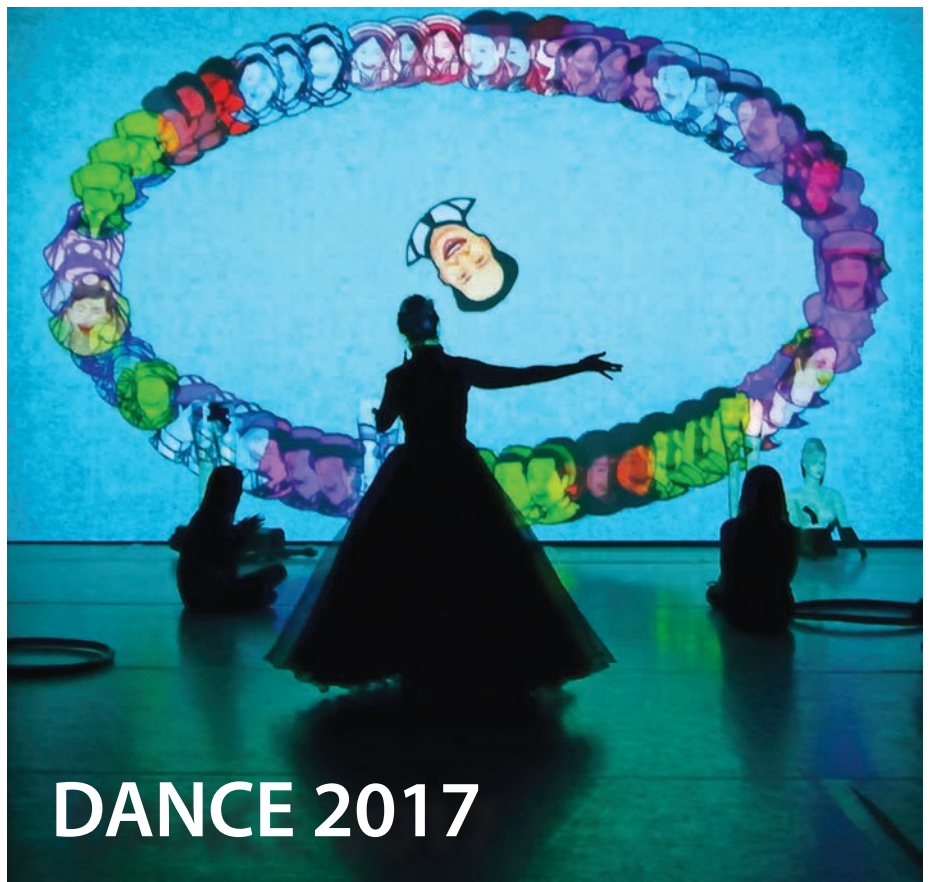
also broke down the traditional division between performers and audience by inviting us to come behind the façade and watch the hectic backstage activities. By walking back and forth, we became part of the performance.

Frédéric Gravel, one of the Montreal artists, also played with the roles of performer and audience. At the beginning of his premiere, *Some Hope for the Bastards*, nine dancers walk around onstage sipping beer, and then sit in a row watching the audience. When Gravel starts to play electric guitar with his band, they are awoken and with pounding pelvises slowly encounter each other, forming relationships in which every caress turns into an argument or an act of violence. In the second part, they mutate into the hammering sound of the music, falling on the floor and bouncing like rubber balls, seemingly boneless and bringing down the house.

In a monologue at the start of his piece, Gravel declared that dance cannot be political, that it is nothing but form. Nevertheless, two choreographers

directly addressed political issues: Daina Ashbee, a Métis from British Columbia based now in Montreal, and Chinese Yang Zhen. In Ashbee’s *Unrelated* (2014), about the murders of Indigenous women in Canada, two mostly naked women dancers (Areli Moran and Paige Culley), vulnerable and alone, were enclosed in a limited prison-like space; one hammered her body against the wall as if trying to get out. At one point, they sought solace by walking into the auditorium and holding hands with members of the audience. Then they were back onstage embracing each other, but never touching. It was a very moving piece, and the Munich audience loved it.

Zhen’s *Minorities*, a premiere, presented five women from Chinese minority groups in Uyghur, Tibet and Mongolia in a piece that was like zapping through what I imagine an evening of Chinese TV would be like. The women were dancing like in excerpts from MTV, while on a screen, video tutorials for the traditional dances from the three areas were shown. Then the women sat



downstage chatting like teenagers. Chinese propaganda for the country and English instruction for the masses were projected and an opera singer appeared in a live performance. This mix made the piece seem without focus.

Israeli Emanuel Gat, Austrian Nicole Peisl and Montreal's Benoît Lachambre were invited to participate in *Minute-made*, a shared-creation format devised by Munich's Karl Alfred Schreiner. In five days, three choreographers had to each create a piece for 20 dancers from Schreiner's Ballett des Staatstheaters am Gärtnerplatz; each works consecutively, with the second and third beginning their contribution to the choreography where the preceding piece ended.

Gat, who was first, clad the dancers in white and black underwear, dividing them into two groups that played a game of stop and go. Peisl took over as one dancer was lying on the floor; she had him do a solo while the rest got dressed. Then the group played around with long ropes, ending with them hugging each other. Lachambre had this

hug evolve into a piece with fleeting relationships and a group from which individuals separated, sometimes moving like drug addicts in need of a fix. They danced with their pants around the ankles, which to me brought associations of a schoolyard prank, but more ghastly and scary.

Two performances by Stéphane Gladyzewski from Montreal ventured into the philosophical areas of identity and physical limits. In *Chaleur Humaine* (2011), two bodies appear in a dark room, illuminated by a thermal camera and video projections, through which they multiply in an erotic game or turn into spots of colour before they disappear again. In *Tête-à-tête* (2012), a single audience member is led into a dark room and seated in front of a black mask. Finally, part of a male face appears, changing and mutating until the mask itself disappears and a man, who takes your hand, is sitting there. The viewer's face is projected onto his face, like an amalgam of two individuals, and then he disappears. Both shows were

wonderful flashes of intangible dreams.

DANCE 2017 presented a snapshot of what is going on in the contemporary dance world right now. Generally, the dance pieces followed the same formula: a slow beginning with a lot of walking and standing, movements in slow motion and tableaux interspersed with movements that hit you like an explosion. Relationships were a focal point, but none were uncomplicated or loving no matter what the gender constellation.

More than half of the shows were either tanztheater or performance art, and it seems that the less dance there is in a piece, the more avant-garde it is labelled. And multimedia is, of course, part of the general trend in all art forms. But it raises two questions: has the physical development of dance in the traditional sense reached its limits, and does the future of dance lie beyond the physical body?

— JEANNETTE ANDERSEN



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Photo: Rod Braun    Choreography: Odette Heyn

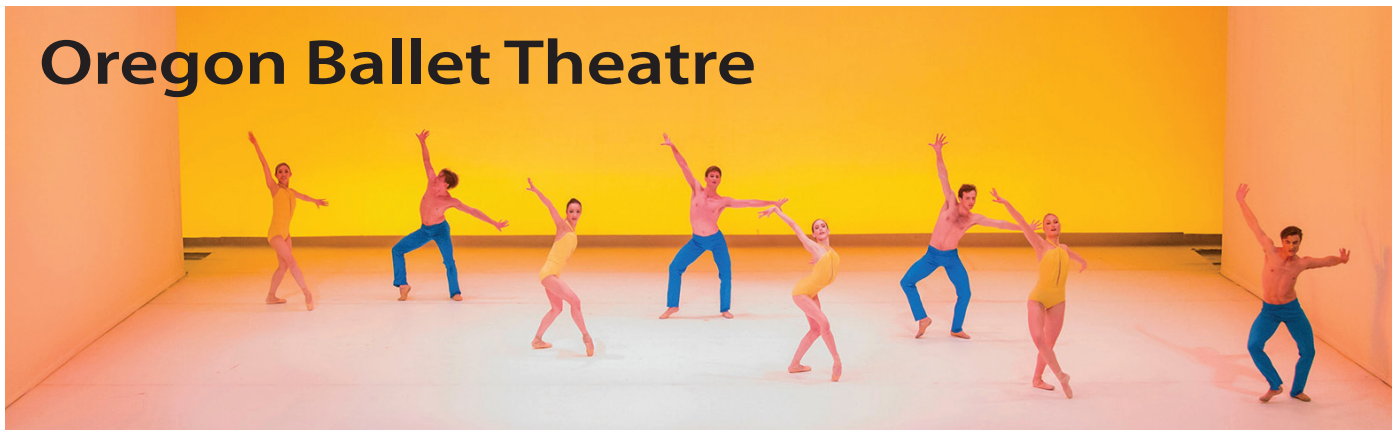
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# Oregon Ballet Theatre



## Helen Pickett and Nacho Duato / Mixed Bill

For some choreographers, music provides the impetus for the dance; for others, a story triggers movement ideas; for still others it's their inner child, or the place where they grew up, or a visual image, or some, or none, or all of the above. Oregon Ballet Theatre's closing show of the season, at Portland's Newmark Theatre in April, featured two choreographers with very different backgrounds and points of view — American Helen Pickett and Spanish Nacho Duato. The bill worked quite well as a showcase for the dancers and as a clear expression of artistic director Kevin Irving's vision for the company he has led since 2013.

Pickett, who describes herself as a contemporary ballet choreographer, and is resident choreographer at Atlanta Ballet, takes her inspiration from a number of sources, many of them visual. Two of her works book-ended the evening: the curtain-raising *Terra* and the closing *Petal*.

*Terra*, a premiere commissioned by Oregon Ballet Theatre along with a score by Hollywood composer Jeff Beal, is the result of a Diaghilev-style collaboration by choreographer, composer, lighting designer Michael Mazzola and costume designer Emma Kingsbury. Packed with all kinds of movement, some of it taken from the mating rituals of birds and animals, some from African and Native American tribal dance, and blended with pedestrian movement and classical steps (the women are on pointe), *Terra*, the choreographer says in a program note, is about relationships — human relationships with one another, the human relationship to the earth.

On opening night, *Terra* seemed crowded and inchoate, with too many different kinds of movement and way too much foot stamping and muscle flexing from the men. Two women stood out: Xuan Cheng and Jacqueline Straughan, strong, fleet dancers who were particularly good in choreography influenced by William Forsythe, in whose company Pickett danced for 11 years. Mazzola's technicolour lights and Beal's score gave the piece a cinematic effect, and Kingsbury's costumes looked fine, particularly a side-slit dress worn by Straughan.

*Petal* is in the repertoire of many companies all over the world; it premiered with Aspen Santa Fe Ballet in 2008, and Oregon Ballet Theatre first performed it in 2014, when it was the curtain-raiser for a mixed bill. It's an equally good closer, and the dancers took palpable pleasure in performing it. Brilliantly coloured Gerbera daisies provided the choreographic impetus; lighting design by Todd Elmer in saturated colours — an intense yellow, then salmon pink, then violet — provided a lovely, mood-swinging environment. Music by Thomas Montgomery Newman and Philip Glass drove dancing that had the strident energy of Forsythe, but also contained intimate, witty gestures that are specific to Pickett's good-humoured take on romance. *Petal* is a technically demanding piece, and Candace Bouchard, Avery Reiners, Xuan Cheng and Peter Franc seized the moment to show what they can do, which was a pleasure to see.

In Duato's *El Naranjo*, a duet from a much longer work called *Gnawa* (2005), Franc partnered Straughan with the acute care and sensitivity he has exhibited in his partnering all season. The title translates as "orange blossom," and the sensuous, lyrical pas de deux is perfumed with the nos-

talgia Duato feels for Valencia, the city of his birth.

Flesh-coloured costumes suggest Adam and Eve in an orange grove before the fall (no fig leaves!), a not unreasonable Garden of Eden for a Spaniard whose passion for his homeland infuses all of his work. This is basically neoclassical choreography, with occasional references to flamenco in the port de bras, accompanied by a North African-flavoured score by Juan Alberto Areche and Javier Paxarino.

*Jardí Tancat* was Duato's first choreography; it premiered in 1983 and has been wildly successful ever since. Irving fell in love with the work when he was dancing with Les Grands Ballets Canadiens and Duato had staged it on the company. Oregon Ballet Theatre's dancers, as directed by Irving (he stages all the Duato works on OBT), gave this familiar piece a freshness and immediacy that surely made it look new to audience members who might have seen it performed elsewhere. Soloist Martina Chavez, a dancer Irving has nurtured since his arrival in 2013, was particularly lovely on opening night, dancing with Colby Parsons, thoroughly inhabiting the accompanying Catalan folk music, passionately sung in a recording by Maria del Mar Bonet. Emily Parker and Kelsie Nobriga, partnered by Michael Linsmeier and Brian Simcoe, respectively, acquitted themselves in unaccustomed barefooted dancing equally well.

*El Naranjo* and *Jardí Tancat*, both company premieres, join *Por Vos Muero*, *Cor Perdut* and *Rassemblement* in Oregon Ballet Theatre's repertoire, with undoubtedly more to come, since Irving was for some time Duato's artistic assistant at the Compañía Nacional de Danza in Madrid.

— MARTHA ULLMAN WEST

# Martha Graham and Ted Shawn in *Malagueña*

## Jacob's Pillow Archives

**T**his rare porcelain figure of Jacob's Pillow founder Ted Shawn with his star pupil Martha Graham is a recent donation to our archives.

Known as Spanish Dance, it was created by German sculptor Dorothea Charol for Rosenthal in 1927.

It depicts a duet choreographed by Shawn in 1921, titled *Malagueña*, and later incorporated into a more extensive *Spanish Suite*. This dance might have been lost to history except for the fact it was captured by at least three photographers, each focusing on a strikingly similar pose. Nickolas Muray's photo (below) might well have served as Charol's model, though the artist took certain liberties in translating the image into porcelain, and neither of the faces resemble their subjects. But there's no mistaking the dance itself, from the position of Shawn's left hand to the arch of Graham's foot. In whatever form, it's extraordinary to see these two very different modern dance titans united harmoniously.

Jacob's Pillow Archives documents dance companies and artists from the Jacob's Pillow Dance Festival's first 85 seasons, with emphasis on founder Ted Shawn, his company of Men Dancers and Ruth St. Denis.

— NORTON OWEN  
DIRECTOR OF PRESERVATION  
JACOB'S PILLOW ARCHIVES



Porcelain by Dorothea Charol, height: ca. 14 7/8 in.  
Photo: David Dashiell



Martha Graham and Ted Shawn in  
Shawn's *Malagueña*  
Photo: Nickolas Muray

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