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SPRING 2017 | VOL. 45 No. 1

Publisher Vancouver Ballet Society

Editor Kaija Pepper

Art Direction Brenda Finamore

Copy Editor Margaret Jetelina

Fulfillment The Oyster Group

Printing Horseshoe Press Inc.

Mailing Mail-O-Matic

Advertising Jorssen Marketing

Social & Digital Media Deanna Peters

DANCE INTERNATIONAL is published quarterly by the **Vancouver Ballet Society** (vbs@telus.net), a not-for-profit organization established in 1946 to support dance.

Opinions expressed within are those of the authors and do not necessarily represent the opinions of DANCE INTERNATIONAL magazine, the Vancouver Ballet Society, its directors or editors. The editors reserve the right to make changes in materials selected for publication to meet editorial standards and requirements. No part of this magazine may be reproduced without written permission.

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Distributed in Canada by Magazines Canada

Distributed in the USA by Coast to Coast



Canada Council
for the Arts
Conseil des arts
du Canada

We acknowledge the support of the Canada Council for the Arts, which last year invested \$153 million to bring the arts to Canadians throughout the country.



BRITISH COLUMBIA
ARTS COUNCIL
An agency of the Province of British Columbia



We acknowledge the financial assistance of the Province of British Columbia.

ISSN 1189-9816
Federal Tax Exemption No. 0308353-22-27
Public Mail Agreement No. 40050848



Dance International turns 40 this year, a notable achievement for a non-profit arts publication.

There is, of course, a long list of people behind the magazine's success, beginning with a pioneer Canadian balletomane, Yvonne Firkins, who seeded the idea when she started a newsletter for the Vancouver Ballet Society in 1953. VBS

board member Ruth McLoughlin developed the newsletter into a magazine, originally called *Vandance*, in 1977.

VBS has remained loyal to the hard work of bringing dance to the page ever since, and is still the magazine's proud publisher. Alongside its support of dancers' training by offering workshops and scholarship funds, through *Dance International* the society fosters global conversation about the art form for the general public, as well as for student and professional dance artists.

In 1993, during her time as editor, Maureen Riches developed the scope of the magazine and re-christened it *Dance International*. Some of you might remember that 48-page black-and-white glossy, which Maureen and her team slowly built into a 64-page, mostly colour quarterly.

When VBS handed me the reins in fall 2013, it was not, as is well known, an auspicious time for magazines of any kind. Yet the opportunity to get inside the stories and ideas behind this magnificent, multi-faceted art form in the role of editor was irresistible. I am honoured to be here for *Dance International's* 40th anniversary year.

Thank you to our expert stable of writers, and to our skilled design and production teams, past and present, without whom there would be no magazine. And thanks to you, our readers, for being here with us. All of us at *Dance International* hope you enjoy our latest offering.

Kaija

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Dance International



DIMagazine

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Photo: Andrew Ross

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Top left: Charles-Louis Yoshiyama and Karina Gonzalez in *Son of Chamber Symphony*

Top right: Karina Gonzalez and Charles-Louis Yoshiyama in *Maninyas*

Centre left: Katharine Precourt as the Snow Queen and artists and students of Houston Ballet in *The Nutcracker*

Centre right: Connor Walsh and Karina Gonzalez in *Romeo and Juliet*

Above: Artists of Houston Ballet in *Giselle*

All choreography by Stanton Welch

All photos: Amitava Sarkar

HOUSTON BALLET'S GOLDEN DAYS

The Stanton Welch era of expansion

by Molly Glentzer

The young dancers rehearsing the battle scene for Stanton Welch's new production of *The Nutcracker* would soon be disguised in layers of costume and makeup. But one day last September, in formations that moved swiftly across the largest studio at the seven-storey Houston Ballet Center for Dance, they wore the colour-coded leotards of Houston Ballet Academy that made it easy to tell who was who: the younger levels in iris, cobalt, teal and so on, up to Level 9, the pre-professionals who wear black and tour internationally with Houston Ballet II.

The older girls marched for much of the hour on pointe, carrying faux rifles. When they lined up to point their weapons, the boys raced at them, lifted them sideways at deadweight, and carried them across the room at a full run. One boy wore a belt with a long rehearsal tail, a reminder that the ballet's ninja-style rat costumes would also require some getting used to.

"Ladies, hold your legs really square. This is a guy thing. Guys, you've got to have her middle in the middle of you. She's got to be on her side ... Find what works best for you," Welch advised.

Their red faces suggested the dancers were stretching the limits of their stamina and strength, but no one let on they were hurting. They looked like they didn't want to spoil any opportunity to work with Welch.

The next generation of Houston Ballet professionals will grow up performing many works by Welch, who is also the company's artistic director, from abstract contemporary dances to a full suite of narrative ballets with ensemble work as challenging as the pas de deux and solos. They will be immersed in his staging of *The Nutcracker* for a month every holiday season.

Welch's *Nutcracker* is well suited to the extreme talents of today's dancers — bigger, bolder, faster and slightly longer than the 27-year-old version by former artistic director Ben Stevenson that the company retired last season. It incorporates many more students — as many as Welch can squeeze in — because Houston Ballet Academy has nearly doubled in recent years, and he wants to give them more opportunities to perform.

He demands concentration and excellence, but, during the battle scene rehearsal, clearly didn't want to intimidate anyone. He coaxed the littlest ones quietly, with a fatherly hand on the shoulder, when they needed a nudge: "When we chassé out across the stage, can you go a little faster?"

Welch, who was named a member of the Order of Australia in 2015, didn't grow up thinking small. He was raised in the theatre, the older son of former Australian Ballet legends Marilyn Jones and Garth Welch and brother of longtime former Australian Ballet principal Damien Welch.

Stanton Welch came to dancing late, at 17, but quickly rose to the rank of soloist and became one of two resident choreographers at the Australian Ballet, a title he still holds. By his late 20s he was



making ballets around the world.

He made his first work for Houston Ballet, the contemporary one-act *Indigo*, in 1999. When he succeeded Stevenson four years later, at the age of 32, he had little directing experience, but ample ambition and confidence.

At that point, Houston Ballet had 49 versatile dancers, a strong British tradition, a solid repertoire of classic story ballets and contemporary works, a modest touring program, a thriving academy from which it drew much of its talent, a supportive board and a rich endowment.

Welch wanted to broaden the company's classical influences, enlarge its contemporary repertoire and engage the world's best coaches in the studios. He also saw potential to grow the company literally — with more dancers, more shows, more touring. Perhaps most importantly, he wasn't afraid to embrace the organization's commitment to producing full-length story ballets.

By all those accounts, and others, he is succeeding.

"It feels like a golden time," Welch says. "There's a lot here that inspires me. A lot of talent, a lot of people you could make a ballet on."

This season, Houston Ballet has 59 dancers. "We're the largest we've been," Welch says. "We've added, roughly, a dancer every year and a half to two years." He'd like a few more, needing a roster of 60 or 65 to support Houston Ballet's repertoire.

"A ballet like *Manon* takes a lot of people," Welch says. "Expansion will allow me to have more principals, more soloists, more people of different rank. I only have so much upward mobility, yet I have a lot of people who are talented enough to move upward."

Houston Ballet performs about 90 times a year, a number Welch wants to increase to 100 or 115. The company's official Wortham Theater season offers six programs each year, half of which are devoted to narrative ballet.

"There's always one that is hopefully our summer blockbuster,

Left: Yuriko Kajiya of Houston Ballet in Stanton Welch's *Giselle*

Above: Stanton Welch, artists and students of Houston Ballet in rehearsal

Both photos: Amitava Sarkar

“It feels like a golden time. There’s a lot here that inspires me. A lot of talent, a lot of people you could make a ballet on.”

and one that is our indie, Oscar-worthy, more for the art form,” he says.

Welch has produced at least one new full-length ballet every season — among them John Cranko’s *Taming of the Shrew* and *Onegin*, John Neumeier’s *A Midsummer Night’s Dream* and co-productions of David Bintley’s *Aladdin* and *The Tempest* (coming in June).

Welch’s own early signature ballets, *Madame Butterfly* and *Cinderella*, have become company staples. More recently, he has made complex new stagings of *Romeo and Juliet* and *Giselle* — and before that, a new *Swan Lake*, the company’s first *La Bayadère* and original ballets such as *Marie* (about the life of Marie Antoinette) and *Pecos Bill* (about a mythical figure of the American West).

A lot rides on *The Nutcracker*, which historically generates more than half of Houston Ballet’s ticket revenue per season. Welch’s \$5 million production costs more than any ballet in the company’s history, partly because it needs to last at least a decade.

British designer Tim Goodchild dreamed up the more than 300 costumes (Welch includes lions, polar bears and penguins in his character mix) and the fantastical, highly mechanized sets, which were realized by London’s Souvenir Scenic Studios.

“We use our money really, really well. We plan with such detail that we don’t waste anything,” Welch says. “But when you sit down out front, they are extraordinarily beautiful visualizations. The costumes are immaculate. The set looks like musical theatre.”

Opulence is important, he adds, because Stevenson — who often worked with Desmond Heeley — set a high standard. “You had great dancing, great music, but you also had great design. I don’t think in North American ballet that’s always the case.”

The scale and deadlines of *The Nutcracker* required outside help with costume production, but Welch’s other ballets were produced in a wardrobe studio that takes up nearly an entire floor of the company’s centre. Italian designer Roberta Guidi di Bagno’s deliciously detailed costumes for *Romeo and Juliet* and *Giselle* were all built there.

“We’re getting to a place where we have one of the best in-house wardrobe departments of all the ballet companies in America,” Welch says. “This is all a contained environment. We can go downstairs and see the costumes. The dancers can rehearse in costume. There are so many benefits to that.”

He’d like to bring Sir Kenneth MacMillan’s *Mayerling* and another Neumeier work to Houston, and he has a long list of

“homework” pieces to create — a new staging of *Sylvia*, a *Raymonda* and an original ballet based on the Biblical story of Cain and Abel. Those ballets aren’t an easy sell in the United States, he says. “But they’re important building blocks for a company or an artist to achieve, as we grow outward, like a tree. Each ring makes us stronger or better.”

Executive director James Nelson and Houston Ballet’s board would rather see Welch try something new, even if it fails, than keep the status quo. They’ve also supported a continually growing infusion of one-act ballets by Mark Morris, Jiri Kylian, Twyla Tharp, Edwaard Liang, Aszure Barton and Nicolo Fonte. Longtime associate choreographer Christopher Bruce is still a presence, and Welch has expanded relationships with the George Balanchine and Jerome Robbins foundations.

Welch also spins out his own one-acts regularly, inside and outside the seasonal repertoire. He collaborated with pianist Lang Lang to create *Sounds of the Soul* in Paris in 2013 with Houston Ballet dancers, and he’s planning a new piece for San Francisco Ballet.

Houston Ballet looked stunningly sharp last fall in a season opening program that required virtuosity throughout the ranks, pairing Balanchine’s *Theme and Variations* with Robbins’ *Other Dances* and William Forsythe’s *Artifact Suite*.

Principal dancer Connor Walsh attributed some of the good energy to working with the famously positive Forsythe, who brings a formidable knowledge of ballet history and organizational theory to his work, along with physical challenges.

“His impact can’t be overstated,” Walsh says. “He says, ‘Show me everything you know about dance’ ... and reminds you that you know what you’re doing, and you’re passionate about it. That carries over into other works.”

Walsh came to Houston as a 15-year-old because the academy offered a strong men’s program. “Sure enough, I was in class with 20 guys instantly, learning so much about men’s technique and partnering,” he says.

At 21, he became the youngest principal in company history, a position he has relished for nearly a decade. He loves the collaborative effort that goes into making new ballets, the constant challenges presented by visiting choreographers and the collective spirit Welch has fostered.

“I’m privileged to be given leading roles, but the company is not a platform for the principals,” Walsh says. “A lot of Stanton’s work is ensemble-based and diverse.”

Walsh also loves the coaching, especially when guest teacher Johnny Eliason makes his annual visit from Denmark. “It’s an honest assessment. His classes are so demanding he doesn’t

have to say anything — you know where you are.”

Houston Ballet's two-week tour last summer to Melbourne also enriched the dancers artistically, Walsh says. They gave 12 sold-out performances of *Romeo and Juliet* — nearly twice what they presented at home when the ballet premiered in early 2015. “The company really got to sink its teeth into the production,” Walsh says. “By the end of the 12th show, it felt really settled.”

The *Romeo and Juliet* tour to Welch's hometown — a gargantuan undertaking — gave him the sense the company is on the right track. There may still be more to do, but he likes where the company has come. “We've grown into our skin,” he says.

Forsythe clearly liked what he saw in Houston. He invited Houston Ballet to perform *Artifact Suite* in Los Angeles in October during a special Celebrate Forsythe program with San Francisco Ballet and Pacific Northwest Ballet.

In spite of its accomplishments, Houston Ballet still fights the perception — especially in New York — that it is a regional company. Some excellent dancers have headed for brighter lights.

“You can either get frustrated by that or energized,” Walsh says. He's stayed, he said, because he loves the company and likes being more than a dancer — he's an ambassador and mentor.

Principal dancer Karina Gonzalez, a native of Caracas, Venezuela, who came to Houston in 2010 as a young up-and-comer from Tulsa Ballet, also sees herself as a mentor. “Now I'm the one they look up to,” she says.

Most of Houston Ballet's top dancers matured with Welch, including principals Sara Webb, Melody Mennite, Ian Casady

and Charles-Louis Yoshiyama, and first soloists Jessica Collado and Katharine Precourt.

Principals Yuriko Kajiya and Jared Matthews joined the company more recently from American Ballet Theatre. Matthews grew up in Houston, and the real-life couple like the city's relative ease of living as well as Houston Ballet's familial atmosphere.

Visiting choreographers salivate over Houston Ballet's state-of-the-art centre, whose facilities include a flexible black-box theatre for lectures, rehearsals and performances of new choreography by adventurous company members. “This was a big part of the plan — it's invaluable,” Welch says.

The centre has also enabled Houston Ballet Academy to double in size (it enrolls more than 560 students annually) and capitalize on its consistently strong showings at the Prix de Lausanne. Former academy director Shelly Power recently became the competition's first dual creative and executive leader. Her Houston successor, Madeleine Onne, is leaving the directorship of Hong Kong Ballet; when Welch saw her name in the applicant pool, he knew the academy had joined an elite club.

Onne, a former Swedish star, could coach Houston's professional company as well as students. “For us to even be on Madeleine's agenda, that's exciting to me,” Welch says. He's going to be keeping Onne busy. He wants to expand the academy's programming exponentially, adding stronger contemporary and character training. “That would be something — to really make this a centre of all things dance, not just ballet,” he says.

Imagine *The Nutcracker* he could create with that. ^{DI}

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Inside James Kudelka's *Vespers*

A Royal Winnipeg Ballet premiere about masks, music and the mature body

by Jillian Groening



Ten smooth resin animal masks lay neatly placed on a white table in the Royal Winnipeg Ballet studio where James Kudelka's latest full-length ballet, *Vespers*, was in rehearsal this past fall. They were as yet unfinished — the cardinal will have crimson feathers added, the ram's curved white horns needed detailing. Below each mask's painted unblinking eyes is a small patch of mesh from where human eyes will gaze. Stuck in the interim between conception and completion, the creatures waited.

Downstage of the masks, the set, designed by Nicholas Blais, was blocked out, with a flight of stairs leading up to a second level that overlooked the inky black floor speckled with glowing white dots, a reflection of the pot lights above. The set was in its early stage, too, sketched out in plywood and unfinished two-by-fours.

Kudelka was sitting on a piano bench, his back to the wall of mirrors, after having spent all morning rehearsing with the cast of 20 dancers. It was the last day of a five-week creative process and he had let them go early — halfway through the day — on account of a successful run-through, and perhaps a little fatigue. About to fly home to Toronto the next morning, Kudelka was calm and soft-spoken, the weight of

the first segment in the *Vespers* creative process having lifted from his shoulders.

One of North America's most respected artists, Kudelka is currently choreographer in residence with Montreal's contemporary styled Coleman Lemieux & Compagnie. Over his long career, he has created more than 50 original works, along with updating classics such as *Swan Lake*, *Cinderella* and *The Nutcracker*. He began choreographing while still a student at Canada's National Ballet School in Toronto, and went on to perform with the company before acting as resident choreographer for Les Grands Ballets Canadiens de Montréal (1984-1990) and creating works for Les Ballets Jazz de Montréal, Joffrey Ballet and San Francisco Ballet, among others. He eventually returned to his roots, becoming the National Ballet of Canada's artist in residence, followed by its artistic director (1996-2005).

Kudelka is known for crafting works where music and movement exist in a symbiotic relationship. From blue-collar country in *The Man in Black*, featuring Johnny Cash tunes, to intricate compositions such as Beethoven's Symphony No. 6, in *Pastorale*, sound is again his muse in *Vespers*.

Vespers, or Evening Prayer, is a Christian service that is typi-



Left: Liam Caines and Evelyn Hart in rehearsal for the Royal Winnipeg Ballet's *Vespers*

Below: Artists of the Royal Winnipeg Ballet in rehearsal for *Vespers*

Video stills: David Cooper

cally composed of chanted opening verses, followed by several sung Psalms, interspersed with readings from the Bible and hymns. The collection Kudelka uses is the iconic *Vespers* by Claudio Monteverdi, composed in 1610. Choral-based, with tumbling voices singing praises to the Virgin Mary in Latin while regal cornet and harpsichord accompany, the music does not immediately seem to lend itself to dance.

Even more surprising, in the mix of orchestra and voice, Kudelka heard animal sounds and, he says, "I wondered what kind of narrative could come of that."

Growing up on a farm in Newmarket, Ontario, Kudelka was fascinated as a child by the wildlife he found there, some creatures coexisting with humans, becoming domesticated, and others remaining feral. In *Vespers*, animals and their inherent characteristics are brought to life within the gilded, courtly music. Ten of the 20 dancers are cast as animals, including a rabbit, a pig and a hawk, and all are on pointe, while the others, the humans, are barefoot.

The masks are by Toronto-based milliner and prop designer Karen Rodd, who has extensive experience building masks for dance and theatre through the National Ballet of Canada, Canadian Stage Company and Livent Inc., where she worked on *Phantom of the Opera* and *The Lion King*.

For *Vespers*, each mask was moulded after taking individual head measurements and matching them with pre-existing casts Rodd has in her studio. Clay was then sculpted around the cast, followed by the creation of a negative mould in rubber, and finally with resin being worked into the rubber. Ears and horns were constructed later using various densities of foam to ensure they remained flexible. Adjustable headgear, padding and straps were placed inside the masks and the outside painted. The finishing process would involve faux fur and velour fastened onto the animal faces, while delicate, handmade feathers would be attached to the cardinal and the hawk, and beaks and eyes hand-painted.

Usually in performance, the majority of emotional information is expressed through the face, followed by the subtleties of the sternum and shoulders. "The mask cuts off a lot of what you're used to projecting as a dancer," says Katie Bonnell, a



member of the Royal Winnipeg Ballet's corps and wearer of the porcupine mask.

Also, she says, the obscured vision complicates movement onstage. "It's fascinating to limit one of your major senses, but when it comes to dance, sight is everything. As soon as that is limited, you have to rely more on your other senses and develop spatial awareness." This means tuning in to the surrounding bodies and forms using animal-like sensing, similar to the feelers of a catfish or the echolocation used by bats, and a whole lot of trust.

Rodd's masks, though constructed to withstand the heavy use that rehearsal and repeated performance brings, are lightweight and breathable, more of a psychological barrier than a physical one. The masks hide the individual: faces are free to contort into whatever expression they please, which assists with the inner transformation from human to beast. Also, the dancers sweat more and don't need to cake on stage makeup.

One of Kudelka's influences for *Vespers* was a collection of essays by 16th-century French philosopher Michel de Montaigne. In one, de Montaigne discusses a time when human and animal relations were in harmony. The essay suggests a common language and an equal respect between the two

worlds.

According to Rodd, “The choreography gives the animals the same weight and focus as the human beings onstage.” This equality between the species, she believes, invites reflection, bringing to light environmental issues regarding how we treat the world around us.

“The realistic nature of the mask design coupled with minimalist costume design [by Denis Lavoie] lends an air of dreamlike surrealism to the work. We see the human bodies supporting the masks, adding an aura of ritual and mystery.”

The first act of *Vespers* has animals and humans existing together, while in the second act a shift occurs. This change will manifest itself via iconic ballerina Evelyn Hart, who interprets the abstract role of the force, which is one of reconciliation, between the two realms.

A former principal with the company who, in 1980, was the first Canadian to win a gold medal for best female soloist at the International Ballet Competition in Varna, Bulgaria, Hart most recently worked with Kudelka and the Royal Winnipeg Ballet in 2014, performing in the Winter section of his moving work *The Four Seasons*. Hart has been semi-retired from the stage since 2005, though taking on independent projects, as well as mentoring and coaching young movement artists.

Dance, and ballet in particular, is a form where the aging

body isn't always prominent. Ballerinas are expected to retire early and go on to more behind-the-scenes roles, to leave the stage when often their presence is most magnetic. Kudelka's choice to feature an artist outside the standard age range — Hart is 60 — demonstrates an ability to see beyond the classic structures of ballet for the sake of the work at hand.

“Evelyn is her own force of nature,” Kudelka says. He describes how she can simply walk across the stage and fill the sound, fill the room, fill an idea. “The dance world has gotten very busy in what it does; there is a lot of movement, but there isn't a lot of dancing. I like to see the space in-between things, and real intention with movement. It's not just a matter of getting choreography accomplished.” Hart, he clearly feels, is a master at bringing this kind of interpretive depth.

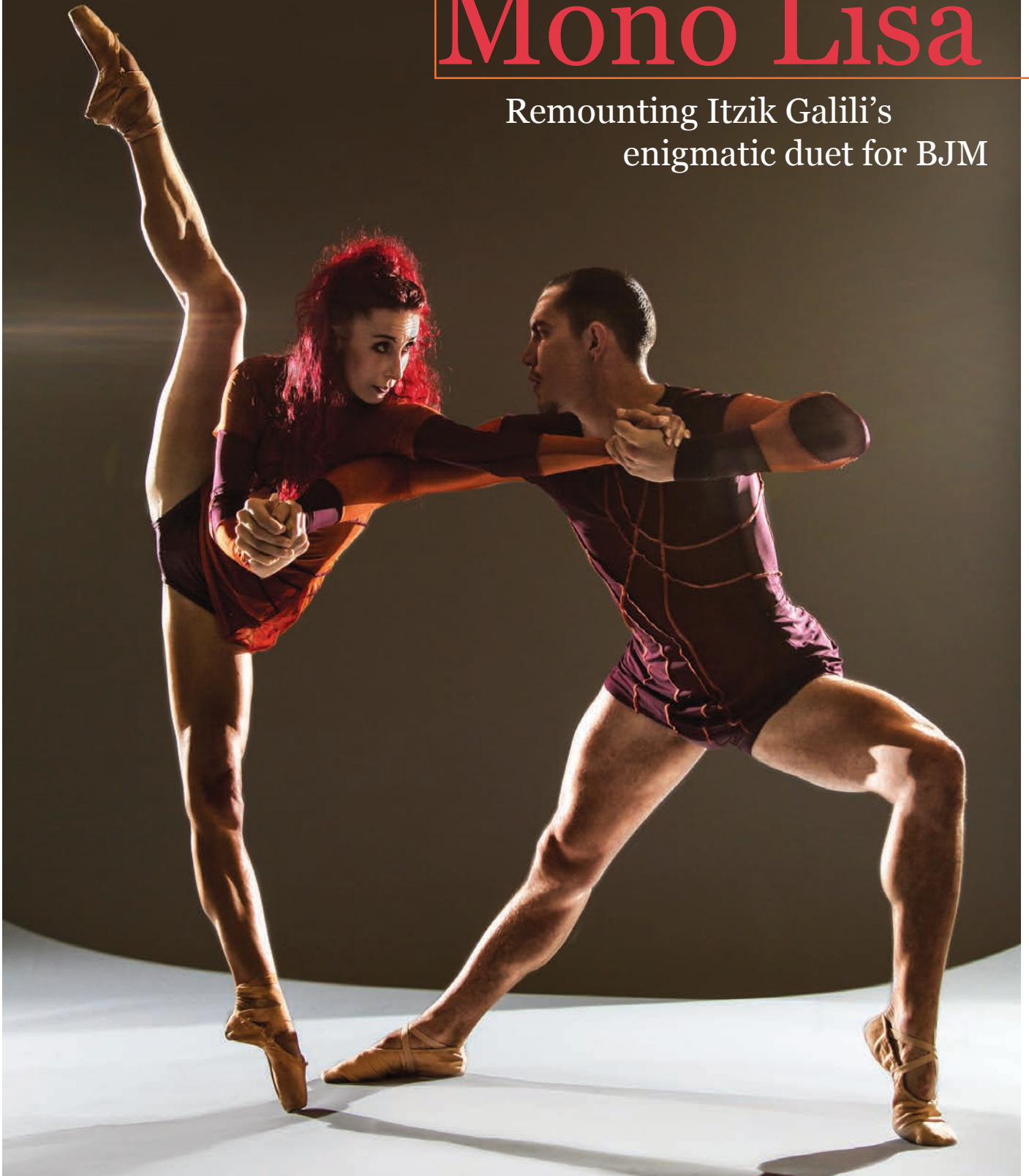
Debuting in May 2017 in Winnipeg, *Vespers* will be the final production of the Royal Winnipeg Ballet's 77th season. The work, when I spoke with the artists, was at that exciting stage where they still had time to ruminate on themes and concepts, to question movements and motives, until heading back into the studio in April 2017 and getting the show ready for its premiere. α



Evelyn Hart, Dmitri Dovgoselets and artists of the Royal Winnipeg Ballet in rehearsal for *Vespers*
Photo: David Cooper

Intriguing Mono Lisa

Remounting Itzik Galili's
enigmatic duet for BJM



“In my interpretation, it is crystal clear — they are a man and woman in a conventional relationship, a couple, having a competition, an argument. It’s as it is with any couple ... only with extreme physical expression. But maybe Itzik has a different story ...”

— Louis Robitaille

T

he only way to teach someone a show-stopping duet like Itzik Galili’s *Mono Lisa* is to break it down into bite-size chunks. And that’s just what I’m watching in the ground-floor studio of Les Ballets Jazz de Montréal downtown on Sherbrooke Street: Céline Cassone, her new partner Yosmell Calderón and a team of supporters, working phrase by phrase, step by step, inch by inch. Galili set the duet on Cassone and then-partner Mark Francis Caserta in 2015, and it’s been a much-loved fixture on BJM’s aggressive touring schedule ever since.

With the departure of Caserta at the end of last season, Cassone (coming off a summer of hip troubles) and new company member Calderón are starting over. Coincidentally, Galili is also briefly in town (the peripatetic choreographer is rumoured to live in Tel Aviv, but travels internationally from commission to commission and claims “nowhere” as home), creating an ensemble work on BJM. But he is nowhere to be seen at these charged *Mono Lisa* sessions. He tells me later over coffee that his absence is intentional. “You need to give space to people, and sometimes space is just distance. The piece has its own form because of them and for them, and it’s different than what was originally created — so they have to find their voice with each other.”

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Mono Lisa is a fast-paced and intricate ballet for a man and a woman. Athletic, it also requires a looseness, a casual demeanour; there are several breaks in the work when the dancers watch each other in a relaxed manner or simply walk away like normal people. The combination of precise movement mechanics and blasé attitude makes it fascinating to watch and tough to perform.

There is solo material, but it’s when the dancers come together that the piece is most stunning, with acrobatic entwined limbs, spins and lifts. It is easy to imagine the dancers’ limbs tripping up on each other; in fact, during these early rehearsals, Cassone kicks Calderón repeatedly with her pointe shoes and there are many stumbles. They also collapse on the floor panting a few times.

“It’s impossible to do it twice in a row,” Cassone tells me post-rehearsal. She and Calderón are aiming to eventually do it once and then immediately repeat the first half. They’ll do this to test their endurance, but also to build confidence. “It’s unpredictable — there are not many roles like this — and sometimes you just have to accept that today was hard, but it will be better tomorrow.”

Louis Robitaille, artistic director of BJM (and Cassone’s life partner), has been flitting between his office, company class and the *Mono Lisa* rehearsal. He is calm, yet attentive to the progress being made. “It’s a very difficult duet,” he agrees. “It doesn’t look like it when you first see it on video (you tell yourself, sure, it’s difficult, but it’s just a duet). Then you start to work on it and — wow! If it’s even a hairsbreadth too much on or off, it falls apart.” Robitaille, like everyone, is a little worried about starting the process of building *Mono Lisa* and its all-important partnership up again from scratch.

“It’s no secret,” he says, “that it takes time to build the affinity the dancers have for each other, the trust and all that. Above all, it takes performances onstage. There is something bigger than yourself that happens there that almost never happens in the studio.”

Back in that studio, the team continues fine-tuning. François Chirpaz, the company’s new ballet master, is not yet totally familiar with *Mono Lisa*, so he is watching carefully, learning the minutiae of the dance. Alexander Hille, who is in the second cast and has danced it several times, has stepped up to



Yosmell Calderón
Photo: Jeremy Coachman

coach Calderón. Robitaille contributes a brief note. Calderón suggests an adjustment to Cassone's head and shoulder placement, which helps. Together they form a safety net of care; when the session concludes they all kiss and hug warmly. They will reconvene the next day — as Cassone tells me later, the only way to do this is to chip away at it daily. She will also do her own daily personal training to ready herself for upcoming performances of the eight-minute work in Quebec (and later in the season for shows in Canada, the United States, Europe and Asia). "I have to train to do it," she says. "Cardio, the elliptical, 30 seconds on, one minute rest, 15 times, and lots of Pilates."

She can prepare until the cows come home, but Cassone agrees with Robitaille about the importance of getting the duet onstage. She thinks it will take about 10 performances before she and Calderón are truly confident. "What I really need is to continue working like this. To be present, working on the corrections. I don't want to go onstage with just luck. Luck will be there, of course, but we are working now to get it right."

Mono Lisa was created for Alicia Amatriain and Jason Reilly at Stuttgart Ballet. Stuttgart artistic director Reid Anderson wanted a longer work from Galili, who has been in steadily increasing demand as a gun-for-hire since leaving the Netherlands, where he directed NND/Galili Dance in Groningen

and then co-directed Dansgroep Amsterdam. At the time, Galili preferred to do a smaller piece. Since then he has set five works on the Stuttgart company. "When I started working with high tech dancers ... well, it's a little bit like working with a high tech computer ... their body facilitations, their speed, the looseness in the way they inhabit their psychological state of mind ... It's really great fun."

When I ask Galili about the ideas behind *Mono Lisa*, he is coy. On the surface, the work feels a bit mysterious with its percussive typewriter score and bold lighting, both of which Galili helped design, and I wondered if there was a backstory.

"I would rather tell the stories around it than talk about the work," he says. Galili is a generous and fun interview, but his responses can be oblique, with answers to questions about his work half-buried in random memories.

"I thought about what would be a beautiful thing to have them do — what about taking them to a remote island? Then I thought the island would be like going backwards in terms of sound, so I took a typewriter and started playing with the sounds. But I didn't want to do more than create the story that's there in that space for the both of them."

Cassone's take on story is more matter of fact. "To be honest, at the beginning there was nothing," she recalls. "We had to just do it. It was already so impressive. But from my interpretation, it's more about a woman and a man who are teasing each other. We just play, try to top each other — it is more this way: 'I can do better than you. But I love you anyway.'"

Robitaille, who acquired the piece to complement the company's roster of mixed program ballets that highlight BJM's versatility, recalls, "I wanted to get the real story about *Mono Lisa* — but I never got it. In my interpretation, it is crystal clear — they are a man and woman in a conventional relationship, a couple, having a competition, an argument. It's as it is with any couple ... only with extreme physical expression. But maybe Itzik has a different story ..."

I never do get a full explanation from Galili, but he does share a few more haphazard snippets as we get comfortable with each other. Toward the end of our time together, I ask him again (for the umpteenth time) what the title means, and he says, "Lonely Lisa."

"Nobody gets it usually. But there are references to many things in this work. And no one knows ..." By way of example, Galili talks about the final position in the dance, in which Calderón lies on his back supporting Cassone's entire back-arched body weight on his feet. Galili says he was inspired by a scene in the original *Ghostbusters* movie, in which the ghosts are taking Sigourney Weaver into their realm, sucking out her life force with chains of electricity. He also mentions Nadia Comaneci (the Romanian gymnast who scored the first perfect 10 at the 1976 Olympics). He may be pulling my leg; I am not sure.

Nor does it matter. For Galili and everyone else who is intimately involved with the work, the meaning in *Mono Lisa* is very literally open to interpretation. "I can tell you different stories, and you may read other stories." Yet every person, Galili hopes, will experience their own take on this enigmatic duet. ^{DI}

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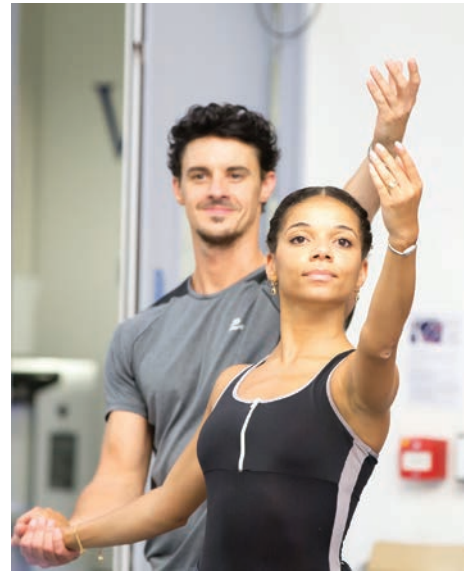


Above left: Elisha Willis, Céline Gittens and Tyrone Singleton in George Balanchine's *Serenade*
Photo: Bill Cooper

Above right: Iain Mackay (Prospero) and Céline Gittens (Ceres) rehearsing David Bintley's *The Tempest*
Photo: Andrew Ross

Right: Céline Gittens as the Fairy of Joy in Peter Wright's production of *The Sleeping Beauty*
Photo: Roy Smiljanic

Far right: Céline Gittens as the Striptease Girl in George Balanchine's *Slaughter on Tenth Avenue*
Photo: Bill Cooper



In Conversation

Birmingham Royal Ballet principal
Céline Gittens chats with Gerard Davis

Tucked away in the Chinese Quarter of the United Kingdom's second largest city sits the modern, busy headquarters of Birmingham Royal Ballet. On the day of my visit, there's a frenetic rehearsal of David Bintley's new full-length narrative ballet, *The Tempest*, in full swing in the company's main studio. Near where I'm standing at the edge of the room, small groups of dancers animatedly discuss and try out steps, while in the centre the first cast battle determinedly to get the work's finale spot on.

Through it all floats the serene figure of Birmingham Royal Ballet's newest principal, Céline Gittens. Sometimes chatting with colleagues, watching rehearsal footage on a laptop or sitting quietly against the mirrors observing proceedings, she suddenly glides into action when called upon to be Ceres, one of Prospero's spirits. It's not your typical ballerina role.

"There's a scene in Act 2 where we have to operate a puppet," she explains in the company's press room after the rehearsal is finished. "It's really difficult, but luckily we had some puppeteers from the National Theatre's production of *Warhorse* to help us. The hardest part is trying to make sure the puppet looks directly at the person you want it to."

But then Gittens is not your typical ballerina. She was born in Trinidad for a start. "It was wonderful; beautiful beaches

Lausanne in February 2006, Gittens did a week of classes with the school in London. But events took a wholly unexpected turn on a visit to a family friend in Birmingham, when her mother suggested she take the opportunity to audition for Birmingham Royal Ballet. Before she knew it, Gittens had a contract to start in August.

The gritty industrialism of urban Birmingham presented quite a contrast from life on Canada's West Coast. "There aren't any mountains!" she laughs. "In Vancouver, you always know which way is north because of the mountains so, at first, direction was a bit of a problem."

In addition to performing at its home base in the city's Hippodrome Theatre, Birmingham Royal Ballet also spends a lot of time touring the U.K. and internationally. "I didn't choose the company based on that, but it's something I've grown to like because touring really increases stage time. Last season, we did more than 20 different pieces of repertoire so there are plenty of opportunities for younger dancers to show their potential onstage; you're not held back at all."

One particularly memorable performance stands out — her debut as *Odette/Odile* in 2012, which the *Guardian* noted was the first time a black dancer played the role in the U.K. "It was the role I'd always wanted to dance. It's so physically demanding and even now I can't believe how I did it. Even though I

One particularly memorable performance stands out — her debut as *Odette/Odile* in 2012, which the *Guardian* noted was the first time a black dancer played the role in the U.K.

and amazing cuisine. It had a much more relaxed pace than, say, Birmingham, but along with its strict old-style British schooling, it made me what I am today."

She concedes that ballet is not very popular in Trinidad and was taught to dance by her mother, who had her own ballet school. Did she feel any undue maternal pressure? "It felt very natural to me — when you're younger you don't really think about it. Obviously, she wanted the best for me, but she taught in a way that was not too pushy so I really enjoyed the classes."

When she was nine her parents moved to Vancouver, British Columbia, and life changed. "We moved in December and it was the first time I'd seen snow!" she recalls. "Everything felt so big — the buildings, food portions — and the change was overwhelming. But Canadians are so friendly we got used to the different ways of doing things pretty quickly." She enrolled at Vancouver's Goh Ballet Academy. "It was tough," she admits. "The teachers didn't allow us to go easy on ourselves, they pushed us hard and we had to show we really wanted to be professional dancers. However, all the rehearsals and the hours I spent in pointe shoes built up my stamina and it was also where I did *pas de deux* for the first time."

Winning the Gold Medal and the Audience Choice Award at the 2005 Genée International Ballet Competition prompted a big change in her life once again. The Royal Ballet School was so impressed with her performance they offered her a scholarship. So, after reaching the finals of the *Prix de*

was much younger, I didn't just do single fouettés, I went for doubles in between and that's thanks to the determination built into me through my training at the Goh school," Gittens reflects.

"On top of all that, my mum snuck into the show. She flew all the way over from Vancouver and I didn't even know she was in the country until she came into my dressing room after the performance — that was just the best moment!"

She describes her parents as the most inspirational people in her life; her mother for her artistic nature and her father for his "straightforward wisdom" and emphasis on the academic side of things.

"I think ballet dancers often get lost in the tornado of getting to the top of a company and they forget about education," she says. "There is life after dance and we need to be prepared for that sooner than we think."

Education is something Gittens takes seriously; she's already earned a master's of philosophy from the University of Birmingham. "For my thesis, I analysed the positives and negatives of perfectionism in ballet dancers and gymnasts; you know, how it can aid you or break you. My case studies included elite dancers and Olympic standard gymnasts; one of the things I found is that the gymnasts have much better coping methods in dealing with the psychological stress of being publicly judged. Their coaches keep them under their wing and support them. As a ballet dancer, when you're in school

you're nurtured and looked after, but that is sort of forgotten when you join a company."

When Gittens finishes her dancing career, she wants to move into teaching. "I feel I've got all this knowledge to pass on to younger students. I recently taught at the Elmhurst Summer School here in Birmingham and, at the invitation of the Vancouver Ballet Society, I've done a few master classes in Vancouver. I've also taught at the Royal Academy of Dance in London; that was a great experience because I was teaching in the same studio where I won the Genée competition."

Like most dancers, she doesn't get much opportunity for a life away from the studio. "Unwinding is important for me," she remarks. "Resting is the body's way of healing and recovering and making sure we can perform at our very best. I don't just mean sleeping; it could mean feet up on the couch watching Netflix or whatever. Also, I take the chance to go outside

as much as possible and get some fresh air and vitamin D — I don't get enough of either because I'm in the studio so much. An open-top studio — one with an electric roof — would be good!"

Not that Gittens is likely to get much rest or fresh air for a while; the company's touring commitments mean she won't have another free Saturday for more than two months. She also has to deal with the expectations that come with being a principal and with recent high-profile attention from Sir Peter Wright, former director of Birmingham Royal Ballet, who, in his new book, *Wrights and Wrongs*, opines that Gittens "is remarkable ... I am sure she will develop into one of the greats."

If there's anyone who looks mentally prepared to deal with that kind of pressure, it's the calmly determined Céline Gittens. "I just enjoy being a ballet dancer," she says with a smile. "Simple as that." *DI*

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ALBERTO PRETTO ON POINTE

Les Ballets Trockadero de Monte Carlo's newest *Giselle*



by Justine Bayod Espoz

Photo: Zoran Jelenic



Les Ballets Trockadero de Monte Carlo said farewell to 2016 with a two-week December run at the Joyce Theater in its hometown of New York. Premiering a new lineup of excerpts from classical ballets, the company performed with the comedic audacity that only an all-male, tutu-clad cast can provide and that has made the Trocks an international sensation. Kicking off the evening was a ghoulish take on Act II of *Giselle*, and tasked with performing the iconic female lead role was Alberto Pretto, also known as Nina Immobilashvili.

A native of Vicenza, Italy, Pretto trained at the Académie de Danse Classique Princesse Grace in Monaco, dancing with the English National Ballet shortly after graduating, and then moving on to Germany's Koblenz Ballet. Before becoming a member of the Trockadero's ensemble, Pretto was a fan, who jumped on a plane from Koblenz to Piacenza, where he seized the opportunity to participate in a Trockadero open class. A few months later, in 2011, Pretto was asked to join the company.

Pretto says that he didn't really know what he was getting himself into, but feeling unmotivated by the neoclassical work he was dancing at Koblenz Ballet, he thought it would be a good idea to try something new. He was not disappointed; his ambition to grow within Les Ballets Trockadero and secure lead roles flourished.

Wanting to perfect his pointe technique, Pretto began attending Elena Kunikova's open class at Steps on Broadway, unwittingly making contact with the dancer and teacher he would come to call his mentor. Unknown to Pretto, the Vaganova-trained ballerina had worked with Les Ballets Trockadero in the past, staging some of his favourite pieces from the company's repertoire, including *Paquita* and *Laurenzia*.

Pretto found that working with Kunikova vastly improved his footwork and precision, helping him make up for lost time. "Girls start pointe in school at 11, but I started serious training in pointe when I was about 20, so there is a lot of catching up to do."

When he got his first lead role, as Esmeralda, Pretto began working with Kunikova privately on the side. "Her knowledge of classical ballet is so vast and she knows what works for Trockadero. She will recommend an exaggerated way of carrying your head or a look that makes it totally hilarious for the audience, especially to an audience that knows about that specific style of ballet."

Pretto credits Kunikova with facilitating his professional breakthrough. "I felt she trusted me and appreciated me as a person, which always helps immensely with dancing. She found what little things in my personality were funny and that I could exploit."

The results of Pretto's work, both technical and theatrical, were evident to the company's artistic direction, and Pretto was cast in the most important role he's had to date, *Giselle*. The ballet is an opening act on the mixed bill, he explains. "I will be the opening ballerina, which is a very important task in Trockadero. She sets the mood for the audience to understand what we are about."

Pretto also performs on drag stages in New York and nationally as his alter ego Lolita Golightly. Plus, thanks to his design and sewing skills, Pretto sells a small dancewear line called Alby Pretty on Etsy. Between the long rehearsals and classes and the grueling touring schedule, Pretto keeps tension at bay by losing himself in these other outlets. Even so, his main goal is clear: to portray the most comical and emotive male *Giselle* the world has ever seen, while continuing to excel within a company that clearly inspires him. ▫

Dance notes



Isamu Noguchi, *Red Lunar Fist*, 1944
Magnesite, plastic, resin and electric components
Isamu Noguchi Foundation and Garden Museum, New York
Photo: Kevin Noble © Isamu Noguchi Foundation and
Garden Museum, NY

Isamu Noguchi *Archaic/Modern*

Isamu Noguchi (1904-1988) was among the most innovative American sculptors of the 20th century. Even as he created works that were ahead of his time, Noguchi frequently found inspiration in ancient art and architecture — from Egyptian pyramids and Buddhist temples to zen gardens and American Indian burial mounds. *Isamu Noguchi, Archaic/Modern* is at the Smithsonian American Art Museum in Washington, D.C., until March 19, 2017.

“Isamu Noguchi — born in Los Angeles, raised and educated in Japan, Indiana, New York and Paris — was among the first American artists to think like a citizen of the world,”

says Elizabeth Broun, Smithsonian American Art Museum director.

The exhibit brings together 74 works, nearly all on loan from New York’s Noguchi Museum, made during the artist’s six-decade career. Both Merce Cunningham and Martha Graham collaborated with Noguchi, and there will be a presentation on March 3 of Graham’s *Cave of the Heart*, with set and costume designs created by Noguchi that are considered an extension of the dancers’ movements.



Édouard Lock
Photo: Carl Lessard

Lock’s Grand Prix

The Grand Prix career achievement award at the sixth annual Prix de la Danse awards in Montreal went to Édouard Lock. The \$25,000 award comes a little more than a year after he disbanded his celebrated troupe La La La Human Steps for financial reasons. Since then, he has worked as a freelance choreographer, creating works for the Paris Opera Ballet, among others. In his acceptance speech, Lock declared that art has the power to provide the collective symbols that people need to survive in an increasingly polarized world.

Other awards went to dance artists Roger Sinha, Sophie Corriveau and Daina Ashbee, with a new award for cultural management going to Gilles Savary, general manager of Fortier Danse-Création.



Brazil’s São Paulo Companhia de Dança in
Édouard Lock’s *The Seasons*
Photo: Édouard Lock



Canada's National Ballet School in St. Petersburg

On November 19, 2016, 14 male students from Canada's National Ballet School performed *Come In* by Aszure Barton at St. Petersburg's Mariinsky Theatre. Diana Vishneva, Russian-born principal dancer with American Ballet Theatre, invited the group to perform on the last evening of her Context festival. They were the only student group to take part in Context, which Vishneva started in 2013 as a way to increase awareness of modern dance in Russia.

Canada's National Ballet School student Siphe November rehearsing Aszure Barton's *Come In* at the Mariinsky Theatre
Photo: Nikolay Krusser

Chouinard's Very Good Year

Marie Chouinard received two major Canadian awards in 2016: the Walter Carsen Prize for Excellence in the Performing Arts, which comes with a \$50,000 cash prize, and the Governor General's Performing Arts Award for Lifetime Artistic Achievement, which awards \$25,000. The Montreal artist was also honoured in Italy, receiving the Positano Prize for Choreographer of the Year and appointed director of dance at the Venice Biennale.

Chouinard's latest work, *Hieronymus Bosch: The Garden of Earthly Delights*, was commissioned in the Netherlands to commemorate the 500th anniversary of the Dutch medieval painter's death. The work for 10 dancers, which presents the three panels of his triptych *The Garden of Earthly Delights*, premiered in 's-Hertogenbosch (known as Den Bosch), the painter's birthplace, in 2016; upcoming 2017 performances include Toronto's Canadian Stage in April.



Marie Chouinard
Photo: Sylvie-Ann Paré



Morgane Le Tiec, Sacha Ouellette-Deguire, Carol Prieur, Leon Kupferschmid, Sébastien Cossette-Masse, Valeria Galluccio and Megan Walbaum in Marie Chouinard's *The Garden of Earthly Delights*
Photo: Nicolas Ruel

World Ballet Day



by Heather Bray

It's a ballet binge of epic proportions. On October 4, World Ballet Day, now in its third year, offered 20 hours of nonstop live streaming featuring some of the world's top companies: starting with the Australian Ballet and moving across time zones to the Bolshoi Ballet, Royal Ballet, National Ballet of Canada and San Francisco Ballet.

The focus was on company class and rehearsals, but we also saw backstage preparations, behind-the-scenes wardrobe visits, and interviews with dancers, choreographers, artistic directors, composers, designers and more. This year also featured short pre-recorded segments from major companies such as Hong Kong Ballet, English National Ballet, Scottish Ballet, Pacific Northwest Ballet, Houston Ballet, Miami City Ballet and Netherlands Dans Theater.

I certainly wasn't the only one who took a day off work to sit glued to the screen: this is always a feast for dance lovers everywhere, many of whom would likely never have the chance to see such a range of companies or ballets in the flesh.

The format generates a wonderful intimacy; I felt virtually inside the studio with the dancers, getting a close-up view of their artistry and skill, and of the depth and complexity of the ballets. It was truly impressive to see how quickly dancers incorporated minutely detailed corrections from the choreographer or rehearsal director. Various hosts provided commentary and conducted interviews, giving both basic and more in-depth information, helpful for newbies and seasoned dance fans alike.

World Ballet Day also provides an overview of where ballet is now; this year, every company was keen to show its commitment to treasuring the classics while also supporting new works, evidently acutely aware of the need to show that ballet is still relevant. English National Ballet's segment, for instance, focused entirely on Akram Khan's radical contemporary version of *Giselle*, which was then about to premiere. Education and outreach initiatives were often featured, and several groups highlighted their schools. The international composition of modern ballet companies, with dancers from all over the world bringing different qualities and approaches, was frequently mentioned.

Sadly, I missed the Bolshoi, who were on in the middle of the night for us on Canada's West Coast, but the 16 hours (!) I did watch had many highlights. Australian Ballet's rehearsals featured the Big Swans and Cygnets from *Swan Lake*, *Le Corsaire* pas de deux and an exhilarating *Coppélia* finale. John Neumeier's sensitively danced *Nijinsky* formed a nice contrast, and we also saw a new *Spartacus* duet by choreographer Lucas Jervies, who was only on his second day of rehearsal, but had already generated a startling amount of material.

The Royal Ballet featured principals Marianela Nuñez and Vadim Muntagirov in the ribbon pas de deux from the English classic *La Fille Mal Gardée*, with Nuñez radiating charm and wit. I also enjoyed the *Anastasia* ensemble rehearsal led by Gary Avis with

exacting rigour, as well as down-to-earth humour. Wayne McGregor is now in his 10th year as the Royal's resident choreographer, and some of the dancers described the significant positive impact he has had — challenging them, but also enabling them to take ownership of new contemporary work.

The National Ballet of Canada showed wonderful rehearsals of John Cranko's *Onegin* and James Kudelka's *Cinderella*, both of which highlighted the skilled acting and mime of the dancers. The company's splendid male roster particularly good, even when dancing with admirable sang-froid while wearing large pumpkins on their heads (for *Cinderella*), and I loved Mandy-Jayne Richardson's detailed, focused rehearsal direction.

Each company began with a full class, and San Francisco Ballet delivered my favourite — taught by ballet master Felipe Diaz, with a palpable sense of joy and inspiration in the room. There was a gorgeously expressive pas de deux from Liam Scarlett's *Frankenstein* (a co-production with the Royal Ballet), and it was exciting to see the diminutive powerhouse Maria Kochetkova in William Forsythe's *Pas/Parts 2016* and Christopher Wheeldon's *Cinderella*. Another highlight was the finale from *Diamonds*, directed by artistic director Helgi Tomasson — who, as a New York City Ballet dancer, worked with Balanchine himself — which fizzed with style and purpose.

World Ballet Day closed with Pacific Northwest Ballet's segment, filmed almost entirely backstage during an opening night at home in Seattle. The filmmakers capture a mix of emotions — euphoria, exhaustion, relief and gratitude — at the end of the performance — a perfect finish to a long but rewarding day of dance. ❦



Backstage images of Pacific Northwest Ballet artists performing George Balanchine's *Symphony in C* during World Ballet Day. Bottom: Sarah Ricard Orza and Carrie Imler
Photos: Courtesy of Pacific Northwest Ballet

Michael Crabb's Notebook

On December 19, the National Ballet of Canada issued a media release announcing that “all performances of *The Nutcracker* are completely sold out.” The release also informed us that by its December 31 close, 49,465 people would have attended the show. That’s very close to 100 percent capacity over a 24-performance run, with sales grossing “a record-breaking \$3.782 million at the box office.”

That’s certainly a stocking stuffer to feel good about, except the National Ballet would claim to be an institution with art at the core of its mandate, and, whichever way you cut it, *The Nutcracker*, including James Kudelka’s estimable 1995 version for the National Ballet, is more a holiday season entertainment than a serious ballet. Thus, the release makes the company sound more like a commercial operation gloating over its robust financial results than an artistic institution.

It is common knowledge that for many North American ballet companies, *The Nutcracker* is their lifeblood. For some it’s what provides the wherewithal to dance anything else. Even for the National Ballet, *The Nutcracker* generates close to 30 percent of total annual box office income.

According to its 2015-2016 season annual report, Canada’s biggest dance troupe just managed to squeak by on the right side of the balance sheet with a very modest \$10,000 surplus on operating revenues of \$33.75 million. So you can understand why a healthy *Nutcracker* season is cause for celebration. But should it be this way?

In a wide-ranging article published in the *Globe and Mail* on the eve of the National Ballet’s 65th birthday, the newspaper’s dance critic Martha Schabas took the company to task for what she views as derogation of artistic duty. In essence, and with programming for the 2016-2017 season as evidence, Schabas argues that the National Ballet is putting populist bums-on-seats financial expedience before concern for the vitality of the art itself, the kind of vitality Schabas believes would reassert ballet’s place as a serious art form.

It’s a thoughtful and important essay because what Schabas argues with so much idealistic passion applies far beyond Canada and the National Ballet, even to Europe and its major dance companies where government support makes artistic risk-taking more feasible.

When National Ballet artistic director Karen Kain joined the corps in 1969, the company expected to generate its revenue in roughly equal portions from box-office sales, government grants and private fundraising. Today, while the overall scale of operations has continued to expand, government grants have tracked downward — now only 18 percent of operating revenue — with consequently heavier reliance placed on box office and private fundraising — 36 and 38 percent respectively. The remainder comes from draw-downs from the company’s endowment fund and ancillary revenue such as rental of productions.

It’s easy to see why familiar titles and family-friendly productions, the very things Schabas rails against, have assumed greater importance. Yet, this is familiar territory. Look at how much new music your average symphony orchestra can risk presenting. Check the Canadian Opera Company to see how works from the art form’s top 20 list routinely get more performances than less familiar fare, and ask about the kind of patron push-back the company receives when some smart-aleck director tries to drag an operatic warhorse kicking and screaming into the 21st century.

Schabas would argue, if I read her correctly, that it’s a vicious circle. Feed an audience unchallenging fare and they’ll become addicted to it. But how do you move audiences out of their comfort zone without losing your shirt? If audiences don’t want to come, they are at total liberty to go elsewhere. It’s not as if comfort food is scarce in the live performance market.

Artistic vitality is not an impossible objective. Les Grands Ballets Canadiens and Ballet BC have positioned themselves successfully as adventurous contemporary ballet companies, but even they accept the inevitability of *The Nutcracker*. For the Montreal troupe, it’s the only 19th-century classic they venture to perform themselves. In Vancouver, they bring in an outside troupe to do the dirty work. Both companies, however, are small-scale operations compared with

the 70-dancer National Ballet, which, for better or worse, decided early on that the classics would constitute the foundation of its artistic identity.

That said, the company has a respectable record of making new work. Kain has programmed two triple bills entirely devoted to new Canadian choreography, but Schabas is right to notice a more populist, title-driven trend.

Perhaps we need to lighten up a little and accept that even Balanchine, whom Schabas upholds as a prime example of aesthetic progressivism, was also at heart a great entertainer. Balanchine staged a *Nutcracker* in 1954; while not the first in North America, it effectively triggered the work’s emergence as an industrial-strength audience magnet.

The issue is finding a healthy balance. Weaning audiences from the familiar takes time. It also requires money to underwrite the financial risks involved. One solution might be to require that taxpayers’ dollars only be spent on original choreography and marketing/outreach expenditures associated with its promotion and dissemination. It’s certainly hard to justify the use of public grants to support more of the same tired old stuff. Something has to give and whatever it is needs bold discussion. ■

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by Carole Edrich



The Sound of Flamenco

The art and craft of floors

In the early 1990s, when large flamenco festivals were first held outside of Spain, the dancers were still using the type of floors common in the 1950s when General Franco was busy promoting flamenco as part of Spain's national identity. The best were simple wooden floors, but others might be tile, concrete or brick, fitted into the venue with little planning and no acoustic design. Today, many larger flamenco stages still lack microphones and have no system to route the sound to the audience.

Traditional flamenco is highly improvisational and intimate, and the majority of moves (particularly those considered to show true style) are subtle. Some artists from both traditional and experimental camps eschew amplification, believing that anything that distances them from the audience and interferes with *jaleo* — that is, feedback from audience and fellow performers in the form of *palmas* (clapping), *zapateo* (footwork) and shouting — goes against the spirit of flamenco.

In the early days of international festivals, artists found ways to stay true to this spirit while expanding their sets and movement vocabulary to fit the larger venues to which they toured. It was during this time that Sergio Sarmiento, sound technician for the Seville-based company of Antonio Canales — considered one of the greatest flamenco dancers of all time — created the first acoustic flamenco floor.

Sarmiento's floor can be thought of as a set of large rectangular pine lids, 15 millimetres deep and three metres long by 1.5 metres wide, with six parallel central batons, each guiding sound to one of six corresponding diagonals that send the sound toward the middle of one of the short sides of the lid. To visualize how the sound travels, think of the way a travelling ball would

follow the corridor created by the batons and then bounce off a diagonal. As well as directing the sound, each parallel baton acts as a partial barrier so that zapateo furthest from the microphone is appreciably softer than when created near it. That means the volume of footwork is not just dependent on the force of the stamp, but also on proximity to the microphone.

It's difficult to know whether choreography was leading the floor design or vice versa. Likely, the change from small to large venues and an increasing drive to provide world-class sets for international festivals have played a part. Yet it seems the developing technology of acoustic floors itself contributed in some degree to the increase in repeatable choreographic patterns and

The change in volume and timbre arising from distance from the microphone was far more subtle using this second version, which gave the dancers back a level of choreographic improvisation since steps further from the microphone differed so little to those close to it.

Sarmiento's 2011 development, his third version, uses small vertical cylinders instead of batons. These give an even greater uniformity of sound wherever the dancer is located. This has allowed some purists to go back to a greater level of choreographic improvisation, and this new floor facilitates more creativity by sound technicians. While they naturally incorporate the sound of instruments, jaleo and voice, modulating them and the zapateo where

the floor according to choreographic need.

I asked Miguel Marín, whose international Flamenco Festival has provided regular doses of high flamenco art to the United States since 2008 — and then to Sadler's Wells, Canada, Japan, China, Russia, Brazil and Qatar — how he saw the relationship between dancer and flamenco floor, and whether it made a difference if the dancer was a proponent of flamenco puro or flamenco nuevo. He explained that the choice of whether or not to use acoustic floors has to do with both choreography and the dancers' style. For instance, you can't hear the nuances of Sara Baras' choreography if microphones are placed only on the edges of the floor (as they typically are in tap), which is why she hires

“There is no controversy; now [acoustic floors] are part of the art. We are used to them. When you go to a rock concert, you don't expect a mellow sound, and when you see flamenco, you expect a level of intensity.”

— Miguel Marín

spacing, with the reduction in the amount of improvisation as a consequence. Nowadays, for many flamenco dancers, it is often only the tiniest gesture that changes between one night's performance and the next.

Meanwhile, Sarmiento redesigned his floor in response to Canales' requirements. This second version, comprised of batons all pointing into the centre and side of each panel, enabled two panels together to create a kind of starburst shape. By directing sound into the middle, Sarmiento enabled the production of a more uniform sound, since the batons themselves were not damping volume by acting as partial barriers to the zapateo happening further from the microphone.

artistically appropriate, the use of reverb within the mix means the audience hears rhythms rather than the sharpness of superior footwork.

Several years ago, London's Sadler's Wells Theatre made its own acoustic floor based on Sarmiento's directions, which they updated in 2013. According to senior production technician Tom Hares, flamenco dancers appearing at Sadler's Wells now choose from one of three main options: to install microphones uniformly inside the entire acoustic floor, to have them in certain areas only or to have microphones placed above the floors in the way that tap dancers prefer. Different productions may require microphones to be present or absent in different parts of

Sarmiento. Eva Yerbabuena also uses acoustic floors to showcase her nuanced sounds. The same is true for the traditional and highly improvisational gitano (gypsy) dancer Farruquito.

Joaquín Cortés, the ballet-trained flamenco popularizer of the early 2000s, put microphones on his shoes. Placing a proprietary brand of special extra-small microphones (made for tap dancers) under the arch of his feet meant a consistency of volume and a different tonality was created, irrespective of where he travelled on the stage.

Rocío Molina, whose dance is often totally traditional, only has microphones on the stage surface as she is more concerned with showing technique than acoustics. Sarmiento's acoustic floor



Obituaries

William Orlowski 1952-2016



Photo: Cylla von Tiedemann, Courtesy of Dance Collection Danse

Tap dance innovator William (Bill) Orlowski — widely renowned for advancing his art form by tackling serious subject matter and featuring narrative and rhythmic complexity — fell in love with Fred Astaire movies as a youngster. Born in Brampton, Ontario, he started tap classes at age 10. Though he began his career in musical theatre, it was his work as a concert tap dancer that established his unique style and reputation.

Orlowski co-founded Toronto-based National Tap Dance Company of Canada, for whom he created his first major choreography in 1977, *Brandenburg Concerto #3*, for six dancers. In 1990, he founded William Orlowski Tap Dance Projects.

Veronica Tennant, an ex-National Ballet of Canada principal dancer who once guested with the National Tap Dance Company, calls Orlowski “a visionary: a choreographer, performer, artistic director and teacher who has performed a modern miracle in forging the art form of tap dance onto the Canadian and international dance and theatre scene and consciousness. His hallmarks were authenticity of premise, daring realization and exuberant quality of execution.”

Orlowski passed away suddenly on October 22. He had suffered for many years with dystonia, an inherited degenerative form of Parkinson’s.

Peter Farmer 1941-2017



Photo: Courtesy of London's Royal Opera House

— CONTINUED FROM PAGE 27

doesn't support the precision of Israel Galván's famous flamenco deconstructions; Galván uses over-floor mics.

Nuria García, principal of the U.K.'s largest and oldest flamenco school, Escuela de Baile, based in central London, still hears of people attaching microphones to their legs with clips and bands in much the same way as one would mic a singer. This low-budget work-around can't be comfortable, but it is a pragmatic solution. Esther Weekes, whose flamenco-jazz fusion company Jazzoleá Flamenco has appeared regularly in Seville's Museo del Baile Flamenco, hadn't even heard of the acoustic floor when we recently spoke, and uses floor mics like most professionals in Andalusia, the region in Spain where the art form first evolved.

According to Marina Keet (made a Dame for her services to Spanish dance by King Juan Carlos), Alberto Lorca, founder of Ballet National d'España, believes that flamenco is destroyed by the microphones. She says, “He used to tour with dancer Pilar López, a singer and no mics so the audience experienced a

genuine performance. We had wooden floors, which are where a good sound comes from. Alberto used to get very anguished when he had to sit in a show that used microphones. He said they never got it right.”

Marín, however is emphatic: “There is no controversy; now [acoustic floors] are part of the art. We are used to them. When you go to a rock concert, you don't expect a mellow sound, and when you see flamenco, you expect a level of intensity.”

The acoustic floor has become a significant item in a flamenco dancer's toolbox, as the creative space of flamenco has blossomed from traditional forms with subtle moves that engage a small audience to huge productions where the sound engineer's expertise in creating specific sound effects can be as important as the cante (song), dance, music and jaleo. Meanwhile, as more and more top-level dancers take to Sarmiento's acoustic floors, he has continually improved their design. We will know more about the fourth version once the patent has been issued. *DI*

Stage designer Peter Farmer, best known for his work in ballet, died on January 1, 2017. Born in Luton, England, Farmer attracted notice early on with his 1966 design for Peter Wright's production of *Giselle* at Stuttgart Ballet. He was closely associated with both of Britain's Royal Ballet companies. His work at Covent Garden included designs for Kenneth MacMillan's *Winter Dreams* (1991) and two successive productions of *The Sleeping Beauty*, the most recent, in 2006, a re-imagining of Oliver Messel's celebrated 1946 staging. At Birmingham Royal Ballet, under Wright's directorship and after, Farmer designed many productions, while also working with major companies worldwide. North American projects included several designs for the National Ballet of Canada, beginning with *Les Sylphides* (1973); the Royal Winnipeg Ballet's *Swan Lake* (1987); and Houston Ballet's *La Bayadère* (2010). Farmer received the 2010 Prix Benois de la Danse for Lifetime Achievement.

Batsheva Alumni Find Their Own Groove

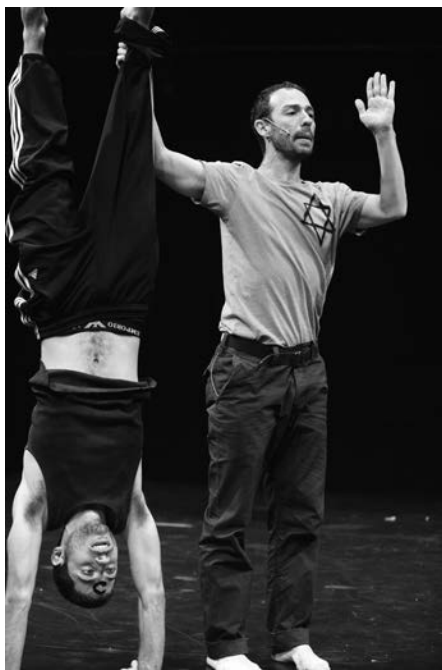
Profiles of six independent choreographers by Gdalit Neuman

When Ohad Naharin, artistic director and principal choreographer of Israel's Batsheva Dance Company, instructs his dancers to "groove" during their morning Gaga class, he wants them to tune into their body's distinct rhythm and follow the flow. Naharin invented Gaga as a means of training his dancers to become "available" to movement possibilities and choices with regards to textures and timings. That kind of daily practice motivates a particularly keen, curious and creative individual. It's no wonder so many Batsheva alumni go on to choreograph professionally, including headliners Hofesh Shechter and Sharon Eyal.

Below is a roundup of six independent dancer/choreographers who performed for Batsheva and are active on the scene today. Their tenure with the company ranges between one and a dozen years, and all credit this time not only for providing excellent physical training, but also for giving them tools by which to experiment with composition early on in their careers. Most took their first steps in choreography through the Batsheva Creates annual showcase in which Batsheva dancers, from both the main and junior companies, are encouraged to present original works. Additionally, Batsheva dancers are very much involved in the creative process as collaborators in Naharin's creations. "He provides us with tasks, and we create a lot of the material," explains Noa Zuk. "One begins to develop [choreographic] skills even as a dancer in the company."

These choreographers recognize their time at Batsheva as formative, even if their current work hardly resembles Naharin's distinct style. "It certainly influenced me," states Yossi Berg. "It's a major part of my history ... I feel like it's a part of my DNA."

Hillel Kogan



Hillel Kogan and Adi Boutrous in Kogan's *We Love Arabs*
Photo: Gadi Dagon

As former longtime rehearsal director for Batsheva – The Young Ensemble, Hillel Kogan recently freed up time in his schedule to focus on his independent work. He still travels the world teaching Gaga and setting Batsheva works on other companies as assistant to Ohad Naharin, but now he journeys just as much to showcase his latest piece, *We Love Arabs*, which recently toured in Europe and the United States.

We Love Arabs, which premiered at Intimadance in Tel Aviv in 2013 and won Kogan the title of "most outstanding artist of 2013" by the Israeli Dance Critics Association, is a tongue-in-cheek critique of Israeli society. "I laugh at myself as a Jew, as a dancer, as a yefe nefesh [a common Hebrew term for intellectuals, artists or leftist-leaning liberals living in Tel Aviv]," Kogan said during a recent interview.

In *We Love Arabs*, Kogan portrays a sensitive Jewish Israeli artist invested in the co-existence project between Jews and Arabs living in Israel. At the start, he describes how he recruited Adi Boutrous, a young Arab-Israeli dancer, to

work with him, and throughout the 30-minute piece manages to reduce his interaction with Boutrous to an embarrassing series of stereotypes and clichés, all the while trying his best to give "the Arab-Israeli contemporary dancer" a platform by which to express himself. The entire fiasco ends with a "breaking of the [pita] bread" between Kogan, Boutrous and the audience, hinting at possible peaceful relations in the future.

Kogan's oft-parodic style demands a quick audience with just as sharp a sense of humour as his. "It's important for me that the audience understands my intentions, and that nobody is insulted," he says, adding that this rarely happens, either in Israel with Jewish and Arab audiences, or abroad.

The choreographer's gift for comedy, theatre and text extends to his other works, including 2011's *Rite of Spring*. With references to well-known versions of this iconic work, among them Pina Bausch's and Maurice Béjart's, in addition to political and specifically Israeli imagery, *Rite of Spring* is another piece that demands an educated audience.

Noa Zuk

Tamir Eting, Yaara Moses, Michal Sayfan and
Noa Paran in Noa Zuk's *Garden of Minutes*
Photo: Gadi Dagon



One of the more veteran Batsheva dancers, Noa Zuk left the company in 2009 after a satisfying 12 years. “I wouldn’t have stayed so long if I didn’t feel I had room to grow,” she explains. “The connection with Ohad and the work and the spirit was always there, even before Gaga was called Gaga. There’s something very human that I connect to because I feel that’s how one *should* dance.” Prior to working on a new piece with a company abroad, she insists on teaching the dancers Gaga in order to establish a common language.

In addition to residencies and commissions abroad, Zuk, in collaboration with her partner in art and life, musician and multimedia artist Ohad Fishof, are active on the Israeli scene. Their latest work, *Garden of Minutes*, which premiered in 2015 at the Curtain Up festival in Tel Aviv featuring four former Batsheva dancers, certainly hints to her Batsheva roots aesthetically, all the while invoking novel strategies. Zuk and Fishof are fascinated by the relationship between movement and music, and in *Garden of Minutes* they gave themselves the unusual task of allotting each movement a specific sound. “Traditionally, a ‘poetic gap,’ or space, exists between the movement and the music and we decided to glue them together, obsessively. In film that [technique] is called Mickey-Mousing.”

The same task inspired *Nothing III*, a 2013 solo performed by Canadian dancer Sahara Morimoto at Dance Matters in Toronto last spring. The 10-minute piece, which features an original

electronic score by Fishof, brought to mind cartoon films in terms of quick timing, whimsical costuming such as yellow rubber gloves and red shorts, an imaginative storyline that involves a lonely sculpture and, at times, abrupt or elastic movement qualities.

In *Doom Doom Land*, a duet with Zuk’s former Batsheva colleague Erez Zohar, which premiered in Jerusalem in 2013, it is the dancers who vocalize the sounds on which the movements fall. Inventing a world of her own, here Zuk explores an imaginary language, as well as rituals, customs and gestures.



Idan Sharabi and Dor Mamalia in Sharabi’s *Ours*
Photo: Tami Weiss

Idan Sharabi

Idan Sharabi, who trained at Juilliard in New York, is a highly skilled, instinctual performer and a young choreographer with a unique voice. Following a four-year stint at Nederlands Dans Theater, where he had the opportunity to hone his craft in choreography in addition to performance, Sharabi returned home and danced with Batsheva for one year. He officially formed his group, Idan Sharabi and Dancers, in 2012.

Sharabi’s diverse choreographic interests include an extended exploration of notions of home, which resulted in three works, all premiering in 2014 — *Makom* (Place), *Ours* and *We Men* — in which Sharabi searches for a “gender home.”

In *Interviews* (2014), a work in constant development that also questions issues of identity politics, Sharabi draws inspiration from discussions he had while sitting in various bomb shelters during the month-long conflict with Gaza in the summer of 2014, as well as conversations with his dancers during the creative process. “These recordings,” Sharabi writes on his website, “provide a framework for the dancers to interpret and share their own experiences.”

Sharabi’s dancers are an integral part of the creation. “If I can direct the dancers to open up to who they are in essence — that’s interesting,” he told me in an interview near his home in Jaffa. “Sometimes they just need one word, one inspiration, and they open up completely and you see their soul, the vulnerability — that’s what’s beautiful.”

Vancouverite Nicolas Ventura, whose kinesthetic intelligence, physical virtuosity and natural sense of play complement Sharabi’s aesthetic, appears regularly in his work. Sharabi’s mostly improvised duet *NOW* (2016), which Ventura performed with him in Israel this past summer after Sharabi toured it in Canada as a solo, draws much of its inspiration from the audience, whose interaction and intimate connection to the performers provides impetus for the dancers’ creativity.

Ella Rothschild



Ella Rothschild and Mirai Moriyama in Rothschild's *Judah, Christ with soy*
Photo: Yoav Bareil

Before spending four years dancing for Batsheva, Ella Rothschild was already a seasoned performer with the distinguished Inbal Pinto and Avshalom Pollak Dance Company in Tel Aviv. Rothschild began composing dances for Batsheva Creates. "It's a safe space," she explains. "It gave me an opportunity to be playful, even if that meant going over the edge."

Rothschild often works in alternative spaces. Site-specific installations such as *Dood* (2011), in which Rothschild transforms into a ghostly Victorian figure inside a deserted building in the ancient port city of Jaffa, and *Rapunzel* (2015), in which a children's playground magically turns into the princess' castle, are theatrical and whimsical.

In 2014, she began an ongoing collaboration with Japanese dancer and actor Mirai Moriyama on *Judah, Jesus with soy*, a duet created and performed in Tel Aviv on the occasion of Japan Dance Week. The piece was inspired by the late Japanese writer Osamu Dazai's story *Heed My Plea*, which is a fictional monologue by Judas. Picking up where they left off, the artists created *Judah, Christ with soy* in Japan in 2015 as a full-length work featuring dance, live music and text, and performed it as an installation in Tokyo

last winter. *Flood* (2016), which investigates the effect of a major disaster on the individual, is another installation and collaboration, this time with Israeli visual artist Nivi Alroy.

Rothschild, who is currently in a residency at Howard University in Washington, D.C., often collaborates with artists from other disciplines and is an interdisciplinary artist herself. "My creations are built from many different parts. I want to create with everything — all materials and mediums fascinate me, though dance is where I came from and I'm first and foremost a dancer. I always experiment with movement first, but it'll never end there."

This is visible in her most political work to date, *12 Postdated Checks* (2015). A large group work in which Rothschild is featured as an overbearing real-estate agent, here the choreographer tackles the housing shortage in Tel Aviv and the challenges faced by young people just trying to make it, a theme relevant to urbanites the world over.



Yossi Berg in *Come Jump with Me*
by Yossi Berg and Oded Graf
Photo: Gadi Dagon

Yossi Berg

Yossi Berg is one half of the Yossi Berg and Oded Graf Dance Theatre, which has been creating provocative, socially conscious dance for more than a decade, both in Israel and abroad. Berg was a dancer with Batsheva Dance Company from 1994 to 2000, during which time he choreographed for the Batsheva Creates series on many occasions, as well as for the entire junior company.

After leaving Batsheva in 2000, Berg became an original cast member in DV8's *The Cost of Living* and performed for Israel's Vertigo Dance Company and Israeli choreographer Yasmien Godder; at the same time he was choreographing independently, prior to his first collaboration with Graf in 2005.

Berg and Graf's theatrical formula, which often incorporates text, extravagant sets and inventive costumes, as well as otherworldly sound scores, frequently deals with identity politics. "We work with dancers from all over the world, so our approach is universal," says Berg. "Our work talks about people, identity, geography and the body — Israeli bodies as well as international bodies."

In *BodyLand* (2013), for example, Berg and Graf associate various body parts with the home countries of the five dancers, thus creating a kind of body cartography. "The question, 'If I come from a certain place, what does that say about me?' very much interests us," explains Berg. Place is also a major theme in their most recent, and perhaps most political work. *Come Jump with Me*, a duet for Berg and Chilean-born Israeli dancer Olivia Court Mesa, which premiered in Jaffa in 2015, tackles issues of Israeli identity, complicated by such subjectivities as motherhood, gay culture and romantic love.

"We want to break down stereotypes. Many times the work doesn't necessarily deal with Israeliness," says Graff, "it deals with something much wider. We touch on Israel, but very quickly we blur those images and allow the body to enter a more poetic, alternative and pluralistic space."

That strategy is perhaps the key to the work's impact both locally and internationally, as well as the reason the company has been in demand since its inception.

Bobbi Jene Smith



A star dancer with Batsheva for 10 years, Bobbi Jene Smith has spent this past year pursuing her own choreographic interests. The Iowa native moved to Israel after working with Ohad Naharin as a student at the Juilliard School in New York.

In Israel, Smith had the opportunity to experiment with composition and present her work as part of Batsheva Creates. During that time, Smith began preparations for *Arrowed*, a poignant movement-interview performed with former Batsheva dancer, fellow American and Juilliard alum Shamel Pitts, who interrogates Smith at an

accelerating speed. Since its 10-minute premiere in 2010, *Arrowed* has grown into a full-length work, has seen several cast changes and has even been adapted for film by choreographer turned filmmaker Celia Rowson-Hall.

This past summer, Smith performed her new work, *A Study on Effort* (2016), as part of Toronto's Luminato Festival of Arts and Creativity. In this solo, Smith investigates physical, emotional and metaphoric effort via 10 specific tasks that ultimately question the relationship of effort to pleasure.

"Through the practice of Gaga, I have come to realize how endless sensations are," Smith wrote in an email. "How contradicting. How two opposite sensations can exist at the same time. How they can attack and yield. Implode and explode. Decay and birth. Hold and let go. Disappear and reappear. As the threshold for pain expands, the ceiling for pleasure rises."

Following a short pause, the second half of *A Study on Effort* consisted of a dynamic duet-conversation-collaboration with violinist Keir GoGwilt. Watching the interaction between these two articulate artists in such an intimate space as the Hearn's studio-theatre was fascinating. Smith and GoGwilt projected sincerity and spontaneity as they listened closely to one another before making their next move.

The piece concluded with a sensitive imagining of what Smith called in a post-program masterclass "the effort of caring," in which she delicately handles a small plant. She ends lying down on the floor, with the plant lovingly positioned on her bare chest, an image of both strength and vulnerability. ▫

**Bobbi Jene Smith in her *A Study on Effort*
Photo: Alex Apt**

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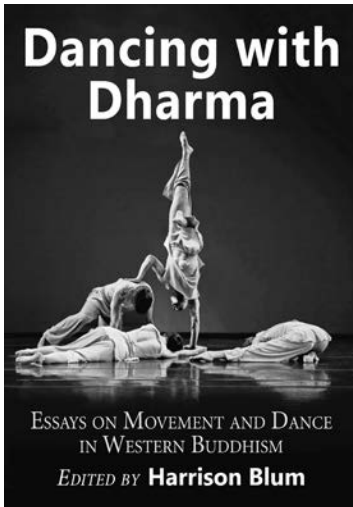
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“At the beginning of an introductory dance class, my teacher tells the story of Buddha’s enlightenment. When the historical Buddha, Siddhartha Gautama, sat meditating for years in extreme austerities and yet could not reach his aim of liberation, he finally nourished his emaciated body. Refreshed, mind cleared, he again sat, hands forming the dhyana mudra of the meditation posture. Still not fully confident in his enlightened nature, he sat firm. Then, spontaneously with a gesture from the heart, an inner mudra, he wholeheartedly moved a hand to touch the earth, acknowledging that it is necessary to be grounded in this body, and in this world, while the mind rests in transcendence. With the earth as his witness, he gained impenetrable confidence. In this way, moving from inner stillness into engaged gesture, the Buddha overcame all afflictions and suffering and fully realized his enlightenment.”

*From “Charya Nritya: Nepalese Ritual Dance of Deity Yoga” by Helen Fox Appell
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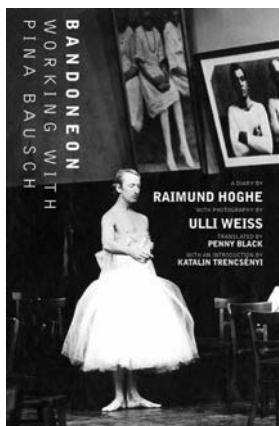
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BANDONEON: WORKING WITH PINA BAUSCH
A Diary by Raimund Hoghe
Photography by Ulli Weiss
Introduction by Katalin Trencsényi
Oberon Books
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Pina Bausch, the great German visionary of dance-theatre who died in 2009 at age 68, left a legacy of unique works that are still being performed around the world by her company, Tanztheater Wuppertal. There is also the wonderful Wim Wenders' film, *Pina* (2011), among others, to keep her memory present, and books, too, notably one in Italian by cultural journalist Leonetta Bentivoglio (the title in English: *A Saint on Roller Skates*), with a photo of a young, surprisingly glamorous Bausch on the cover. Another, in English, is *Bandoneon: Working with Pina Bausch*, which brings together the rehearsal diary kept by dramaturg Raimund Hoghe during rehearsals for Bausch's 1980 *Bandoneon*; photos by Ulli Weiss; and two substantial pieces of writing (an opening essay and a closing interview with Hoghe) by Katalin Trencsényi.

The essay by Trencsényi, a freelance dramaturg based in London, is a treasure, solidly researched, insightful and gracefully composed. After placing Bausch's "search for her own expressive language in dance" historically, referencing post-war American and German aesthetics (Bausch spent some "defining years" in New York), Trencsényi takes us to Wuppertal, "a melancholic and somewhat faded town," where in 1973 Bausch became director of dance for the Wuppertaler Bühnen, including the theatre's troupe of ballet dancers. The troupe's transformation into Tanztheater Wuppertal, "an ensemble full of characters, specially chosen and developed for expressive dance," is succinctly chronicled. We are introduced to Bausch's early collaborators: designer (and partner) Rolf Borzík, followed after his

untimely death in 1980 by Peter Pabst. We hear about the originally unwelcoming Wuppertal audiences (in early days, Bausch was spat on when she watched performances in the last row of the auditorium); some critics took a while to come on board, too.

Some never did. I recall reading Bausch's obituary written by Alastair Macaulay in the *New York Times*, in which he missed the mark when he wrote, "What is scarcely diminished by Ms. Bausch's death is the art of dance. There were good dance moments in her work, but they were usually of secondary interest and choreographically of no lasting import."

Trencsényi digs deeper into Bausch's now iconic dance-theatre, teasing out her aesthetic development. She describes Bausch's growing interest in the ensemble over the soloist and chorus, and her famous "trademark" of asking questions to start off the creative process. She also acknowledges what some feel are Bausch's "mellower, more commercial" later works.

The heart of the book is *Bandoneon*, one of Bausch's early "residency pieces" in which the company travelled to a host city and then made a work inspired by their experiences. Trencsényi's discussion of *Bandoneon* — in which the choreographer investigated "what's the use of tango?" but used no tango steps — includes an introduction to its dramaturg, Raimund Hoghe. His rehearsal diary, newly translated by Penny Black, is the centerpiece that follows.

Hoghe was a journalist based in Düsseldorf when he met Bausch, whom he was commissioned to write about. Their common interest in "watching people" — he as a writer, she as a choreographer — was a strong bond between them, and led in 1979 to his first program credit as Bausch's dramaturg. With that, says Trencsényi, "the role of the dance dramaturg was born." Their groundbreaking collaboration lasted a decade.

The diary provides valuable background information, such as a sense of how the ensemble played together in the studio, which was situated in an old cinema turned into a McDonald's fast food outlet in the front and a rehearsal space for Tanztheater Wuppertal in the auditorium. We also get a sense of how Bausch's questions worked: she asked "four or five during a rehearsal, over a hundred during the course of the work." At one rehearsal, Hoghe reports, Bausch asked the dancers, "If you sometimes have the feeling in certain situations that you're afraid, that you're not enough — what sort of fear is that?" Another time, he reports that "what she wants to find out" is what they have observed in babies and children and regret having forgotten.

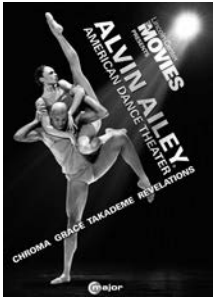
Less interesting are the rehearsal diary's descriptions of Bausch's method in action, which provide a pedestrian record of fact that makes her process and work sound simultaneously mundane and absurd, though her finished pieces carried such resonance onstage.

Ulli Weiss photographed the company from 1976 until her death in 2015, providing an important visual record of rehearsals and performance. Though looking a little crowded on the page, especially in layouts that carry over two pages — too much of the image gets lost in the stiff centre fold — the photos have a gentle everyday beauty that is true to Bausch's aesthetic.

The publication concludes with a Q and A between Trencsényi and Hoghe, including details about his subsequent career as a choreographer. Bausch never came to his shows. "She found it difficult to accept when people left the company," he says in explanation.

The sense of family, especially with her first group, and of exploring the creative act together, seems to have been at the heart of Bausch's method. Why wouldn't she want to keep them all together and to keep making works with them forever? But perhaps that's too schmaltsy a conclusion to a piece about Pina Bausch. "I don't know what'll emerge when I ask questions," Hoghe quotes her as saying, "but I don't want anything pathetic, anything sentimental."

— **KAIJA PEPPER**



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More than two decades after the death of its founder, Alvin Ailey American Dance Theater is still in vibrant artistic health, and this DVD showcases the range of the company's repertoire. It also shows the quality of its dancers, who display technical skill, physical eloquence, musicality,

warmth and finesse. It's bookended by two classics, one old and one relatively new.

First up is *Chroma*, created by Wayne McGregor for the Royal Ballet in 2006, which has lost none of its gripping audacity. Danced in minimalist architect John Pawson's spare white space to an extraordinary driving score by Joby Talbot and the White Stripes, the piece looks fabulous on the Ailey dancers as they power through the hyper-articulated choreography.

Alvin Ailey's iconic *Revelations* (1960), danced to uplifting spirituals and gospel music, closes the performance. It draws on the African-American experience and the central role of religion, embodying suffering and struggle, faith and yearning, tenacity and hope. This classic continues to resonate, and the dancers perform it with obvious love and pride.

Presented in between are artistic director Robert Battle's *Takademe*, a short virtuosic solo based on the rhythms of Indian kathak dance, performed to Sheila Chandra's syncopated vocalizations, and Ronald K. Brown's *Grace*, an energetic ensemble work set to music ranging from Duke Ellington to Fela Kuti's Afropop. *Grace* has an intriguing parallel to *Revelations* in its contemporary evocation of a journey to the Promised Land, but both these works felt overshadowed by the impact of *Chroma* and *Revelations*.

A bonus section of interviews with Battle and the dancers highlights their commitment to nurturing Ailey's impressive legacy.

— **HEATHER BRAY**



GALA DES ÉTOILES
Teatro alla Scala
Opus Arte
 142 minutes
www.opusarte.com

Gala des Étoiles took place at the historic Teatro alla Scala in Milan to celebrate the closing of the 2015 Milano World Expo and, in traditional gala fashion, it showcased a dozen pas de deux and solos from a wide range of ballets. This format can be challenging, especially for dramatic

ballets stripped of their theatrical context. But the great plus for dance fans is the chance to see an astonishing collection of A-list stars — from companies including the Bolshoi, Mikhailovsky, Mariinsky, Royal Ballet, Bavarian State Ballet and, of course, La Scala — perform at one time.

Highlights included (perhaps inevitably) the pas de deux from *Le Corsaire*, danced with great elegance by Svetlana Zakharova and Leonid Sarafanov. Sarafanov also appeared with Alina Somova in Gsovsky's bravura *Grand Pas Classique*. Russian superstar Ivan Vasiliev, performing the *Don Quixote* pas de deux with the delightful Nicoletta Manni, pulled off some outrageously flashy jumps. He also partnered the sensuous Maria Vinogradova in the pas de deux from *Spartacus*, which was thrillingly intense in spite of its grandiose Soviet-era vibe.

Polina Semionova was fantastically alluring opposite La Scala's own Roberto Bolle in Roland Petit's *Carmen*, and we got another look at the magnificent Bolle in *Prototype*, a multimedia solo choreographed for him by La Scala choreographer Massimiliano Volpini. But it was Zakharova who really stole the show. In a touching and emotional interpretation of Fokine's *The Dying Swan*, created for Anna Pavlova in 1905, she transcended the ballet clichés that have become attached to this solo in four minutes of outstanding artistry.

— **HEATHER BRAY**

RESET

Paris Opera Ballet
Directed by Thierry Demaizière
and Alban Teurlai
 110 minutes

Reset (Relève), a two-hour documentary by Thierry Demaizière and Alban Teurlai shown at the Vancouver International Film Festival in fall 2016, provides an irresistible backstage view of the thoroughbred dancers from the Paris Opera Ballet working in their ornate and very beautiful Palais Garnier home.

The star of the film is the then-new director of the company, Benjamin Millepied, who is choreographing a new work for 16 young men and women chosen from the corps. *Clear, Loud, Bright, Forward*, as the piece would be titled, is seen in its early stages as Millepied works alone with his computer, and then with the dancers, in a series of rehearsal rooms: the Noureev, Lifar and Petipa studios among them, their names reminders of the history behind this large institution.

Millepied clearly enjoys mentoring the young artists, who he calls "the heart of the company," partly because he's unhappy with the hierarchy of the 150-member Paris Opera Ballet, which, he feels, has not yet ground them down. Certainly they're a hardy group: despite injuries, no one drops out, though there is obvious discomfort (one woman groans in a foetal position after collapsing to the ground; another's nose bleeds after being struck; a third has foot issues). We hear from a few of them directly, talking about the stress of being in the corps, where it's "hard to be your own person."

Judging from the slightly ponderous, too-long film, it's easy to see why Millepied resigned his directorship mere months after his first premiere: he handles the tensions and sometimes petty responsibilities of his directorship with impatience. He only looks happy when he is dancing himself as he works out movement for his ballet or, briefly, taking a few spritely steps on the rooftop of the Palais Garnier, where he chats on his phone, the Eiffel Tower in the distance.

— **KAJIA PEPPER**



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**Above: Detail of Annette Lodge's
Inside The Pass-There is a Landing (1974)
Oil and collage on canvas, 146" by 72"
Walter Phillips Gallery Permanent Collection
Photo: Beck Gilmer-Osborne**



INSIDE

ED Improvisation as a tool for creation

by Karissa Barry

There is sound in silence, texture in a seemingly flat wall, and colours, shapes and motion that exist within every aspect of the environment. Inspiration for movement is everywhere, and we have endless ways of interpreting what we see, hear, taste, smell and feel. Refining awareness of spatial complexities benefits our creative impulses when interacting with moving bodies through the practice of improvisation.

Michael Schumacher, an international figure in the discipline of improvisation and a former member of William Forsythe's Ballet Frankfurt, introduced these fundamental ideas as he began a choreographic lab at the Banff Centre last summer. Over six days, he led myself and the other participants through informative explorations based on interpreting movement influenced by our surroundings and our sensorial responses to them.

Michael led the group through structured improvisations, challenging us to keep exploring possibilities within each detailed assignment. Many of the specific tasks were seeded in entering, exiting, observing and influencing space. He also spoke about recognizing the places of tension or connection between individuals, and to let this inform how and when we interact with each other or attempt to alter the scenario. By practising the ability to observe the environment acutely and patiently, our impulses to create movement became investigative, provoking new pathways in our bodies.

A satisfying group exploration involved entering and exiting with a simple, very specific movement system of our choosing, allowing it to evolve, but always keeping true to the initial action. For example, a basic system might involve the repetition of a movement sequence consisting of elbow to shoulder to ear. The challenge here was to not be seduced by the urge to create something "interesting" and thus stray from the seed of the simple system. The struggle to maintain original organizations amidst

the influences in space created engaging moments of tension between individuals. My appreciation for clarity was met here with the reaffirmation that conflict is a beguiling thing to witness between intelligent bodies.

As this was a choreographic lab, for part of the time dancers were assigned to create with the invited choreographers, who were encouraged to use unconventional spaces around the centre. Montreal-based choreographer Gioconda Barbuto and I worked together on a solo inspired by a large and colourful painting by Australian artist Annette Lodge, on display in the grand hallway of the Jeanne and Peter Lougheed visual arts building.

Gio tasked me to generate movement and text from the various lines and textures in the painting, as well as from observers organized in a 270-degree formation around the painting, framing a performative space. My physical and verbal choices were informed by my environment as I followed the choreographic structure involving a sequence of events that guided me through the piece. Inspired by the painting, and interested in exploring visceral response to colour, Gio layered the concept by instructing me to instinctually decide what colour I associated with certain audience members and to declare this aloud. I would then relocate them to a specific spot in the space that mirrored the composition of the artwork. This structured improvisation, which depended a great deal on circumstance and spatial influence, generated a raw quality of performance that, as an interpreter, I appreciated.

On the last day, there was an informal public showing of everyone's work performed throughout the centre. These creative seeds produced by the seven choreographers and 16 dancers were remarkably varied in structure and aesthetic, demonstrating the diversity and interests of each creator.

Exploring improvisation as a tool for creation can be a complex engagement with limitless propositions. Throughout the program, I valued the simple but effective processes of generating material in unconventional spaces and exploring movement in the spirit of being incredibly present to my environment. ▫

Karissa Barry is a contemporary dance artist based in Vancouver, B.C., working as a performer, emerging creator and occasional instructor for the professional community.



Vancouver

by Kaija Pepper

At their home season opening performance in November at the Queen Elizabeth Theatre, the artists of Ballet BC gave powerhouse interpretations of four very different works by resident choreographer Cayetano Soto. The powerhouse interpretations were no big surprise: the company has been on a roll under the direction of Emily Molnar and know how to make even the merely average look pretty darn good. But the range of the choreography by a single artist was not expected: the works did not look all the same, despite Soto's clear choreographic preference for forceful bodies that ooze and snap into extreme positions.

Barcelona-born Soto has worked as a freelance choreographer since 2005, with commissions from companies around the world, including Nederlands Dans Theater, Stuttgart Ballet and Philadelphia's BalletX. In 2014, Ballet BC premiered his *Twenty Eight Thousand Waves*, and, the following year, Soto began a three-year residency with the Vancouver group.

The mixed bill opened with *Beginning After*, a premiere to music by Handel, featuring the muscular, emphatic hands and arms, back and hips, familiar from *Twenty Eight Thousand Waves*. The effect was again arresting: here, 11 dancers in shiny black leotards with a high, flared collar worked every crevice and cranny of their bodies, creating a petrified forest of dance that carried a kind of threat and also a kind of sadness.

Fugaz (2007), to mournful music composed by G.I. Gurdjieff and Thomas de Hartmann, and the duet *Sortijas* (2013), to the late singer-songwriter Lhasa de Sela, comprised the program's middle section. *Fugaz* was a heartfelt statement in which two men in black trousers and tops shadowed four women in light-coloured leotards. In their intimate pas de deux, Emily Chessa and Christoph von Riedemann, and Livona Ellis and Peter Smida, created troubled scenarios filled with drama and maybe regret.

Finally, another premiere: *Schachmatt* (German for checkmate), built from a brief work created for Germany's Gauthier Dance. Set to a medley of Michel Legrand, Henry Mancini and Xavier Cugat, among others, *Schachmatt* sizzled with fun. Sporting black equestrian hats, neatly chin-strapped, and buttoned-up grey shirts decorously tucked into shorts, the five men and five women strutted and sashayed, often in unison, for this tongue-in-check chorus line of cute and kinky proportions.

Another home team — Out Innerspace Dance Theatre — presented *Major Motion Picture* at the Firehall Theatre in October. The title is somewhat misleading; this was really a quirky little work spread out over two short acts, with an intermission. Yet the title does reflect the clear inspiration: the epic emotions of action movies, with a nod to the early Hollywood silents. There is little plot or characterization, which are sketched in; instead, choreographers David Raymond and Tiffany Tregarthen pluck

out the oversize fear, horror, anger and despair in silent era and action genre movies, conveyed with enthusiastic clarity by the seven performers. This includes Raymond and Tregarthen, who are also the company artistic directors.

The inventive piece, which premiered in Victoria on Canada's west coast in January 2016 and toured the country before being seen at home, bursts with imagery. For instance, a huge black coat roams the stage powered by nine legs, eerily lacking a head, and there's plenty of shadow play, with a menacing, long-fingered hand creeping around the backdrop. There is also spooky music that degrades and speeds up to become background to various chases. The performers take turns being in the black-clad, white-faced ensemble, dashing offstage for a costume change into stripy pyjama-styled disguise, looking a little like burglars, a little like prison inmates.

The epic menace needed something more behind it, though the performers excelled in this presentation of bodies in the throes of major emotions and dastardly deeds. This was "*Major Motion Picture*": tongue in cheek, and fun, it could be tightened into a non-stop 40-minute gem.

A third home team, Company 605, appeared at the Firehall Theatre in December in *Albatross*, commissioned from Spanish-born, Brussels-based German Jauregui. The invention of this duet, danced by 605 co-artistic director Josh Martin and independent dance artist Hilary Maxwell, was in the impressive way the two remained connected through most of the hour-plus of muscular push and magnetic pull. The lengthy section in which they cover each other's eyes, roaming the stage with limited vision and maintaining their entanglement despite the constant hard scrabble of the movement, presented a resonant journey of relationship.

Other parts of Jauregui's staging seemed a throwback to an earlier generation of idea-based performance art. At the beginning, for instance, two needles are lying handily nearby, which Maxwell jabs into the white bandage covering her eyes, creating two bloody marks that look like cartoon eyes.

The draw of *Albatross* was not in the clever bits, but in the arresting physical portrayal of what it means to have someone forever on your back, or to be the someone dogging another's footsteps. ▫

NAfro Dance Productions opened its 2016-2017 season with *Milandy – The Sacred Trees*, a mesmerizing full-length show, performed on stilts, choreographed by founding artistic director Casimiro Nhussi. It marked a departure for the 14-year-old troupe, which typically offers shows pulsating with a combustion of African and contemporary dance. This time, Nhussi's vision turned more introspective, with his latest premiere featuring seven dancers dressed in Carla Oliphant's eye-popping leaf and twig-festooned jumpsuits, and with Cam MacLean's naturalistic electro-acoustic score that often felt hushed and reverent.

The 45-minute production, presented October 14-16 at the Manitoba Theatre

on stilts, flailing crooked arms through the air like gnarly branches as Almirante Alberto rolls and tumbles between them. When they suddenly move in unison, stomping out accelerating syncopated rhythms, the force of a wrathful nature is felt. As a defiant Almirante Alberto rubs sticks together to destroy the forest with fire during the show's climax, it speaks to our own environmental destruction as well as denial of the past. The final scene where the trees gradually crumple becomes diluted by Nhussi's choice of melodramatic flashing orange lights to suggest burning flames, and there are a few overall pacing issues. Still, NAfro's latest production proved one of its most conceptually and physically daring shows in recent years, an urgent cautionary tale

guileless Mina betrothed to Jonathan Harker, principal Sophia Lee's acting skills and solid technique created palpable tension with Dracula, first rejecting his kiss before becoming magnetized by his fatal charms.

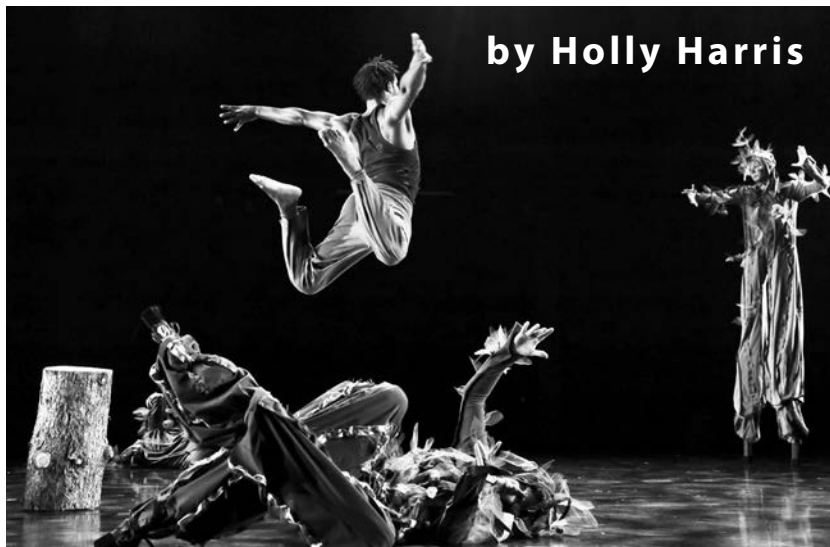
Godden's inventive choreography, straddling both contemporary and classical worlds, teems with effective pattern symmetry: duets morph into quartets and quartets expand into ensembles of eight, showing his strong architectural sense as witnessed in his other contemporary ballets for the Royal Winnipeg Ballet, including 2014's *Going Home Star – Truth and Reconciliation*.

His bag of tricks includes pausing the quick-paced ballet's driving narrative with Act II's comical pantomime featuring a condensed version of Stoker's novel performed by the company in rapid fire. That's followed by the Red Dance, which pays homage to classical ballet tradition, in the spirit of a palate-cleansing divertissement.

Godden's seamless, all-Mahler pastiche score performed by the Winnipeg Symphony Orchestra led by Tadeusz Biernecki is both brilliant and bold. Longtime Godden collaborator Paul Daigle's sumptuous costumes range from period gowns and shaggy wigs to more fantastical deconstructed costume pieces. Lighting designer David Morrison creates moody shadows, as well as laser-cut shards of light streaming into Dracula's Transylvanian crypt, which heighten the drama while never obfuscating the dancers.

Winnipeg's Contemporary Dancers presented the 2016 instalment of Prairie Dance Circuit, October 7-8 at the Rachel Browne Theatre. This year's touring production showcased Edmonton choreographer Amber Borotsik's vignette-based *The Moon at Midnight*, featuring a tight-knit ensemble of eight who imagine monster movies and chant in darkness.

The triple bill also featured the premiere of Winnipeg-based Lise McMillan's *Stage for Loss*, an athletic duet performed by McMillan with Jasmine Allard. Lastly, artistic director Brent Lott, now in his 12th year at the company's helm, remounted his poignant 2012 solo *Egress*, with its newest interpreter, Sam Penner, fearlessly throwing her body against the floor, falling, rolling and crawling in this emotional tribute to the company's legendary late founder, Rachel Browne. ▯



by Holly Harris

Winnipeg!

for Young People, is inspired by the age-old Makonde tradition of communicating with departed ancestors through mystical trees. Nhussi also crafted his production as a statement about the periled environment, and how climate change has altered it. The compelling Sale Almirante Alberto serves as an Everyman pitted against a "tribe" of six larger-than-life "trees" that magically spring to life during the quasi-prologue. Paula Blair appears as a moral conscience, evoking an all-knowing, benevolent Earth Mother figure who stretches her arms out to the trees during her opening (and, unfortunately, only) solo.

The show succeeds with its stark imagery, with the ensemble (Nicole Coppens, H el ene Le Moullec Mancini, Robyn Thomson Kacki, Kim Hildebrand and Jessica Oliphant) balanced precariously

told through the power of dance.

The Royal Winnipeg Ballet reincarnated one of its most enduring — and popular — ballets as it opened its season with Gothic thriller *Dracula*, October 26-30. Last staged in 2010, it is remarkable how Mark Godden's now 18-year-old, full-length story ballet based on Bram Stoker's 1897 tale still seems as fresh and vital as during its 1998 premiere.

Atlanta, Georgia-born soloist Josh Reynolds, in his second year with the troupe, sank his teeth into the title role with relish (replacing principal dancer Liang Xing at the last minute), his brooding, nuanced portrayal oozing danger. Second soloist Elizabeth Lamont cast a captivating spell as Lucy, her prismatic characterization spanning vulnerable innocent to wildcat banshee. As the

NAfro Dance's Sale Almirante Alberto (leaping), H el ene Le Moullec Mancini and Nicole Coppens in Casimiro Nhussi's *Milandy – The Sacred Trees*
Photo: Leif Norman

Toronto

by Michael Crabb



After the long summer drought, the wave of often overlapping performances that engulf the Toronto dance scene each fall can be overwhelming. However, as the wave recedes, certain images and impressions remain memorably fixed. Some are very specific, others more the result of cumulative impact.

Into the former category falls Bill Coleman's extraordinary presence in *Dollhouse*, a collaboration with avant-garde composer and sound artist Gordon Monahan. *Dollhouse* utterly defies adequate description and exists outside any widely acknowledged category. It harks back to the glory days of performance art, but without the self-conscious transgressive nature. There are comic moments that verge on slapstick, yet *Dollhouse's* general atmosphere is absurdist. There's a dark vein that summons thoughts of Beckett, Brecht and Kafka.

The middle-aged Coleman first made his mark years ago as an accomplished dancer of admirable technical facility. In *Dollhouse*, his movements are mostly spare and minimal, yet devastating in

their impact. He is an Everyman, a Chaplinesque figure pitched into a surreal environment contrived to hobble him at every turn.

The opening scene offers a taste of what unfolds. A dark-suited Coleman stands motionless for an uncomfortably long time in the still fully lit theatre, which is the home of presenting company Canadian Stage. You can tell his every sense is hyper-alert. Then Coleman begins to move, tentatively and awkwardly, as if sensitive to some lurking danger.

Soon we hear odd cracking sounds. They come from within Coleman's suit. As his body crumples, rather like the Scarecrow in *The Wizard of Oz*, shards of shattered plastic glasses begin to spill forth. It's at once funny and horrifying. As Coleman's assorted misadventures continue, we quickly see him not as a performer, but as a very real and disquieting proxy for any number of universally recognizable and existential anxieties.

Claudia Moore's MOonhORsE Dance Theatre marked its 20th anniversary in November with the 39th edition of its popular series Older & Reckless. It was a rich program, including solo appearances

by Margie Gillis, Robert Desrosiers and Moore herself. The image that haunts was collectively generated — a community project comprising 29 performers, some local dance-scene veterans, others amateurs, who covered a range of ages and body types. The work, *Danser Joe*, is a compact version of Jean-Pierre Perreault's 1983 *JOE*, the late choreographer's defiantly stomping and seminal tribute to the plight of the downtrodden masses. As the cast in their long raincoats, fedoras and boots executed Perreault's increasingly complex tattoo, the essence of the choreographer's purpose communicated with a freshly raw, authentic power.

Fearful Symmetries, described by its composer John Adams as "a seriously aerobic work, a Pantagruel boogie with a thrusting, grinding beat," has understandably attracted many choreographers, including Roberto Campanella, co-founder/artistic director of Toronto's ProArteDanza. His version, titled after the score, is Campanella's best work in years. Adams' music compels movement, but its structural symmetry can be misconstrued as an invitation to choreographic platitudes. Campanella avoids these. His

response to the score has human urgency. It's essentially abstract, but emotionally resonant. He's come up with a movement motif of running that is both kinetically thrilling and psychologically ambivalent. Is this ensemble actually getting anywhere or merely struggling to keep up with an ever-changing world?

Among visiting troupes, Nederlands Dans Theater continues as a reminder of what can be accomplished by the human body in motion. These are dazzlingly exciting dancers, apparently capable of executing whatever a choreographer orders. But there are limits to the abilities of even the finest dancers — however gorgeous they may look — to bring substance to the inherently insubstantial.

In a triple bill featuring two works by NDT artistic director Paul Lightfoot and his longtime choreographic partner Sol León, it was only the opener by Crystal Pite, a Canadian, of course, who rose above the affected portentousness of so much contemporary European dance.

Of the León/Lightfoot offerings, *Safe as Houses* from 2001, with its symbolic

rotating wall, was the stronger. The sense of elusive reality and unpredictable change made the work more than a display of technically breathtaking dance. Oddly, the other work, *Stop-Motion*, made in 2014, seems rooted in a similar, now rather dated aesthetic, even if the mood is more overtly emotional and personal.

Pite's *In the Event* from 2015 has clear links physically and thematically to much of her earlier work, but its sheer inventiveness and ability to evoke complex emotional responses through what are often taut physical means is what leaves you gasping in wonder. It impresses by not striving to impress.

As for the National Ballet of Canada, it launched its 2016-2017 home season unadventurously with a couple of familiar and dependable full-length story ballets, James Kudelka's 2004 version of the Prokofiev-scored *Cinderella* and John Cranko's *Onegin*, made originally for Stuttgart Ballet in 1965 and a more-or-less staple of the Toronto company's repertoire since its Canadian premiere in 1984.

"Dependable" is not quite the same as

"best-selling." *Cinderella* is a well-known story with an easily pronounced title. *Onegin* is neither, despite its passel of avid devotees. Thus, the former got 10 performances and the latter six. This is unfortunate because *Onegin* is a strongly character-based ballet and its meaty leading roles are justly coveted by those who aspire to be recognized as accomplished dance-actors. Yet, with relatively few performances, the opportunities are limited.

The run of *Cinderella* featured several debuts — most notably that of second soloist Emma Hawes in the title role. Hawes is already very much on National Ballet fans' radars, and she did not disappoint. Following Kudelka's intentions, she offered a feisty if put-upon young woman in Act I before transforming into a ravishingly poised and elegant mystery guest at the prince's ball. With McGee Maddox as her strong and seasoned partner, Hawes negotiated Kudelka's almost wilfully perilous choreography with suitably romantic abandon.

On the *Onegin* front, there was only one title-lead debut, that of Piotr Stanczyk. He was awarded a single show and seemed determined to make the most of it. It was also apparent that Stanczyk had given the role a great deal of forethought; it was not that his portrayal looked in any way calculated, but rather that it was intelligently considered. His Tatiana, the woman Eugene Onegin initially spurns, was veteran ballerina Sonia Rodriguez. There is a palpable chemistry between these two fine dancers and it injected real fire into their climactic Act III pas de deux when it is Tatiana's turn to reject Onegin.

In the case of works such as *Onegin* featuring over-the-top romance and heart-break, ballet fans tend to develop very particular allegiances. They will propound, often with alarming vehemence, what they regard as the superior merits of their idols. In truth, however, it often comes down to questions of taste. That said, it would have been hard not to be deeply affected by the sheer dramatic intensity of Svetlana Lunkina's debut as Tatiana, partnered by former Stuttgart Ballet dancer Evan McKie in his National Ballet debut as Onegin. Their single performance was the last of the run and, for fans, the most keenly awaited. To say it was electric rather understates the case. *DI*

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Montreal



by Victor Swoboda

Last seen in Montreal in 1994, Nederlands Dans Theater received an eager reception for three works including Crystal Pite's *In the Event* (2015). Pite tackled an emotional subject — the desire to reconnect with dead loved ones. Hovering over a prone figure, seven dancers expressed collective shock through Pite's artful use of strobing — tiny, stop-action gestures cascading through the group like electric charges. In great waves, the group criss-crossed the stage, backs arching, arms curved as though diving. Stunningly coordinated, this wonderful flowing action showed the NDT dancers' brilliance.

The departed figure returned, reaching for unattainable human shadows behind a sheer backdrop. Two male-female duets echoed past encounters never to recur. In the end, a lone man searched abjectly for the lost one. If all this longing recalled the favourite theme of 19th-century Romantic ballet, Pite's take was uncompromisingly contemporary — a masterpiece.

Virtually unknown here, NDT's resident duo, Sol León and Paul Lightfoot, offered *Sehnsucht* (2009) and *Stop-Motion* (2014). In *Sehnsucht*, Sarah Reynolds and Roger Van der Poel elegantly portrayed a couple inside a suspended box outfitted like an apartment with door, table and chair. The box slowly revolved, suggesting the couple's topsy-turvy relationship. The man sought steady ground outside the box where a group executed leaps in rather predictable patterns contrasting with the apartment's unpredictability. Reunited with the woman in their upside-down world, the man watched as she walked out on him. Here today, gone tomorrow?

Stop-Motion was less evidently structured than *Sehnsucht*, which was appropriate because it dealt with life's ephemeral nature. A group sequence danced in white clouds of baking flour was visually lovely, but more memorable were solid duets by Marne van Opstal and Meng-Ke, and by Van der Poel and Parvaneh Scharafali who delivered the leggy extensions that León / Lightfoot favour.

In 2013, Emmanuelle Lê Phan and Elon Höglund established Tentacle Tribe as a new force in Montreal dance with their duet, *Nobody Likes a Pixelated Squid*. As highly accomplished breakdancers and former performers with Rubberbandance, Lê Phan and Höglund applied urban dance's popping and locking to an extended abstract dramatic narrative. Their new duet, *Fractals of You*, further proved how rich these moves are in expressive potential.

In geometry, a fractal is a shape whose parts have the same character as the whole. Any dance duet is a measure of give-and-take as two people seek control of the other or allow the other to control them, and *Fractals of You* profoundly demonstrated the extent to which two people could be fractals of each other.

In the opening sequence, Lê Phan's limbs moved as though pulled by Höglund's invisible strings. If he lifted an arm, so did she in marvellous unison. Gentle physical contact followed. Long identical trench coats were donned and doffed with silky elegance — this duo moves effortlessly, cleanly. Then an intrusive video image separated them. In a private spiritual place beyond Höglund's influence, Lê Phan did a contemplative, ritualistic solo to the sound of Buddhist chanting — a shout

out to her Vietnamese father's faith — her long hair concealing her face like a mask. Reunited, the duo made bolder, wider gestures, then lifts appeared, suggesting great mutual confidence and ease.

Höglund entered his own private place in a solo demonstrating anguish and doubt. The couple reunited again, though now they moved like mechanical clockwork figures — prisoners of each other's wills. The 70-minute piece finished with them standing side-by-side, tilting slightly right and left. After so much interaction, neither betrayed traces of the other, which apparently contradicted the preceding events. As such, the ending seemed the only questionable aspect of this remarkably accomplished duet.

A splendid example of integrated dance/technology was *Aqua Khoría* presented inside the globular Satosphere theatre of the Société des arts technologiques with its surround cinema screen. Zach Settel's motion-capture technology allowed dancer Peter Trosztmer to orchestrate the theatre's sound-and-light environment. With slow, controlled gestures, Trosztmer sent "waves" rolling across a magnificent seascape on the screen and sounds crashing from multiple speakers. Videos often overwhelm rather than support live performers, but Trosztmer's control over his surroundings let him integrate live gestures and techno tricks. *Aqua Khoría* was an eye-opening glimpse of dance's future.

As Pina Bausch introduced theatre into dance 40 years ago, circus is similarly expanding dance's parameters today. Montreal dance cannot ignore circus performances whose choreographed sequences not only astound, but also move audiences to laughter and tears. In its North American debut at Montreal's Centaur Theatre, three-member Dust Palace from New Zealand presented *The Goblin Market*, an hour-long narrative about two sisters navigating the perils of big-city sex and drugs. Acrobatics served dramatics. On a motionless trapeze, Rochelle Mangan and Edward Clendon River formed astounding dual shapes in a choreographed seduction scene. River turned a solo on the aerial silks into a soulful shout. And in an emotion-filled finale of sister reconciliation, Mangan and Eve Gordon — the troupe's artistic director — showed a stunning intermix of arms and legs on the suspended hoop known as the lyra. Dust Palace's dance-circus definitely deserves international exposure. ▫

The artistic relationship between Berkeley's Cal Performances and the Mark Morris Dance Group has been one of the major creative forces in dance in the Bay Area. Over the better part of three decades, the community has enjoyed some of choreographer Mark Morris' finest inspirations, including both North American and Bay Area premieres. *L'Allegro, il Penseroso ed il Moderato*, Morris' masterpiece, has toured here five times. We're so familiar with the snow scene in *The Hard Nut* that when you're watching the corresponding scene in a conventional *Nutcracker*, you can hear suppressed laughs all around.

Morris' latest premiere (September 30) in Zellerbach Hall was the full-evening *Layla and Majnun*, the retelling of a classic seventh-century Persian legend, set to exquisite Azerbaijani music by early 20th-century composer Uzeyir Hajibeyli. Members of Yo-Yo Ma's redoubtable Silk Road Ensemble were complemented by two great singers in the mugham style, Alim Qasimov and Fargana Qasimova (father and daughter), who reclined on the floor at downstage centre performing the arranged score.

Music from other cultures has fascinated Morris since his youth, when he was a member of a Greek folk troupe in Seattle. Here, he presented us with a treasure house of unfamiliar riches. They divide

our attention. Do we yield to this fascinating music? Or do we fix our eyes on the 16 amazing dancers of the Mark Morris Dance Group responding to this music and animating this saga of doomed love in front of Howard Hodgkin's boldly hued and textured backdrop, all aglow in James Ingalls' lighting? Inevitably, as the 60-minute work progresses, you find yourself immersed in something organic and thrilling.

In his staging, Morris has done something rare (alas) for choreographers. He has planted many of the musicians of the Silk Road Ensemble centre stage, with the dancing transpiring in front of the players, on side stairways and on an elevated platform behind the musicians. If all those colours occasionally appear as a glorious blur, the clarity of individual movements ravishes the senses. All praise is due the elegant costumes of former dance group member Maile Okamura, who favoured mottled orange for the women and white trousers and blue tunics for the men.

Morris has divided the narrative into five brief acts, taking us from parental opposition, to Layla's forced wedding, to the lovers' demise. While the Qasimovs musically render the lovers throughout the piece, Morris has astutely selected a different dancing couple for each of the first four acts, bringing them all together for the death scene.

It is interesting to compare the changes

in their relationship. The first pair, Stacy Martorana and Dallas McMurray, almost avoid physical contact. The second pair, Nicole Sabella and Domingo Estrada, Jr. are as frisky as rabbits. Laurel Lynch/Aaron Loux and Lesley Garrison/Sam Black were the others, with Durrell R. Comedy playing the unwanted husband. The reproving parents were Lauren Grant and Noah Vinson (hers) and Michelle Yard and Billy Smith (his).

Music always guides Morris; so, too, here. The dance seems to take wing from the vocalizations, and supertitles aid our comprehension. Morris remains captivated by its beauties without succumbing to *Arabian Nights* kitsch. But there's also the original poem; a transcendent relic, which Morris claims to have read before every rehearsal. Somehow, he communicated that elevated aura to the members of the company. Even in this context, the choreographer melds his own modern/ballet style with the demands of the narrative, a format he hasn't worked in all that often. You quickly get the idea that one should enjoy suffering, like Majnun, over thwarted love.

Despite the seriousness of the source, Morris finds more than a dollop of wit, not to mention characteristic Asian moves, in the dancers' back bends, stamping feet, whirling dervish turns and swirling arms. And you can't escape the light tone of all those recumbent bodies, or the male unisons on the stairs (Bollywood musicals come to mind) or Smith's terrific solo.

There was ineffable atmosphere in a candle-bearing ceremony for the group that suggested quiet reverence. Throughout, Morris can intimate much with little movement. Watching the wedding families huddled side by side, you knew all you needed to know about parental objections.

The company, which Berkeleyans feel they know intimately, is as technically secure and expressive as any Morris has fielded here in three decades. The dancers lack nothing in courage. Watching them negotiate the narrow stairways and platform provided an unexpected element of tension.

Layla and Majnun also buoyed what for many was a depressing year in this country. Yet how bad can it really be when the Mark Morris Dance Group comes to town twice in seven months? ▯



San Francisco I

by Allan Ulrich

NEW YORK I

by Robert Greskovic



For two weeks at New York's downtown Joyce Theater, a converted movie house, the Lucinda Childs Dance Company took to its somewhat limited stage. Wider than it is tall or deep, with no orchestra pit and a plain brick back wall complete with an indentation that once held a projection speaker, the Joyce's performing area can be a challenge to proscenium-styled work for both performers and audiences. Childs' work, however, looked well situated here.

The first week's program, *Lucinda Childs: A Portrait* (1963-2016), proved a neat overview of the dancer and dance-maker who came of age in the 1960s when what we call postmodern dance was being explored.

The works in the first half played out in nearly precise chronology, from 1963 to 1977. The earliest, *Pastime*, which stands as the first work in Childs' choreographic chronology, was initially a three-part solo for Childs. For this rare restaging, it was apportioned to three company dancers, who each duly displayed the deadpan wit of the choreography. *Pastime* was led off by statuesque Caitlin Scranton, whose striking dark looks are reminiscent of Childs' own. Scranton remains mostly stationary in profile stance as she dangles a lower leg and animates its foot as if she were a flat, cutout, hinged mannequin. All the while, Philip Corner's soundscore of gushing, rushing waters acts as accompaniment.

Katherine Helen Fisher follows, as a bathing beauty flexing a sleek leg and foot skyward, while contained in a stretch-fabric affair with the character of a bathtub. Finally, Anne Lewis performs mostly folded over forward on her hands and one

leg until she is left balancing only on her leg with her other limbs angled away from her.

A memorable trio of dances capped part one of *Portrait*. These three studies each showed how Childs advanced from the delicately witty aspect of *Pastime* toward minimalist dance, which has more or less since dominated her interests. These dances, all without sound accompaniment and all costumed in sleek, cream-costuming of leotard-topped, high-waisted slacks, which became a signature Childs' look, demarked the stage with patterns and rhythms that bring the viewer into their pulsing, repeated locomotions.

Katema from 1978 delivers a crisscrossing set of striding and pivoting paces for two pairs of women. The X arrangement of their paths gets accentuated more at their end points than at their central point of crossing. Childs' manager emailed me the following comments about this dance, named for a place on Martha's Vineyard in Massachusetts, where, "Every few hours, the tide changes direction. Instead of having one opening to the sea, it has two openings. Currents can be rising from two directions, or falling when the current is moving either direction."

Radial Courses (1976) and *Interior Drama* (1977), the two other cream-costumed dances that followed, each revealed rarified motor energy that drew attention to its simply varied movements.

Radial Courses has four men on a determined mission of repeatedly coursing the stage in this direction and that, building up to a quiet haste that prompted smiles from the engaged onlookers. While each dancer played his part scrupulously, I was especially taken by the fleet and buoyant way in which Vincent McCloskey took

to the little hop/skip/dart sequence that intermittently elaborated the choreography's delicately frantic pacing.

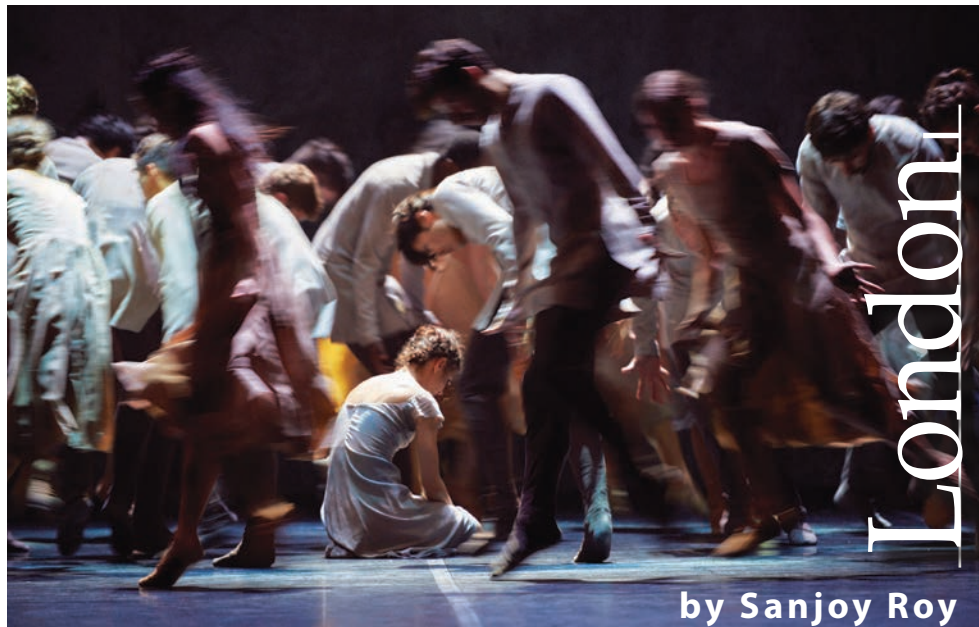
Interior Drama showcases six women, who form a recurring V arrangement, facing the audience with advancing, receding and side-directed impetus built from its ongoing strides, some set as if marking time with legs swinging like bell clappers. Engagingly, the cast's two smaller women define little pooling paths as if, perhaps, they were the independent engines on some V-shaped aircraft.

The second half of *Portrait* showed dances of later vintage, all with musical accompaniment. The 1993 *Concerto*, to Henryk Górecki, showed more open, air-filled emphases, with Childs' familiar, carefully calibrated paces set more freely and expansively. Górecki's music, metallic and driven, added piquancy to the austere dimension of it all.

A segment from the 2010 *Lollapalooza* (to John Adams), made originally for students, looked thin. Like *Lollapalooza*, the 2015 *Canto Ostinato* (to Simeon ten Holt's burbling music of the same name) involved brief moments of partnering, which only recently became a choreographic interest for Childs. It had a sometime pleasant mating game air, but in the end felt unfinished.

Capping the program, however, the new *Into View*, to *The Sun Roars Into View* by Colin Stetson and Sarah Neufeld, showed Childs' arriving, if perhaps not yet fully arrived, at a new point of exploration. Here 11 dancers, an odd number for a dance that has its cast catching itself into coupled configurations on its shifting and pulsing ways across and over the stage, beguiled the eye with travels that felt spiritual as they took place in the glow of John Torres' halation of light emanating from a pinhole point on the background.

Finally, occupying the second week was what is arguably Childs' most iconic work: *Dance*, the inspired collaboration from 1979, trimmed back to 60 minutes running time. In it, she teamed up with visual artist Sol LeWitt for his overspreading décor of film, with minimalist master Philip Glass for his dryly celestial score, with Beverly Emmons for her counterpoint lighting choices and with costume designer A. Christina Giannini for her trim versions of Childs' tailored uniform look. The much-admired *Dance* has been rewardingly revived on occasion, and this restaging was another welcome one. ▀



Tamara Rojo, still boldly pushing the envelope for English National Ballet since her appointment as director in 2012, has commissioned a new version of *Giselle* from Akram Khan, whose reputation rests on his combination of training in kathak and contemporary dance.

Reading his synopsis for this reimagined version, I was struck by its similarities to George Romero's classic 1978 zombie movie *Dawn of the Dead*. Romero's zombies are an underclass of labourers who dwell in the badlands outside the fortified walls of a giant shopping mall, home to a high society of consumers. The story hinges upon a group of people who cross the boundaries between the consumer class and the undead lumpenproletariat, and it ends with uprising. Khan, meanwhile, recasts *Giselle's* peasants as outsourced labour in a garment factory. His aristocracy, secure within their walled world, are gilded landlords who wear the finery that the workers produce. Albrecht (a landowner) and Hilarion (a wheeler-dealer) are the characters who cross the class divide and hence instigate the drama, while the Wilis of *Giselle* are now the vengeful revenants of dead workers.

Vincenzo Lamagna's music is suitably filmic — awash with brooding swells and (rather too many) ominous crescendos — and though it references Adolphe Adam's original score, it is more concerned with cinematic mood and effect than with articulation and motif. Dominating the set is Tim Yip's marvellous monolithic wall

— the great divide — its forbidding surface marked with the innumerable handprints of those who can never reach the other side.

And the dance? A mixed blessing; as is often the case, Khan is stronger on dramatic imagery than on drama. That matters less in his image-based works, but *Giselle* is structured upon story, and in this production it's never clear who the protagonists actually are, what their relationships mean or why they behave as they do. Consequently, the big emotional scenes on which the piece pivots feel either overwrought or empty.

Leave aside the narrative, and the rest is ravishing. The opening scene is full of relentless factory rhythms: the swing and punch of arms, the push and heave of torsos. *Giselle* encounters the couthured landlords in a tableau that glitters with disdain; the appearance of the Wilis in the ghost factory is a veritable spookfest of unearthly apparitions and malign intent. Khan has an unusual gift for making stillness as enthralling as action, and his ensemble scenes — a turbulent crowd through which his protagonists race, or an identikit workforce within which Albrecht hides — are highly effective.

Ultimately, the piece teeters on ambivalence. On the one hand, it cleaves to the conventions of its source: a tragic love story enacted through leads, supporting roles and chorus. On the other hand, the choreography is stronger on group action and effect than on character and development. Yet unlike Romero's zombies, the corps de ballet — the mass, the labour

force — never becomes a subject in itself or for itself. *Dawn of the Wilis* this is not.

If Khan's *Giselle* is a remake, Michael Keegan-Dolan's version of *Swan Lake* is a complete reboot. The Irish choreographer, an associate artist at Sadler's Wells Theatre, has already reworked other ballets (*Giselle* included), but none is as startlingly strange — it opens with a naked, middle-aged man, tethered to a breeze-block and bleating like a goat — nor as ultimately transfiguring as his *Swan Lake/Loch na hEala*.

Setting the story in the Irish midlands, Keegan-Dolan marries — as so often before — the drab details of earthly life with the transcendent power of myth. The goat-man (actor Mikel Murfi) plays several dodgy characters: priest, policeman, politician, narrator. The drama brings together two tales. One is of Jimmy (Alexander Leonhartsberger), a man in his mid-30s who, haunted by the death of his father and dominated by an imperious crone of a mother (Elizabeth Cameron), is immobilized by chronic depression. The other story is of the young Fionnuala (Rachel Poirier), who has been sexually abused by the priest. She and her three sisters who had witnessed the act are turned into mute swans, forever unable to speak their secret.

The set is a sparse array of blocks, ladders and boxes, like a halfway house that's neither properly lived in nor moved out from. Ragged white wings lie on the ground; the local lake is a sheet of rumpled black plastic. Of these elements, Keegan-Dolan makes magic, both black and white. Jimmy's first encounter with Fionnuala is a marvel of unsentimental tenderness, a wary unfurling of trust. The birthday party is played for grim humour, its guzzling guests egged on by the unhinged hoots of the mother. Everywhere, we feel the interplay between the voiced characters and the voicelessness that surrounds them.

Buoyed by deceptively simple music from folk trio Slow Moving Clouds, the story unfolds with an intuitive emotional and poetic logic (grief, we sense, really is a thing with feathers), and it ends with an apotheosis to die for. Fionnuala and Jimmy plunge into black waters rather than remain in the world they know — and emerge into a kind of heaven. Filled by joyous motion amidst a snowstorm of white feathers, the stage becomes an ecstatic vision of the winged human spirit. *DI*

Included in a triple bill concocted by Benjamin Millepied, Crystal Pite's *The Seasons' Canon* presented in September at the Garnier proved just the right piece — with an almost uncannily prophetic title — to start the season with a bang. The shock came as much from the substance of the work as from the uncharacteristically wild acclaim it received at the premiere. All rose in a spontaneous standing ovation — something that had not been witnessed on the premises since Natalia Osipova and Ivan Vasiliev starred in *Don Q* a few years ago.

Pite is all but a stranger in France and discovering her very special organic style was no doubt instrumental in this raging success. Also, the sheer number of dancers (50 at least), who moved together in a long chain reminiscent of a giant caterpillar, gobsmacked everyone. Nature and animal life, with its wonders and eerie rituals, seem at the heart of the piece. It must be this animalistic and pagan energy that instilled so much liberating fervour from a crowd accustomed to the rigour of more traditional ballet or the banality of some contemporary works. Set to Max Richter's *Recomposed*, a version of Vivaldi's *Four Seasons*, Pite's *Canon* packed a seriously visceral punch spearheaded by feisty Marie-Agnès Gillot as supreme queen of this vibrant dance fest.

This pièce de résistance was preceded by two solid appetizers previously shown last season, starting with Justin Peck's *In Creases*. Peck is also quite unknown in France and created a mini sensation with *In Creases*, which may be best described as neat in both senses of the word. The young man has a nifty flair for quirky geometrical ensembles. He is quite gifted, a dance geek of sorts whose work strikes one as clever, but a little vain.

More energizing was Forsythe's *Blake Works I*, created at the end of last season, mainly for the company's younger dancers to whom Millepied wished to give more pride of place. And sensibly so. Some of them are the definite future of this company and are seriously beginning to steal the thunder from the established étoiles, a few of whom are rarely seen. A return to a stricter hierarchy has since been announced and implemented by new director Aurélie Dupont. But that explosion of youthful energy courtesy of Forsythe is something the Paris Opera should still promote and encourage.

The evening ended with a short yet extravagant (*untitled*) (2016), by Tino Sehgal, who is more of a performance art and installation artist than a choreographer. His show came as a storm of light and sound, with the bare stage animated by dancing black curtains. With one's head spinning, one failed to realize some dancers, including amateurs and Paris Opera recruits alike, were busy gesticulating in the stalls and upper circles like frenzied night clubbers. As (*untitled*) ended, they flew into the grand staircase to join more dancers who nimbly mingled among the departing audience members, several of whom looked a

it. Étoile Alice Renavand and young up-and-comer Hugo Marchand both showed impressive dramatic presence in *Tar and Feathers*, a lesser-known piece from 2006 that has just entered the repertoire. The angst-ridden *Tar and Feathers*, to Mozart played by a pianist on top of a platform on stilts, was attention-grabbing, but also a dull conundrum. Mozart is interrupted at intervals by growls, while the dancers proceed to move like dogs — a motif, incidentally, also present in *Bella Figura*. Also, what is the meaning of the bubble wrap strewn onstage or used as tutus at the end? Why does the piece suddenly switch from Noh-theatre-like drama to farce? And where is the tar, where are the feathers? Whatever the intent, it somehow, uncharacteristically for Kylián, lacks subtlety.

Paris



little dazed but happy. It was a joyful, final mess to end a fantastic evening, paradoxically a triumph for Millepied, who is no longer here.

Dupont chose in December to scrap the Millepied/Antony Tudor evening planned by the ex-director and replace it with an all-Kylián one. Whole evenings dedicated to a sole choreographer can prove a little too much and a disservice to the creator. Kylián delivers some works of rare beauty to awe-inspiring musical scores, but both his fluid and quirky moves in rather dark and sombre atmospheres do pall after a while, even though the pieces were cherry-picked for diversity.

The magnificent *Bella Figura* opened, which showcased one of the most gifted young dancers of the company, Pablo Legasa, whose swift grace illuminated

The last piece, choreographed to and titled after Stravinsky's *Symphony of Psalms*, dates back to 1978 and shows Kylián in one of his most solemn and yet vibrant modes. The piece is potent if overdramatic and characterized by clichéd gender roles. Eve Grinsztajn is riveting throughout, as well as Legasa again, who shows off diabolical jumps.

It is, however, another sombre, dimly lit piece, which, though different from the others, still feels dramatically similar. *Symphony of Psalms* does have a spellbinding conclusion as the dancers, hitherto trapped in a closed space hung with oriental rugs and furnished with chairs that look like devotional prie-dieus intended for kneeling, slowly fade away into the misty horizon.

No wild standing ovation this time. ▫

STOCKHOLM & COPENHAGEN

by Anne-Marie Elmy



When an unknown August Bournonville ballet is restaged today, it is certainly interesting for ballet enthusiasts.

Thus I travelled to Stockholm to see his *Ponte Molle* from 1866 recreated by two Danes, Dinna Bjørn and Frank Andersen, for the Royal Swedish Ballet. It was a continuation of their collaboration from 2009, when they recreated *From Siberia to Moscow* (1876) for the State Ballet of Georgia in Tbilisi.

Bjørn had inherited Bournonville's original notation of both works from her late father, Niels Bjørn Larsen. *Ponte Molle* turned out to be a charming ballet inspired by the Scandinavian artist milieu in 19th-century Rome, which Bournonville knew from his travels to Italy in 1841. The plot is familiar from several of his other ballets: young love and lack of money, but eventually a happy ending. During the overture, the scene of a studio where artists were painting on high speed was amusingly set like a black-and-white silent film on the drop curtain.

Sources show that an actual Ponte Molle Society existed in Rome that arranged festivities at Nordic artists' arrival and farewell. This must have inspired the vivacious dances in the second

tableau, where a military brass band came onstage playing the still well-known tune *Carnaval de Venise*, also known as *My Hat, it has Three Corners*, while a *Pulcinella* from the commedia dell'arte tradition entertained.

Bjørn and Andersen have the Bournonville style in their blood, and the Swedish company has been excellently directed in the style's specific characteristics and danced with the fresh, natural ease it requires. That some soloists probably turned more multiple pirouettes and jumped higher than when the ballet was last performed, in 1911, only bore witness of a living tradition.

Under the title *Distinction*, *Ponte Molle* was contrastingly presented with Israeli choreographer Sharon Eyal's *Bill*. Formerly with the Batsheva Dance Company, Eyal now collaborates with her partner Gai Behar as well as DJ Ori Lichtik and runs her own company.

It was fascinating to watch the clear-cut sculptural solos of five successive male dancers who stood as if naked in flesh-coloured unitards against a changing mono-coloured background. It is rare to see a mature, robustly built, full-bearded man offer his body in such articulate form, as was the case here with one of the men. The movements were angular and strange. Although

radiating an improvised feel, everything was fully choreographed based on the organic Gaga movement vocabulary associated with Batsheva. By and by, both male and female dancers in similar non-costumes filled the space with individual robot-like walks as background for solo outbursts of extreme intensity.

Last season, principal Gudrun Bojesen turned 40, retirement age for a Royal Danish Ballet dancer, but due to maternity leave she never got a farewell performance. So the whole October 15 evening at the Royal Theatre in Copenhagen was devoted to her unique career.

Bojesen entered with former principal Gitte Lindstrøm in Bournonville's amusing *Jockey Dance*, and later other dancers performed excerpts from his *La Ventana*, which Bojesen staged in 2013. The *Flower Festival in Genzano* pas de deux with Mads Blangstrup was shown on film, and there were live interviews with several of her former partners.

One of Bojesen's leading roles was Marguerite Gautier in John Neumeier's *La Dame aux Camélias*. With the passionate Ulrik Birkkjær as Armand, Bojesen danced the white pas de deux as beautifully as ever, when their love is still joyful, following the blue pas de deux of their first meeting alone, which had been shown on film.

Bojesen's comic talent shone when she appeared with Thomas Lund, her frequent partner in the Bournonville repertoire, who is now the director of the Royal Danish Ballet School. Their Quaker couple duet from Vincenzo Galeotti's *Whims of Cupid and the Ballet Master* (1786) made the audience laugh aloud. Lund was her James in the final deadly moments of Bournonville's *La Sylphide*, a fitting farewell in an iconic role in Bojesen's career.

On December 3, the Royal Danish Ballet presented Christopher Wheelton's lavishly mounted *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland* from 2011 in a co-production with the Royal Swedish Ballet. Adding a frame story to the literary text works well, especially for a Danish audience for whom the book may not be part of their childhood memories. The characters introduced at the opening garden party at Alice's Victorian home reappear as curious creatures in her wonder world. Also the author Lewis Carroll is a guest and turns into the anxious White Rabbit. With digital help, we were sucked into a tunnel with Alice and landed in the surreal fantasy world of Bob Crowley's imaginative scenography that cleverly plays with scales, when Alice grows or shrinks.

Alice, onstage almost the entire ballet, is a tour de force role. In the first cast, Ida Praetorius honoured the challenge with expressive enthusiasm and wonder at all that was happening to her, as she was carried along by Joby Talbot's evocative score. Leitmotifs and specific instruments illustrate the nature of the various characters and a wide range of percussion instruments are used.

Bombarded with a kaleidoscopic colour palette and absurd scenes, one gets a chance to catch one's breath during Alice's solos and when she and her Knave of Hearts, the agile Andreas Kaas, grab the opportunity for a sweetheart pas de deux before the parade of dancing animals, flowers and playing cards once more interrupts them.

As the Queen of Hearts, Kizzy Matiakis was a hilarious drama queen, who — in a parody of *Sleeping Beauty's* Rose Adagio — swung between a smiling, confident ballerina and a fretting madwoman, dropped into unflattering positions by her four terrified playing-card partners. The huge Cheshire Cat that was split up into single limbs, which

were moved independently by black-costumed "invisible" stage hands, was brilliant.

Tivoli Ballet Theatre opened on December 1 in the Tivoli Concert Hall with *The Nutcracker*, with choreography by Peter Bo Bendixen, and scenography and costumes by Queen Margrethe II. The experienced ballet conductor, Henrik Vagn Christensen, who also conducted *Ponte Molle* in Stockholm, celebrated Tchaikovsky's score played by the Copenhagen Phil.

This staging is set in a 19th-century Danish home, and is filled with Danish references. For instance, one Christmas party guest is Hans Christian Andersen, who entertains with his fairy tales illustrated by his own paper cuttings blown up on the backdrop. Another guest is Bournonville, who cannot refrain from trying out steps that one recognizes from his ballets.

There are also local references, as when Tivoli director Bernhard Olsen, onstage as one of the guests, presents

Clara with Harlequin, Columbine and Pierrot dolls, characters that are familiar from the pantomimes at Tivoli's Peacock Theatre. The Nutcracker is in the shape of a paper cut out of the soldier from Andersen's *The Tinderbox*, and Clara wins it when she finds the whole almond in the rice pudding, a Danish Christmas tradition. Surrounded by snowball tutu girls, the Andersen-inspired icy Snow Queen tries to entice Clara's brother Fritz, who is rescued by the pantomime trio in a flying balloon. Snow disappears, and we are transported to summer in Tivoli Gardens, where Clara's presents come alive and dance.

One performance had guest dancers for the golden grand pas de deux. A principal with the Czech National Ballet, Moldavian Alina Nanu's technique sparkled in competition with her tutu, and as her gallant partner, Czech Michal Kremár, a principal with the Finnish National Ballet, impressed with utmost lightness in his jumps. ¹¹

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Photos: Sarah Schorlemmer, Gilles Vézina

Last autumn, 2,500 youngsters participated in *On Your Toes*, financed by one of Norway's biggest banks. The project was launched in Oslo, Stavanger, Bergen and Trondheim, the country's four main cities, and aims to build a bridge between talented young dancers and the Norwegian National Opera and Ballet.

Sarah da Fonseca, at the head of the project, is a British dancer and choreographer who works in the opera house's communication centre. She and an assistant gave workshops to groups of about 18 in every city, each with their own choreographer. The project culminated when the four pieces were shown at the second stage in the Oslo Opera House at the end of December. Some

dancers took more than 15 minutes to smear their bodies with honey, which might have signified the complexity of a beehive. There is not much more to say about this evening, which was not one to be remembered.

Another group that toured to Oslo this autumn was Israel's Batsheva Dance Company, with *Last Work* by their superb director Ohad Naharin. Though, fortunately, there is nothing that should make us believe that it is, indeed, his last choreographic work.

In the background, a woman runs on a treadmill during the entire 75 minutes, an impressive feat. Whether she is running away from something or to reach something, we don't know. The Batsheva dancers are extremely well trained, evident in difficult moments of balance on one leg, when they

tempo, and the dancers' upper bodies often do the exact opposite of the lower body. The dancers are also able to bring forward León and Lightfoot's brand of humour.

The second piece, *Sleight of Hand*, also new to Oslo, features a dark family story. On the back wall, approximately five metres above floor level, are an elderly man and woman, maybe the grandparents, nailed to the wall. From the hip down, they must be strongly strapped, but they can move their upper bodies freely and seem to have complete control over the young ones dancing below. Maiko Nishino and Sebastian Goffin are superb in a long pas de deux, in which they fit together as one before they are ripped apart and have to go in different directions.

The last ballet on the bill was *Same Difference*, where seven dancers are living in their own worlds. Yolanda Correa, in opposition to everybody, had a fantastic section during the ending of the ballet. She manages a complete inner, dramatic transformation without moving any parts of the body. At the end, she rushes into the auditorium and says goodbye to all of us.

Another triple bill featuring works new to Oslo was George Balanchine's *Serenade*, *Agon* and *Theme and Variations*. Norwegian National Ballet danced its first Balanchine ballet in 1966 when Sonia Arova was director and, since then, his works have been returning regularly. This time, three leading experts on Balanchine's choreography were brought to Oslo to set the ballets: Colleen Neary for *Serenade*; Sandra Jennings, *Agon*; and Patricia Neary, *Theme and Variations*. These three ballets give newcomers to the Balanchine world a broad introduction to the diversity he created.

The corps de ballet in *Serenade* did well, though some lines and diagonals could have been better. The three ladies taking care of the soloist parts — Julie Gardette, Melissa Hough and Georgie Rose — have the technique needed, and were well partnered by Philip Currell and Mark Wax. *Agon* provided a contrast in this program, since Balanchine uses a completely different choreographic approach here, and it was a pleasure to sit back and enjoy Correa and Dirk Weyershausen as the central couple. The orchestra played Stravinsky with punch, and conductor Andrea Quinn seemed to be in a good symbiosis with the musicians.

Although *Theme and Variations* lacked the great sparkle this ballet needs, all together the evening was a strong homage to a great master. »



years may pass before we have a chance to see if the hard work produces results. Will we see some of the participants onstage with a professional company?

Carte Blanche came to Oslo's Dansens Hus with a double bill titled *We Are Here Together*. The evening's program was a book with nearly 100 pages; when that is needed it makes me a little nervous, and as it turned out, with good reason.

First up was Mia Habib's *Gjallarhorn*, the title referring to a huge bronze horn the gods from Norse mythology used to warn people of some impending threat. The dancers wore heavily sequined black costumes and, in dim light, it was the sequins one could see moving around, not the bodies. The piece started in an extremely slow tempo and it became rather boring. In the opening of Brazilian Marcelo Evelin's *The Who of Things*, the

moved the other leg in impossible positions. They are also all strong personalities, perhaps because they have an artistic director who himself has a very strong sense of self.

Eleven years ago, Norwegian National Ballet managed to sell out every seat when it presented a triple bill with works by the duo León and Lightfoot. This autumn they tried again, with the same success. The company's repertoire features 13 ballets from the pair, who are now in charge of running Netherlands Dans Theater (Paul Lightfoot as artistic director, Sol León as artistic advisor).

The evening opened with *Sad Case* from 1998, danced to infectious Cuban rumba music; it is a wonder the audience did not use the opportunity to stand up and dance, too. With a quick glance, one might think *Sad Case* is a trifle, but, in fact, the choreography is very intricate, with quick changes in



MILAN & REGGIO EMILIA

by Silvia Poletti

The fall was stormy in Italy. Not only because the country was tragically afflicted by earthquakes that destroyed some of the most beautiful villages in the Umbria and Marche regions, but also due to turmoil in the dance world.

The greatest artistic unrest came in Milan as a result of Mauro Bigonzetti's resignation from his post as La Scala Ballet's artistic director after only eight months. Officially, it was due to the choreographer's back problems; Bigonzetti produced a medical certificate prescribing a four-month leave necessary for recovery, but it was clear at the outset that his relationship with the dancers never took off.

In his early days as director, Bigonzetti didn't appreciate the dancers' objections to his first season, which they considered too focused on his own dances. Interviewed by *La Repubblica* newspaper, he, in turn, called the dancers "unprepared." He also attacked former director Makhar Vaziev, saying that "in the last few years, the company has been pushed down ... he looked at East Europe; I, at the entire world."

Often away for other commitments (in June 2016, Alvin Ailey company premiered his *Deep*), Bigonzetti also overlooked the daily training of the dancers, leaving them to his assistants' care. When, in September, he did not accompany the group for an important Asian tour and sent the certificate of his health problems, the leadership breakdown seemed clear.

Roberto Bolle, principal dancer with La Scala Ballet, took away any doubt in an

October 5 television interview when he said Bigonzetti's *Coppélia*, which was scheduled for December, was cancelled. "In these days at La Scala," he said, "tension is all around." On October 6, Bigonzetti received a unanimous vote of no confidence from the dancers; the following day he resigned.

Frédéric Olivieri, the La Scala Ballet School director who became interim company director, had to quickly arrange a replacement ballet. And he did — Kenneth McMillan's *Romeo and Juliet*, featuring the Italian debut of Misty Copeland.

Of course, the buzz around who will be the new director has started. Bolle does not hide his wish to become the next director. Almost 42 years old, still in very good shape, the most popular star of the Italian dance scene is thinking ahead to the next step of his bright career.

Bolle's popularity goes well beyond the traditional ballet audience. This fall, Italy's principal national television channel broadcast a documentary titled *Roberto Bolle: L'arte della Danza* by dance writer and film director Francesca Pedroni. In only three days of showing in more than 200 cinemas all over Italy, the film reached second place in the country's box-office listings. Not to mention that Bolle's performances at La Scala typically sell out and the Bolle and Friends Galas, usually set in big venues like Verona Arena or Rome's Terme di Caracalla, gather huge crowds.

Will Bolle be the next director? It's an important decision, as La Scala Ballet is our national ballet company and needs

care and love to maintain and improve its current standards. This time the controversial intendent of Teatro alla Scala Alexander Pereira must not get it wrong.

Another important dance company, this time in Reggio Emilia, is changing its artistic and management staff. The current national trend is to facilitate the generational turnover and, with this in mind, the Aterballetto board has decided not to renew the contracts of artistic director Cristina Bozzolini and general manager Giovanni Ottolini, which expire in July. This is a pity because in recent years the company has improved in quality, versatility, bravura and artistic proposals, partly because they are now free from Bigonzetti's legacy — the choreographer took away all his ballets from the Aterballetto repertoire when he left his position as principal choreographer and director. This has allowed Bozzolini (who received the 2016 Lifetime Achievement award from Danza & Danza) to create a new repertoire for the company, with careful attention to new Italian choreographers as well as international ones currently working in the dance scene.

For last October's program, she commissioned two men of different ages and artistic stature — the older, renowned Swede Johan Inger and up-and-coming Czech choreographer Jiri Pokorný.

Bliss by Inger, set to Keith Jarrett's *Köln Concert*, is really about a state of grace that emanates from any gesture, any little step. It's a mood ballet, something like Jerome Robbins' *Dances at a Gathering*, though Inger's style seems easier, softer, arising from natural daily movements. Inger takes away instead of superimposing: the essence of his dance is a light, sweet breath of spring air, apparently vague, but persistent, as true happiness can be.

Pokorný, in *Words and Space*, reveals his talent for chiselled movement that is an expression of inner feeling. He wishes to translate in dance an inner soliloquy, the dynamics of thoughts, fears, sensations. So he works on details, even a glance, to describe the streaming of feelings we face in life. Unusual in current dance trends, Pokorný is someone who listens to the deepest emotions to find not only an aesthetic, but also an emotional meeting point with the audience.

It isn't surprising Pokorný and Inger come from Nederland Dans Theater, known to be a contemporary dance company with a human touch. ▀



Spain

by Justine Bayod Espoz

Often when writing about dance in Spain, I feel compelled to note the economics facing Spanish dance companies and their dancers.

The Spanish economic crisis and the political infighting that prevents real economic change and, hence, recovery, has taken such a shattering toll on the country's dance world that it's difficult not to mention. For as much as we may romantically view art as something that rises above such mundanity, art, politics and economics are inextricably linked.

To successfully promote dance in Spain, one has to have a keen understanding of the country's cultural administration and either a talent for exploiting it or a near-mythic ability to work around it.

One of the few professionals in Spain who is successfully navigating these choppy waters is Francesc Casadesús, director of Spain's only dance house, the widely respected Barcelona-based Mercat de les Flors, and president and founder of the European Dancehouse Network, which promotes and presents contemporary dance across Europe. I met with Casadesús in October to discuss the blows dealt to the

Spanish dance scene by a still struggling economy and a lack of funding. He spoke frankly about how Spain's cultural scene in general is undergoing the "complete dismantling of an old system."

Cultural life in Spain has always been almost entirely dependent upon public funding; as such, funding and infrastructure is handled in large part on a regional level. "Then there is the national government, which should act as a regulating agent or policy generator. However, in reality its role has evolved to that of creating national arts centres or groups and doing very little to oversee work on the regional level," Casadesús says.

He points out that the national government's two primary contributions to dance in Spain are the funding and, to a great extent, regulating of the National Dance Company and the Spanish National Ballet. Unlike in other European countries, even Spain's most prestigious theatres don't have in-house dance companies. "Not even the national opera has its own ballet," says Casadesús, giving some justification for the founding of the National Dance Company. However, "The Spanish National Ballet, which performs Spanish dance and basically tours the world demonstrating one particular kind of Spanish identity, tours very little in Spain, so in my opinion they are not living up to their mission of working with audiences nationally."

Casadesús worries that the two exclusively nationally funded dance companies are not providing what Spain's dance scene really needs, namely presenting dance throughout the Spanish territory and contributing to the establishment of strong performance circuits and enthusiastic audiences nationwide. "At the national level, there's no global vision for audience development and talent support," he says, adding that there are national and regional grants or funding programs, but they have long supported only certain artists, who have felt very comfortable and secure with such enviable financial aid.

Even more worrisome for Casadesús is how Spanish governments have sunk millions of Euros into building performing arts spaces, only to provide insufficient funding for projects and knowledgeable management staff.

"This liberalization policy that believes handing over management to private companies will fix all the problems is completely wrong," he says. "Up to now, many of the spaces and projects that have managed to survive have done so only due to the intelligence, strength and sheer will of individuals. The Galician Choreographic Centre was opened, the person in charge changed and shortly after it closed. The Danza Valencia Festival was terminated due to political issues. There's been no policy made to address planning and ongoing support of projects. There has been, however, political interference. New projects almost surely died whenever there was a political change. There's been no pact for continuity."

Aside from seemingly endless funding cuts, a bone-crushing blow was dealt to the arts in 2012, when the national government, under the control of the conservative Partido Popular party, increased tax on tickets to cultural events from eight to 21 percent.

Although the tax is on the tickets themselves, Casadesús explains, "the first option for the majority of theatres, especially publicly funded ones, but some private theatres as well, has been not to pass the tax on to spectators, but rather to absorb the cost themselves. So ticket prices have not increased at the same rate as the sales tax. This decrease in theatre revenue has, therefore, affected performing arts presenters, which has affected their production capacity, which has led to precariousness amongst artists, which has led to lower quality productions, which finally leads to lower government earnings. The government will have a larger intake in the short term, but ultimately they've destroyed the system."

He adds: "This has been horrible for private entities, and while public entities haven't been as affected by the tax increase, they have been subjected to persecution by the Spanish tax office in order to prevent fiscal deductions. They are trying to eradicate any exemptions we've gotten up to now, so we're going to take a second hit that will sink us economically. There's another catastrophe waiting round the corner." ❖

The annual Liveworks Festival of Experimental Art, curated by Sydney's Performance Space, is a stimulating fortnight of dance, exhibitions, conversations and workshops from local and international artists. The Performance Space makes its home at Carriageworks, the former railway workshop complex that was converted into a spectacular venue for contemporary arts practice 10 years ago. Its versatile spaces of different shapes and sizes make the place perfect for a festival that concentrates on the new, or relatively new — three examples of which (two local and one international) are reviewed below.

Kristina Chan's *A Faint Existence* starts with a pulsating, unforgiving light piercing the darkness. The solo picks out Chan's forehead and underscores her cheekbones, sculpting her face into an eerie mask. A lone figure in the gloom, she rises to the balls of her feet then drives her heels into the floor.

Up and down, up and down, again and again she goes to a beat imposed by big, relentless industrial blocks of sound. It's as if Chan is being driven deep into the earth, or perhaps she is the last person on a woefully degraded Earth. From this eloquent and despairing standpoint, there is no anger or call to action. This is the end.

As is often the way, there is exceptional beauty in the depiction of existential threat. The visual elements are few and they are rigorously austere, although there is an oddly calming suggestion of repose in the use of curves rather than straight lines and the way light glows rather than burns.

Clare Britton's design has a central mound that suggests by turns a parched landscape and a dying sun. At the back of the space, high up, a slender, twisting ribbon of fabric sparkles with life-enhancing colours, although the great rushes of air that occasionally animate it feel less benign.

There is a moment of immense poignancy when Chan lies motionless beneath that ribbon, so far out of her reach. Chan has an ability to suspend time that is as exquisite as her phenomenal physical control. She understands the power of stillness and uses it potently.

James Brown's score and Benjamin Cisterne's lighting are integral to *A Faint Existence's* intense impact, and it is interesting to note the involvement of a dramaturg, Victoria Hunt. If only more choreographers took this path: this is a dark work whose intent is absolutely clear while having an air of ineffable mystery.

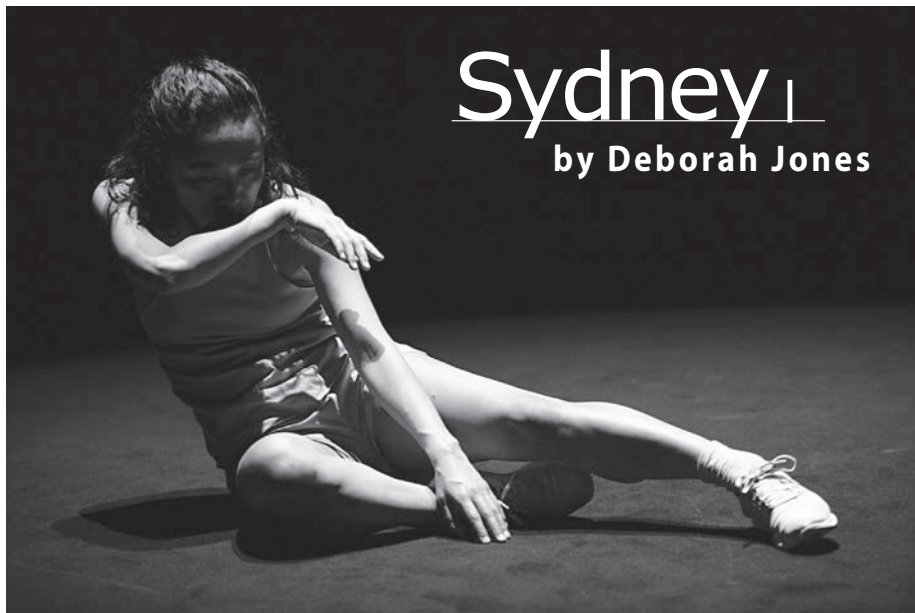
Nicola Gunn and Jo Lloyd's *Mermermer* recently premiered in Chunky Move's Next Move program in Melbourne so it, like *A Faint Existence*, was hot off the presses. While the two works share a less-than-optimistic view of the future, *Mermermer* has slapstick energy and deep devotion to the ridiculous in the face of encroaching darkness. This is *Waiting for Godot*, if only Samuel Beckett had jazzed it up with shiny party streamers and not repeated himself quite so much (*Mermermer* runs a tight 50 minutes). Gunn and Lloyd chat away to one another and seem to find not only comfort, but also necessity in their tangling, tumbling, sweaty physical connection.

While the big curtain at the back of the performance area suggests overt theatricality, and therefore the presence of the audience, Gunn and Lloyd don't look beyond each other. There are no ironic quotation marks around their actions. This immersion in one another is touching, and the effect is amplified by the era-style-forgot costuming (Shio Otani designed). The women look very, very ordinary. They look human.

The work's title carries implications of the persistence, or otherwise, of memory. It also implies a fading of language, perhaps resulting in a weakening of ties between people. Gunn and Lloyd have tried to keep it all going, but it looks as if larger, less chaotic and impersonal forces will prevail. Still, like Beckett's characters Vladimir and Estragon, they have gallantly given it their best shot.

It was also a great pleasure to see Choy Ka Fai's *SoftMachine: XiaoKe x ZiHan* on the international program. Choy, a Berlin-based Singaporean artist, has created a series of contemporary dance portraits combining video with text and movement. This one, featuring dancer Xioa Ke and her artist husband Zhou Zihan (who perform as XiaoKe and ZiHan), takes a critical look at censorship and control in China. Much of it is wryly humorous; there is a glorious piss-take of a propaganda song and a chilling conclusion.

In about 40 minutes it covers a lot of territory and offers keen insights. I wish, though, I'd read Keith Gallasch's interview with Choy in *RealTime* magazine before seeing *SoftMachine* (you can find it online). Apparently an invitation from the Cultural Bureau of China to pop in for a cup of tea is not something you want to receive, knowledge that would have enhanced this viewer's understanding of an exchange between Xioa and Zhou near the end of the work. Good to know now though. ▫



Kristina Chan in her *A Faint Existence*
Photo: Ashley de Prazer

When Frontier Danceland marked its 10th birthday in 2002, the local troupe still had a roster of amateur dancers and students. Mostly it served as a platform for the choreography of its co-founder and artistic director, Low Mei Yoke, whose attempts at fusing Chinese dance with ballet steps and contemporary floorwork represented the friction that she felt, as a Chinese-educated Singaporean, between tradition and modernity. The company has since turned professional and has eight full-time members, with repertoire that largely consists of works made by other artists at home or from abroad. It was thus fitting to see Low return to the stage in her own work for the year-end season to celebrate the troupe's 25th anniversary.

Meanwhile, the dancers broke in and out of unison, with lingering duets and smaller units surfacing from the group. Though the stage was cleared for the alumni performers, their solos and combined forays ended quickly, and they reappeared only in the closing minutes of the show's third and final section.

In the frenetic finale, set to pulsing electronica, the Frontier dancers negotiated the seven lattice towers — by turns obstacles and way stations — punctuating the space. It was also here that Low's scarf re-emerged as a red sweater for young company member Adele Goh, who kept on pivoting in place alone as the lights faded at the end, suggesting a handover to the next generation.

Unusually, the opening and concluding segments of the show bookended a short middle section comprising a

which toured here with a new production presented as part of Kalaa Utsavam — an Indian arts festival coinciding with the Hindu holiday of Deepavali — for its 80th anniversary. The repertory company of Kalakshetra, the prominent arts academy that Bharata Natyam master Rukmini Devi Arundale founded in the southern Indian city of Chennai, premiered *Saraswati Antharvahini* at the Esplanade Theatre Studio. Created by Hari Padman and Lokesh Raj, this full-evening work animated a collection of tales surrounding the Saraswati, a sacred river mentioned in ancient Vedic texts and often personified as a Hindu goddess. She was played here by Sreedevi Jayakrishnan, who stood almost a head taller than the four women in blue portraying the goddess' attendants.

The show's most compelling section depicted a story that explains why the river is said to have vanished millennia ago. According to myth, the sage Vishwamitra ordered Saraswati to bring his rival Vashistha to him; instead, she carried Vashistha away, so Vishwamitra laid a curse to turn her waters into blood, forcing her to flee underground. A churning stage picture enlivened their confrontation, with Saraswati's attendants folding and twining swathes of filmy blue cloth around her to evoke the waves keeping Vashistha out of Vishwamitra's reach. What a shame, then, that despite such superb dancing, the piece never quite managed to bind its 14 parts into a more coherent whole.

It was also a pity that Suzhou Ballet Theatre brought *Legend of Beauty* to the Esplanade Theatre. This muddled dance-drama about the Chinese royal concubine Xi Shi, whose fabled beauty helped topple a kingdom in the fifth century BC, was a feeble showcase for the troupe.

Singapore Dance Theatre fared better at the Esplanade Theatre Studio with two premieres during its contemporary mixed-bill season. In Australian choreographer Timothy Harbour's *Another Energy*, the quivering strings of John Adams' *Shaker Loops* drove 14 dancers into controlled abandon against the glowing ring of an annular solar eclipse. Local artist Christina Chan's *Unfound* saw Reece Hudson and Chua Bi Ru wriggling and bonding over a string of difficult lifts before drifting apart — love going cold all too soon. *DI*



For this milestone, she developed an evening-length piece with input from Frontier's current dancers and some of the former members, including a 51-year-old doctor who had stopped dancing for nearly a decade. Low appeared in the first part of the show, whose Chinese-language title has not been translated into English, though it can broadly mean a moment of consideration or reflection. She stood against the stream of men and women slowly walking backward onto the shadowed School of the Arts Drama Theatre stage, as if pondering the passage of time. Curving gently through space, she gestured with orchid-like fingers before settling into a chair, knitting a long red scarf that trailed onto the floor.

dance film by Kelvin Chew and Martin Hong, which starred four Frontier performers amid the pale sand dunes in the Malaysian state of Malacca. The action includes Joy Wang grappling Goh, Goh exchanging air kisses and shedding tears with Adrian Skjoldborg, and Skjoldborg tumbling on the ground with Daniel Lorenzo. While the short was well filmed, its sun-bleached setting and romantic angst seemed at odds with the rest of the piece and made for a rough transition to the last act. Nonetheless, this was overall one of the troupe's most polished efforts in recent years. One hopes it can continue running at this level until its golden jubilee.

An even bigger landmark was commemorated by the Kalakshetra Foundation,

Reviews



Jessica Lang / Mixed Bill

There was much cleverness at the centre of the five works in this mixed bill by Jessica Lang, performed by her New York-based company on tour to Vancouver's Playhouse theatre October 28-29. I couldn't help but admire that creativity, but the concepts in this two-hour mini retrospective — with two intermissions and even a short film thrown in — too often got bogged down in prettiness.

Lang is an American artist I have wanted to catch up with; her name of ten figures in the ongoing, and necessary, conversation about the need for more female choreographers. Her name is also found in the programs of major ballet companies; this past summer, Pacific Northwest Ballet premiered Lang's *Her Door to the Sky* and Birmingham Royal Ballet premiered *Wink*, to name a couple.

Lang's interest in visual art was apparent in the opening piece, *Lines Cubed* (2012), for which Dutch modernist Piet Mondrian was the easily identified inspiration, with the work neatly divided into sections defined by colour — Black, Red, Yellow, Blue. A painterly abstraction seemed to drive the energy and shapes of the eight dancers, who wore single-coloured tunics and tights according to which section they were in, all coming together for the finale.

Yet the attempt to abstract legs and arms into unemotional lines and curves with the variously shaped bodies of real people seemed limiting; I clocked the effect, rather than being moved by it. The Mondrian-inspired space looked good, with set design by molo, a Vancouver, B.C.-based design duo, whose expandable accordion-pleated structures created moveable form and borders that contributed to the painterly look.

The strength of *i.n.k.* (2011), which closed the evening, was also in set design, in this instance, video projections by Japanese-born, New York-based visual artist Shinichi Maruyama. At first, small splashes of ink travel across the huge upstage screen while the sounds of dripping water plonk heavily above the lightly sounding commissioned score by Jakub Ciupinski. The inky blots gain weight and size until there is one dramatic and threatening wave of black under which the dance takes place.

The seven black-clad dancers in pink ballet slippers are kept busy in steps and shapes that seem more calculated than organically derived. There's an abrupt, overly prescribed quality; even when one of the dancers runs into the arms of another during a pas de deux, there is no sense of abandon or of dramatic motivation to showcase the run and give us a reason to pay attention to it. The coming together of the two bodies does not match the visceral power of those black inky blotches on the screen.

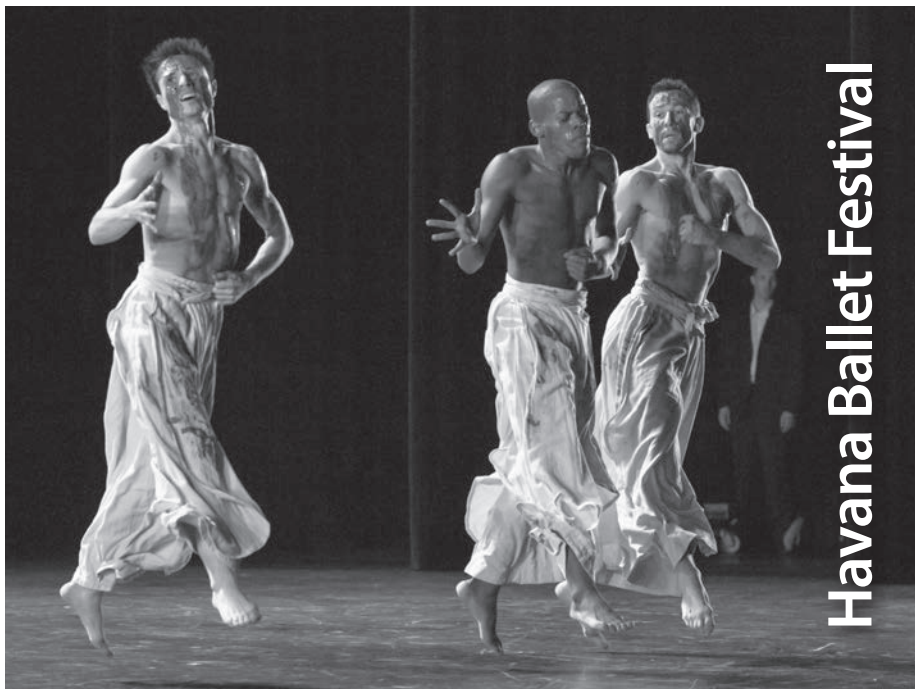
In *The Calling*, a brief solo excerpted from 2006's *Splendid Isolation II*, the visual effect was built from costume and movement. The piece began with Kana Kimura facing upstage, clad in a long white gown that pooled into a large circle around her in the centre of the stage. From this arresting image Lang built a five-minute solo filled with expressive arms, shoulders and back. A startling dream-like moment came when Kimura seemed to melt into the pool of her own dress (she is actually bending her knees very deeply). The music, *O Maria, stella maris*, by Trio Mediaeval, added a spiritual aura.

Thousand Yard Stare (2015) is titled after a term that refers to the blank, unfocused gaze of an exhausted, traumatized soldier. That, and the nine khaki-costumed dancers who marched in unison (while Beethoven's *String Quartet No. 15* plays), situated the piece in battle. The group paused, one pink, ballet-slipped flexed foot lifted, the march cut off mid-step, and in that sudden pause, a question seems to be asked. Yet what the choreographer was pointing to was never apparent. In one section, lights flashed high above as the dancers carried each other in ways that suggested the burden of weight, but the partnering could have belonged to any number of scenarios to do with war or romance.

The film, which ran after the second intermission, was titled *White* (2011) and it was indeed that: white-clad dancers projected bigger than life-size in an all-white space. Despite the size, their presence on film did not compare with the live dancers, for whose return I found myself waiting.

Lang is an ex-dancer with the Twyla Tharp company, and Tharp's relaxed ballet aesthetic was certainly visible in these works. That aesthetic looks a little tame today, a little safe, though Lang's creations might well offer a pleasant interlude on a more gripping and contemporary mixed bill.

— KAIJA PEPPER



Festival Roundup

The National Ballet of Cuba, under the feisty leadership of dance matriarch Alicia Alonso, may well be a metaphor for the changing face of Cuba itself. There are no more cheap mojitos at ballet intermissions and no more cheap ballet tickets. Hotels are difficult to book in Havana, and tourists are flocking in by the planeload, hoping to catch a glimpse of the capital city before it morphs into something new and different. They're almost too late.

Like the great ballet company that has been one of the main cultural faces of this troubled country, Cuba is finding new life and energy while retaining vestiges of the architecture, landscape and dance loved by many. And, as far as the public is concerned, Alonso, at 96, is the queen of the ballet; in fact, the name of the theatre where the company performs has been amended to enshrine her contribution to culture — it is now called Gran Teatro de La Habana Alicia Alonso.

What goes on in the management offices of the Cuban company Alonso founded is less clear. There are contenders here for leadership and we can certainly expect a different face of the company when Alonso is gone, though she has told me on more than one occasion she believes herself to be

immortal. Alonso's legacy may very well provide her "immortality" if this year's 25th Havana Ballet Festival is anything to go by.

The 10 nights of dance in October were framed by two important ballets, which Alonso had danced to great acclaim around the world. Her choreography for these works, *Swan Lake* and *Giselle*, make them two of her best and most interesting creations, precisely because she retains classical and Romantic purity, while at the same time offering slightly different versions of these popular pieces.

With *Giselle*, exquisite attention to detail and technical performance complemented perfectly by devotion to the art of storytelling made the festival performances impeccable. There were no inclusions of technical bravura for bravura's sake. There were no intrusions by the modern world. From the autumnal haze of the early scenes, with their lyrical dancing, fomenting passion and stirring sense of romance, to the heartbreaking conclusion, this is a *Giselle* to rival the very best versions seen today.

Anette Delgado embodied the living, breathing essence of *Giselle*. There is the tragic vulnerability, the heart-pounding hope and the sense that love is the most important thing in her bucolic world. Her little bourrées, hops onto pointe and elegant pirouettes worked perfectly for the character. Her mad scene didn't

have the rage of a young Makarova or Evelyn Hart, but she is so crushed by life we are swept completely along on her terrible journey.

Dani Hernández may not be a Cuban stallion of perfect proportions, like Carlos Acosta or José Manuel Carreño, but he is a wonderful boyish Albrecht. His jumps are clean, neat and soft as fluffy down. His hands and arms are always expressive. And his long, lean body suggests a man enraptured by innocence.

In the final act, the corps de ballet creates a dark synergy, a fearful organism of evil, a powerful sense of retribution they cast against the sweet forgiveness of *Giselle's* broken spirit. This is very much Alonso's *Giselle*, a beautiful evening of vintage dance.

Less successful, by far, was Alonso's *Swan Lake*, danced by Viengsay Valdés and a last-minute replacement, Moisés Martín from the National Ballet of Spain, for an injured Siegfried. Martín offered a soft, unsympathetic character, and his lack of attack failed to match Valdés' powerful duality as Odette/Odile. In many ways it looked like these two dancers met onstage for the first time. Valdés, rock solid in the fouettées and vicious as the evil Odile, isn't, however, perfect casting for this ballet. Her body is not willowy enough for the battered Odette, too tough and sinewy for the cruel betrayal of Odile. Alonso's production, set in ugly new designs by Ricardo Reymenta that were too highly coloured, was harshly lit by Ruddy Artiles' florid lighting.

Also, the dancers' annoying habit of stopping every few minutes to bob and bow like circus ponies constantly broke the mood and destroyed its build. This is something the Cuban group has aped from the big Russian companies. It has never worked to the advantage of *Swan Lake's* story.

Two stunning moments of dance, representing the heights of Romantic and classical era ballets, were given on one of the festival's best mixed programs. *La Sylphide*, blessed with perfect performances from Aymara Vasallo and Gretel Morejon in the Prelude and Waltz respectively, shimmered with beauty. Alonso's version, set perfectly in the usual moonlit glade, has a requisite sense of mystery. Steps here were never the mere plodding of mortals, but rather footsteps of some glorious moonlit spectres.



Paquita Grand Pas de Deux sparkled with gorgeous performances from Valdés and Patricio Reve (just possibly the next great Cuban star), supported by a corps of superb female dancers.

One of several guest companies, Les Grands Ballets Canadiens de Montréal, gave an intriguing account of a modern dance ethos with *Black Milk*, a segment of *Minus One* by Ohad Naharin set to music by Paul Smadbeck. Powerful dancing created a sense of evil in this anti-war piece and the dancers from Canada — Marcin Kaczorowski, Jeremy Raia, Andrew Wright, Jeremy Rivera and Hervé Courtain — were a tight unit and a hit with the international and Cuban audience.

There were other stellar moments. Valdés and New York City Ballet's Joaquín De Luz gave a fiery account of the explosive *Don Quixote Pas de Deux*. Every trick worked and every moment sent shivers down your spine. There was also Javier Torres' own version of *The Dying Swan*, all muscular writhing with dark ferocious moments. Sadaise Arencibia and Raúl Abreu were compelling in the exquisite pas de deux from *Raymonda*. And Lucia Solari and Torres were thrilling in David Nixon's *Wuthering Heights*. Their power and commitment made me want to see the whole ballet the next time Nixon's Northern Ballet is anywhere on my radar.

Finally, there was nothing better than the brilliant flamenco of Latin dancer Irene Rodríguez in *Secreto*. Her choreography and dancing were exciting and her Irene Rodríguez Company is well known by Cuban audiences. Rodríguez's interplay with the onstage musicians, as well as her artistic integrity, were breathtaking. She is a diva, divine one, darling of dance, all rolled into one. I'd walk on hot coals to see her again.

— GARY SMITH

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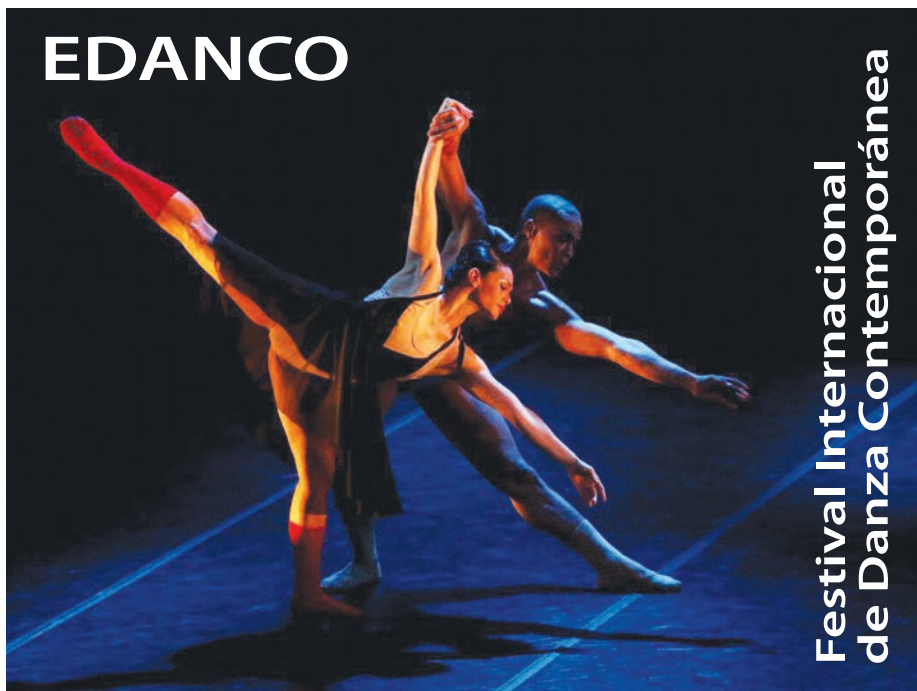
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EDANCO



Festival Internacional de Danza Contemporánea

followed. The combative nature of the dance suggested an abusive relationship, a theme I noticed again and again during the festival. Here, both partners are equally formidable, but the power dynamic constantly switches — he lifts her, then vice versa; he applies lipstick to her mouth, she wipes it off later using his shirt as a cloth. Is it abuse if each partner gives as good as they get? The question was not resolved, but the ending of *Dispar* was a lot less despairing than several other short works that chose to leave power unbalanced, or proposed violence as a solution.

To close the evening, the Ballet Nacional Dominicano took the stage with Francisco Centeno's *Guara ar iu filin?* (How does that make you feel?). Centeno is from Costa Rica, but is a large presence all over Latin America and the Caribbean where he is much in demand as a guest choreographer.

Guara is a sprawling full-length ballet and we were only offered excerpts, which

Festival Roundup

In the Dominican Republic, 2016 is the Year of Dance. But, in the capital, Santo Domingo, there were few manifestations of this federal designation — no banners, no billboards, no newspaper ads. Nonetheless, the program at the 12th annual EDANCO Festival Internacional de Danza Contemporánea was rich and varied, reflecting a healthy depth of training and talent in the region, as well as a burgeoning and enthusiastic audience for contemporary dance.

Held at the grandiose Palacio des Bellas Artes, set in manicured grounds a few blocks from the city's famed oceanside promenade, the festival featured mixed programs of Dominican artists, as well as guests from elsewhere in the Latin-Caribbean diaspora, and as far afield as Canada, Finland, Spain and the United Kingdom.

Edmundo Poy, a much-loved professor of contemporary dance at the Escuela Nacional de Danza, programs the 13-day event each year. Poy typically gives a lot of space to emerging artists, so it's fitting that the festival kicked off with an offering by youth ensemble Endanza Juvenil, made up of Poy's own students.

El Bolero de Raquel, choreographed by local stalwarts Dayme del Toro and Marcos Rodríguez, is built around a giant table on wheels that the dancers take turns using as a pedestal or manipulating around the



stage. In addition to precision group work and solos, the choreography features some complex table-to-ground dynamics involving handstands and spectacular leaps. The work has a lot of moving parts, but the youthful cast handled it with aplomb, solid technique and some beautiful lines.

Next up on the opening program, del Toro (who is a member of the National Contemporary Dance Company), choreographed and performed *Gleba*, mostly confined to a huge mound of beach sand centre stage. Framed by the music of Laurie Anderson and Wim Mertens, del Toro digs, scrabbles crab-like in the sand, and strikes poses as she lowers herself deeper into the shifting pile.

Dispar (Dissimilar), an athletic duet for Patricia Ortega and Erick Roque of the National Contemporary Dance Company (they also choreographed the work),

could explain its slight incomprehensibility. The work showcased some great company dancers; I couldn't take my eyes off petite principal Laura Benítez with her long back and fiery attack.

Centeno's movement is very athletic with a strong emphasis on the shoulders and upper body — and the company wears it well. Some of the men were remarkable, more buffly muscular than is typical of North American classical dancers. Alexander Duval was especially entrancing as he lip-synced to some truly crazy trills from 1950s' cult Peruvian singer Yma Sumac. Even though I caught the general breeze of cultural references — 1930s Hollywood, film noir, Cocteau — I couldn't really make heads or tails of the piece. Didn't really matter.

Centeno choreographed another major work at the festival, *Confesiones de un*

Top: Ballet Nacional Dominicano's Ariadna Roblejo and Joel Rodríguez in Francisco Centeno's *Guara ar iu filin?*
Photo: Enzo

Below: Raphaëlle Bertoni (centre) with Jose Carlos Oviedo Luciano and Fabienne Denis in Bertoni's *Et on continue*
Photo: Sandra Garip

primate en el Km. 50, which was created for Fernando Hurtado on the occasion of the Spanish dancer's 50th birthday. The work is a tour de force hour-long solo in which the performer seems to be communicating with an invisible tormenter. Surrounded by mirrored cubes and Mylar squares taped to the floor, Hurtado grimaces, jerks and poses like a bodybuilder. Sometimes he speaks (there is a long monologue in Spanish delivered as Hurtado eats a banana), he re-arranges his prop furniture, he changes his clothes and he dances.

As the week's programming advanced, first warnings of the looming category 4 Hurricane Matthew failed to deter audiences to the festival. Neither did security concerns (there were armed guards at each entrance) or power outages (a government-run institution, the Palacio must have its own means for generating power — the building and surrounding garden were lit up every night).

One convention at EDANCO left me furious. For each performance, the first row of seats in the theatre was occupied by photographers shooting stills and video, complete with glowing screens, loud clicks and beeps and, all too often, flash. During Hurtado's show, the flashes and lights were reflected in the mirrored set, becoming part of the *mise en scène*. During another show, a photographer answered a phone call and spoke for several minutes while audience members hissed and shushed.

EDANCO is a lengthy festival and there were dozens of works. Some programs attracted large crowds (anything featuring Dominican dancers), but not everything was memorable. A few pieces absolutely were. And there was a wonderful cross-referencing of talent; several dancers who performed showed up later as choreographers.

For example, Duval also choreographed and danced a brief ballet with Benítez. *Desde el silencio* takes athleticism in classical technique to a new level. As it began, a pair of pointe shoes was spotlight centre stage. Duval and Benítez dance barefoot, then sit and put on ballet shoes (there is a pair of men's slippers tucked inside the pointe shoes), all of this in silence. The music (by Spanish composer Cesar Benito) begins and a second dance starts, full of complicated lifts and extensions that highlight Duval's brute strength and Benítez's flexibility. Danced precisely and at maximum speed, the duet barely lasts three minutes.

I had hoped for more representation from Haiti, fewer than two hours by car

to the west, but there was only Raphaëlle Bertoni, a Haitian artist who lives in Santo Domingo with her piece *Et on continue* (And one goes on).

Accompanied by singer Fabienne Denis and percussionist Jose Carlos Oviedo Luciano, Bertoni performed a contemporary expression of the Haitian voodoo ritual *Yanvalou*, a dance of supplication and fertility built around undulating movements of the spine. Bertoni's depiction of a woman carrying on after being laid low was dignified, stunningly fluid and emotionally uplifting. For me, it was a highlight.

Although I wasn't able to see all of it, there was quite a bit of Canadian content at EDANCO. Michaela Dennison and Natasha Dennison from Four Season Dance Academy in Brockville, Ontario, contributed several pieces to an emerging artists showcase held on the closing weekend, which also featured dancers representing Aurora Dance Academy in Thompson, Manitoba. I did catch Montreal's Andrea Peña and her company in *Kairos*, a well-made investigation of individuality. Detail in the scenic transitions and striking imagery gave it a gothic, angels versus demons quality, sort of like a medieval triptych come to life, darkly atmospheric.

It was refreshing to watch dance through the new and unfamiliar lens of southern island culture. The things I found strange — the photographers, the prevalence of crudely sketched heterosexual dynamics (to be fair, there's lots of it here as well), the frequency of swimsuits as costumes, the ripped musculature on many of the performers — were offset by the quality and range of dance on display and the unquestionable vitality of the contemporary scene in Santo Domingo.

— KATHLEEN SMITH



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and wanted to create a ballet based on Federico Garcia Lorca's play *The House of Bernarda Alba*.

Haydée explains, "Alain Honorez was my perfect Carabosse in *The Sleeping Beauty* and created the role of Rothbart in my *Swan Lake*. Not only is he a brilliant dancer, but one with an intuitive dramatic sense. I felt he would be ideal as the Mother in *Bernarda*."

As for Nuñez, an ex-first soloist of Royal Ballet Flanders, Haydée had seen her *Symbiosis*, a duet performed at a gala in Buenos Aires, as well as a rehearsal of her *Claroescuro* by the Flanders troupe in

Third Choreographic Festival

Teatro Municipal de Santiago in Chile is one of the most important "houses" in South America. Its gracious white, red and gold interior has, for 150 years, played host to countless stars. Anna Pavlova was the first important dancer to visit and, in recent times, Carlos Acosta and Svetlana Zakharova danced here. The great dramatic ballerina, Brazilian-born Marcia Haydée, performed in the theatre for the first time in the 1970s, with her partner Richard Cragun. Haydée was then prima ballerina of Stuttgart Ballet, which she had joined in 1961, soon becoming artistic director John Cranko's muse, and later turning her hand to choreography.

Haydée was invited back to Santiago to choreograph a work for Ballet de Santiago, the company that is based in Teatro Municipal. By then, she was Stuttgart Ballet's artistic director, after the untimely death of Cranko in 1973. When an invitation followed to direct the Chilean troupe, she found she couldn't say no and, in 1992, became director of both companies.

Today, as the director of just Ballet de Santiago, and closing in on 80, Haydée's energy, quick mind and sharp intelligence would put many 20-year-olds to shame. A few days after I arrived to view the company's Third Choreographic Festival last October — a two-hour program repeated over four nights — she was jetting off to



Korea to put the finishing touches to her acclaimed version of *The Sleeping Beauty*.

A savvy lady, she began her directorship by building an appealing repertoire to draw in the conservative-minded Chilean ballet audience, one that contained dramatic roles for her dancers. Cranko, MacMillan and Béjart were her immediate choices. More recently, Haydée began slowly developing both the public's and the dancers' appreciation of modern classical ballet; hence the introduction of a choreographic festival, one that, she was quick to emphasize, was not intended to be a platform for experimental works. She started the event, she says, because "choreographers have given me so much, I owe it to them to give something back."

We also talked about the two Europeans taking part, Belgian dancer Alain Honorez and Spanish-born choreographer Altea Nuñez. Honorez's inclusion began with an idea by Jaime Pinto, who had already created many works for Ballet de Santiago

Antwerp, where it had premiered in 2014. Both had made a strong impact. "Altea's choreographic voice, musical choices and lighting ideas struck me immediately as highly original."

Later, watching a rehearsal of *Percussion for Six*, choreographed by Venezuelan Vicente Nebrada in 1969 and scheduled to open the festival's program, it was evident why Haydée had chosen it. As she told me with obvious satisfaction, "I have several really good young men who absolutely demand to be seen." *Percussion for Six* is a "show-off" piece for six men, stylistically dated, but a real crowd-pleaser; it certainly placed the fine Chilean dancers centre stage. However, it did suffer without a second cast. This meant that, with a really tight rehearsal schedule (they were working on and performing Cranko's full-length *Onegin* up until a week previously) and with the inevitable injuries, a couple of replacements had to learn the piece in double-quick time.

It was a similar scenario for *Los Pajaros de Neruda*, from resident choreographer Eduardo Yedro (an overly long, rather ponderous neoclassical work). With a lead soloist off days before the premiere, young corps member Katherine Rodriguez had only a day to rehearse and step onstage; she did it totally unfazed, earning her the compliment “supergirl” from her director.

Honorez and Nuñez had their own difficulties. For Honorez, his connection with Pinto was slow to combust. “While Jaime starts by knowing more or less what he wants, he relies on a younger man to demonstrate. At ‘third-hand,’ so to speak, the movement appeared stilted to me. Another difficulty was that the company’s style is not very grounded, something a work like *Bernarda* seemed to demand.” When Honorez threw caution to the wind and interpreted the dance in his own fashion, rehearsals caught fire. “What also helped enormously,” says Honorez, “was that I was surrounded by great drama.”

He was referring to the sensitively wrought portrayals by *Bernarda*’s other protagonists. Haydée has fostered the

company’s dramatic facility at all levels; according to her, Cranko’s maxim was that the strength of any ballet’s narrative lay in the believability of the corps.

With Nuñez’s *Claroescuro*, at first the off-balance moves, with torsos and arms that scroll and twist, off-kilter partnering and grounded language did not come easily to the company. The physical and emotional content began to resonate with them, however; the piece, set to a musical compilation by Héctor González Sánchez, plays with light and shadow to reveal the passion and yearning, jealousy and temptation, to which young people are often prey. In performance, both casts were a revelation.

On opening night, all hiccups were smoothed over and the company pulled out all the stops. The men (particularly Emmanuel Vazquez and the exceptionally talented Gustavo Echevarria) and women shone in *Percussion for Six* and *Los Pajaros de Neruda* respectively. *Bernarda* delivered a powerful punch while young Romina Contreras, partnered by Gabriel Bucher, shimmered at the centre of the atmospheric *Claroescuro*.

Haydée had decided, quite late in the day, to include *D a la cuarta (D4)*, a work-in-progress by company member Esdras Hernández, whose title refers to four words beginning with “d”: disappearance, deportation, destruction, defiance, which define the suffering of a people living under a dictatorial regime. Haydée’s frequent work absences while setting her ballets often necessitate this kind of impulsive decision; on this occasion, her instincts served her well. In this theatrically inventive work, Hernandez showed definite promise and is also a talented musician, having composed the music himself.

Haydée’s present contract is reported to terminate at the end of the 2017 season. It will be fascinating to see which direction the company will take when this happens; the program revealed a strong divide between conservative and forward-looking. The backing of Chile’s powerful artists’ union provides the dancers with a fair amount of influence (albeit discreetly), and they are hungry to grow. Their director herself has led the way forward.

— JUDITH DELMÉ

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Below left: Artists of Ballet de Santiago in *Bernarda*
Photo: Edison Araya

A Cover Story | Celebrating 40 years of *Dance International*



In the early years of *Dance International*, which was initially called *Vandance*, the magazine was black and white only. The first covers had minimal text, the image alone carrying the job of enticing readers in. I became art director in 1993, during this era, and appreciated how an absence of colour focused the eye more closely on form, shape and tone. For the Spring 1997 issue, as a special tribute to National Ballet of Canada ballerina Karen Kain, who was retiring from the stage, the budget was stretched to include duotone, which we used to add a hint of colour in her burgundy dress. There was no going back, and our design evolved to full colour in Fall 1997.

The last cover in the small display above — a mere 16 chosen from the 160 that have been designed over 40 years — is from Winter 2014. It features a young Royal Winnipeg Ballet dancer, Yoshiko Kamikusa. Her leap is dynamic, her costume flowing, her expression radiant, altogether an ideal representation of the story celebrating the RWB's 75th anniversary and one of the magazine's most well-received covers.

— **BRENDA FINAMORE**
ART DIRECTOR, DANCE INTERNATIONAL

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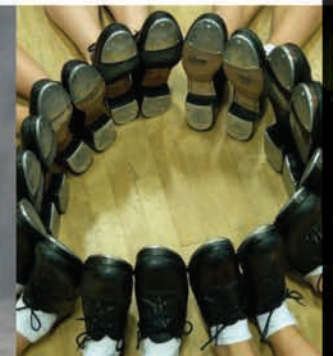
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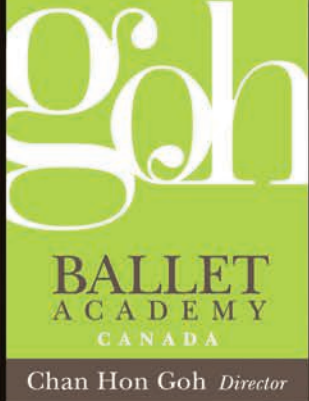
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