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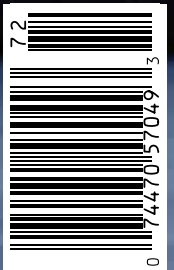
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“No extra moves!” These were Elena Glurjidze’s words of advice during a recent master class I observed in Vancouver as young dancers tackled a challenging sequence of steps. The Georgian-born, ex-English National Ballet principal has proven herself to have the determination and stamina to power through the most fiendish classical moves onstage, and yet she conducted her class with calm, quiet authority. Glurjidze’s focus on

the essentials clearly helped build balance and strength in the dancers, to say nothing of elegance. (I wish our world leaders would follow her lead, but that’s another very different story.)

“No extra moves” could become my mantra here at the editor’s desk as we strive to bring you the essential stories from the world of dance. With so much going on, we have to pick and choose, and make each word count. In this issue, our coverage ranges from Jennifer Fournier’s sprawling international feature on the corps de ballet — jam-packed with information and insight on this important part of the large-scale ballet enterprise — to our Galleryspace back page, which spotlights a new digital archive in Montreal.

Our fourth “short story” collection begins on page 26. This time, a range of contributors share their memories of watching an unforgettable dance performance. These collections have become an annual tradition and I’m thinking about the next instalment already: stories about inspirational teachers.

If there is a dance teacher from your past who made a difference to you, I would love to hear why: please email me your story in 250 words or less, describing what makes this individual memorable.

We’re offering a complimentary annual subscription to two randomly chosen readers who send a story, to be used themselves or gifted to a fellow dance lover. We’ll make the draw on August 1.

A handwritten signature of Kaija Pepper in a cursive script.

Kaija Pepper
editor@danceinternational.org

www.danceinternational.org



Dance International



DIMagazine

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San Francisco Ballet's Rebecca Rhodes (centre) with company dancers in George Balanchine's *Theme and Variations*
Photo: Erik Tomasson



Life in the Corps de Ballet

Insights from
the ground in
North America
and Europe

by Jennifer Fournier

For classical ballet, an art form born in the court of the aristocracy, rank is foundational. Hierarchy is embedded in the canonical works, populated as they are by peasants and gypsies, and dukes and princesses, and in the companies themselves where the principal dancers quite literally reign, onstage and off. But while the spotlight may shine more brightly on the stars, a company's reputation is won or lost by the artistry and standard of dancing by its corps de ballet.

To find out more about the challenges and rewards of life in the corps de ballet, I spoke with several corps dancers at a variety of stages in their performing careers — all fine artists in their own right — from large ballet companies in North America and Europe, as well as two ballet mistresses.

Almost all dancers start their career in the corps, but increasingly they perform with a company for some time without any guarantee of being hired full time. Katie Bonnell, a dancer in her mid-20s at the Royal Winnipeg Ballet, danced first as an aspirant while still in the company's school and then as an apprentice for a total of four years before she was offered a full-time corps contract last year.

Rebecca Rhodes, a 28-year-old senior corps dancer at San Francisco Ballet, also spent years as a trainee, working on

repertoire during the day and performing at night with other trainees all over the Bay area, and augmenting the company in larger productions when needed. She was only one of two of the 11 trainees to get a coveted contract with San Francisco Ballet as an apprentice in 2009.

Lise-Marie Jourdain of the National Ballet of Canada and Laurence Laffon of Paris Opera Ballet, both in their late 30s, began their careers at the Paris Opera where dancers apprentice for anywhere from six months to a year before being offered a tenure-track position. Unlike many companies where dancers can join at the level of principal or soloist, Paris Opera Ballet promotes, with rare exceptions, from within and all dancers must begin in the lowest of five designated ranks, quadrille. (To give some sense of the complex hierarchy at Paris Opera Ballet, there are three ranks forming the corps de ballet: quadrille, coryphée and sujet.)

Lower-paying apprenticeships may make good financial sense for companies that need to keep overhead low, but the reality is even the finest ballet training doesn't fully prepare a dancer for the demands of a professional corps. Jourdain, who has 22 years of experience, recalls that in her first years at the Paris Opera she would understudy several women in one



Left: The Royal Winnipeg Ballet's Katie Bonnell in Peter Quanz's *Luminous*
Photo: Leif Norman



Right: The National Ballet of Canada's Lise-Marie Jourdain in *Rubies* from George Balanchine's *Jewels*
Photo: Bruce Zinger

ballet: “It was stressful dancing a different person every night, but it was also a very good place to learn how to dance in the corps de ballet.”

Amanda Clark, a senior corps member of Seattle’s Pacific Northwest Ballet, called dancing in the corps “a steep learning curve — as a student the process is much slower because you spend a whole year rehearsing for a performance. Suddenly you have to learn how to judge a line and know not just the count but the right part of the count — and it all has to become innate.”

Laffon, now an accomplished sujet who has danced with the Paris Opera Ballet for 20 years, likened the process of learning the classics to a rolling train that has long since left the station, which the new dancers “have to catch.”

Ballet mistresses are crucial to the process of achieving the uniformity necessary for the classics. Their jobs are especially difficult where dancers are drawn from different schools around the globe. Caroline Gruber, former principal dancer and current ballet mistress of the Royal Winnipeg Ballet, says her job is to bring the ballet to life: “I don’t want rows of dancers without interpretation — but I do want oohs and aaahs at the uniformity. I work on the turn of the hand, alignment, the way the foot is placed on the floor.”

Lorna Geddes, a veteran of the National Ballet of Canada who danced in the corps for 25 years until she was appointed as assistant ballet mistress in 1984, says she used to coach new corps members privately in the style of the work and help them

and sometimes don’t have second casts, they risk getting injured before they even get to the theatre unless they learn how to back off before injuries occur, says Pacific Northwest Ballet’s Clark. Pacing yourself is especially hard for corps dancers who undertake soloist roles, because they will sometimes alternate between dancing in the corps in one act, where muscles tighten up from all the standing around onstage, and dancing a solo in the next act, which requires a different kind of physical and mental preparation. Young dancers might assume they will be relieved of their corps work when they have an important solo, but, as Jourdain says, there is an unwritten code: “It would never occur to me to get out of corps work to save myself for a solo,” noting that “as you age it does get harder.”

Laffon, who has three years until mandatory retirement at the age of 42 with the Paris Opera Ballet, worries on days when her body is really hurting that she may not be able to perform classical ballets such as *Swan Lake* for much longer.

Another aspect of life in the corps, especially in the early years, is the paradoxical feeling of being on your own. Unlike principal dancers who develop intimate professional and personal relationships with coaches, corps dancers are often left to shoulder the challenges of professional development with minimal support from management. For example, after dancing a soloist or principal role, a dancer usually hears from the ballet master or artistic director immediately after their performance — for a corps dancer a cursory, “Good show everyone,”

The dancers learn to depend on each other. Mentoring is vital, and all of the older dancers interviewed say that passing on their knowledge is empowering.

learn how to use peripheral vision to check the line or height of their arms without moving their head or eyes.

Geddes adds that Rudolf Nureyev, who made regular tours with the company, insisted on full movement from the corps, with lots of bend in the torso and deep pliés. From him Geddes learned how useful it was to watch the corps from the wings to get another perspective, as Nureyev used to do before his performances. “I remember Rudi warming up in the wings during *Sleeping Beauty* and belting out ‘stretch your feet!’ or ‘wake up!’”

Learning how to handle the intense workload is one of the greatest challenges at every stage of a career. At San Francisco Ballet, for example, there is a four-month season right on the heels of three weeks of *Nutcracker*. “When you are a principal or soloist, you get nights off, but, in the corps, you are expected to dance every night,” says Rhodes. In her first year with the company, Rhodes developed a stress fracture and was so worried about losing her job, she didn’t tell anyone. “Looking back, I wished I had stopped earlier — I didn’t know you could take time off to let an injury heal.”

Because the corps do runthroughs with every cast of principals,

delivered onstage to the whole company, sometimes has to suffice.

Gruber tries to confine herself to positive comments to the group after the performance, saving her individual notes for the next day so as not to ruin the experience of the show.

As dancer Jourdain explains, “You need feedback as an individual, but in the corps there are so many people on every night, so the feedback is delivered to the group. I sometimes feel a bit lost without personal corrections.”

Although corps dancers have yearly performance reviews, Clark also believes there should be more communication — about artistic choices, casting and performances.

The dancers learn to depend on each other. Mentoring is vital, and all of the older dancers interviewed say that passing on their knowledge is empowering. Rebecca Rhodes says she has taken on a maternal role with the younger dancers, helping them with their soft corns (the bane of a dancers’ existence), for example. She also notes how the atmosphere at San Francisco Ballet has become more supportive over the years; today, principal dancers might point out what they liked about her performance, and even the younger dancers feel free to give such positive feedback.



The National Ballet of Canada's assistant ballet mistress and principal character artist Lorna Geddes
Photo: Karolina Kuras

Jourdain says that although doing three pirouettes and “being on” feels great, the communion with other dancers, often through laughter, is ultimately more memorable. Empathy is as important as a good sense of humour. Clark points out, “You work with so many dancers, some you have danced with for years and some who are new, so you need a strong set of interpersonal skills. When there is tension, you always have to ask yourself — is this person hurting or having a bad day?”

There is certainly tension between the individualistic drive required to become a ballet dancer and the necessity of being a team player as a member of the corps. Especially when they are new, most young dancers dream of moving through the corps de ballet, not remaining in it. Katie Bonnell, who is already getting the opportunity to dance featured roles, exemplifies this attitude: “I’m always going to push to dance more soloist and principal roles. Trying to find ways to stand out in the corps while not looking like I’m making a mistake is a matter of stage presence and work ethic.”

Lorna Geddes, on the other hand, knew right away she didn’t want to be Swan Queen. “You could say, ‘Boy, you lowered your ambitions,’ but I really wanted to dance a lot. I would choose not to have a second cast [in my roles], so I could be on every night!”

To young dancers, Geddes cautions that trying to stand out is a misguided approach. “You are part of a group, you are not ‘you’ trying to outdo the girl next to you with a higher leg or something. If there’s an awful lot of drive in you, don’t use it in the corps where you have to be good within limits.”



The Royal Winnipeg Ballet's ballet mistress
Caroline Gruber
Photo: Réjean Brandt

So how does a dancer in the corps move up in the ranks? The truth is that in classical ballet, a dancer’s rise is often subject to forces and considerations beyond their control. Performing well in the occasional soloist role is usually the best way to prove yourself, but as Clark points out, opportunities often come when you are juggling your corps role and are at your most overworked and tired.

Yet artistic directors, who play a central role in casting, do often take classwork into account. Peter Boal, artistic director of Pacific Northwest Ballet, teaches company class twice a week as “a way of keeping tabs on the dancers,” Clark says.

Laffon explains that former Paris Opera artistic director Brigitte Lefèvre was not in the studio, but was “with us for performances every night.” The dancers were excited at the prospect that Lefèvre’s short-lived successor, Benjamin Millepied, would be in the studio, but he was there so little and taught class so rarely that he seemed more like an “adjunct.”

After eight years in the San Francisco Ballet, Rhodes says she doesn’t have a “buddy-buddy” relationship with director Helgi Tomasson, but if there is a role she wants she feels comfortable asking him, and if there is something lacking in her dancing he will tell her. By contrast, Jourdain is hesitant about being direct with Karen Kain, at the helm of the National Ballet of Canada. “I have always felt more comfortable working harder to be picked for something than pushing for a role they might not see me in,” she says.

Jourdain’s reticence may derive from her roots in the Paris Opera Ballet where dancers are judged by a panel of internal and external adjudicators in a company-wide concours to determine suitability for promotion. While the dancers decide whether or not to put themselves forward, and can choose one



The Paris Opera Ballet's Laurence Laffon in Merce Cunningham's *Un jour ou deux*
Photo: Julien Benhamou

variation of the two required, their performance that day plays an outsized role in determining success. Jourdain admits the system is in certain ways unfair: "Some people never get featured and all of a sudden they are amazing on the day, and sometimes it is the other way around — but it is such a part of the tradition." Although these examinations strike many as outdated and cruel, they arguably inject transparency and a certain democratic spirit into what can be highly subjective decisions.

When choreographers unfamiliar with a company are invited to set or create work, they often notice things in certain individuals that others miss. Although dancers generally don't like open auditions, they allow choreographers to see how dancers dance their work — and this process can be to the advantage of the lesser known. Additionally, it can be difficult to cast high-ranking soloists and principals in works where there may not be any featured roles. As a result, many corps dancers have a large contemporary repertoire in the ballets of a wide range of emerging and established choreographers.

Rhodes names her work with Liam Scarlett (she originated a role in Scarlett's *Hummingbird*) and Christopher Wheeldon (she has danced in several of Wheeldon's many works for San Francisco Ballet, including *Ghosts* and *Within the Golden Hour*) as highlights of her career because of the opportunity to be part of a collaborative creative experience.

Laurence Laffon says that Pina Bausch, who she met when she was 19 and who cast her in *Le Sacre du*



Pacific Northwest Ballet's Amanda Clark (fourth from left) with other company dancers in George Balanchine's *Concerto Barocco*
Photo: Angela Sterling

“You would think I’d say *Swan Lake* was the least rewarding ballet to dance, but whenever we are together, there is a huge feeling of accomplishment from being a part of this big thing.” — Rebecca Rhodes

Printemps, “taught me to push my physical and emotional limits and express my own personality and individuality even in extremely rigorous choreography.”

Laffon adds that working with Trisha Brown on *Glacial Decoy*, a work danced in silence, was also a transformational experience. “I learned how movement creates its own rhythm. I felt during the 25 minutes as if I was unspooling a thread from a ball — and the feeling of completely listening to the breathing of the movement and being with the other dancers was magical.”

Jourdain singles out contemporary choreographer Crystal Pite for her generosity and interest in dancers who aren’t “perfect.” “When Crystal cast me [in the premiere of *Emergence* at the National Ballet of Canada] I thought, ‘Why me?’ and imagined they were going to remove my name from the cast list. But she told me ‘No, it’s yours.’”

Pite’s large group pieces have become a signature and are embraced by dancers eager for work in a more egalitarian vein. Laffon says that Pite’s recent *The Seasons’ Canon* for the Paris Opera Ballet was an amazing experience because she “makes work for everybody at the same level — and the audience can feel that we are with her and completely invested in the piece.”

Each dancer interviewed is passionate about their career, but it is passion tempered by realism. “I get to do a lot of soloist roles, which are more rewarding and fulfilling, but I am a solid corps dancer,” says Rhodes.

Many said that dancing in the corps was deeply fulfilling, albeit less obviously so than soloist work. “We always envision being in front and doing a solo part as the most

rewarding, and definitely you crave artistic and technical challenges, but when I think about the most awesome moments onstage, more of them are in a group,” Jourdain says.

“You would think I’d say *Swan Lake* was the least rewarding ballet to dance,” says Rhodes, “but whenever we are together, there is a huge feeling of accomplishment from being a part of this big thing.”

Besides Bluebird pas de deux in *Sleeping Beauty*, Clark told me that her most memorable experiences onstage have been in two works by Balanchine, *Serenade* (which she danced outdoors in the mountains at Vail, Colorado) and *Concerto Barocco* — not only because his style feels natural to her, but also because she was dancing with her friends.

Jérôme Bel in his work *Véronique Doisneau*, an unflinching portrait of a sujet of the Paris Opera Ballet in her last season before retirement, brilliantly captured some of the ambivalence many dancers feel about the corps. Bel seems to provide a fairy tale ending to Doisneau’s career by giving her the opportunity to perform an excerpt from *Giselle*, a principal role she had long dreamed of dancing.

Except *Véronique Doisneau*, the ballet, didn’t end there. For her final moments onstage, Bel had Doisneau dance what she referred to during one of her monologues as “the most horrible thing we do”— the section in which the corps becomes, in her words, “human décor” during *Swan Lake*’s White Swan pas de deux. But without the swans or their Queen onstage, Doisneau, performing steps she had danced hundreds if not thousands of times, showed us how dancing can effortlessly transcend any worldly conception of rank.

After the Corps de Ballet

Most of the artists interviewed here have considered what comes next once their performing careers are over. Rebecca Rhodes made continuing post-secondary education a priority during her career and while she doesn’t have any immediate plans to retire, she already has a bachelor’s degree and intends to study nursing. Rhodes is married and plans on starting a family soon, noting that typically only soloists and principals have children in her company due to the corps members’ strenuous workload.

Laurence Laffon, like many dancers in the Paris Opera Ballet (where dancers have tenure and periodic sabbaticals), has a husband and children, and last year received a teaching diploma in order to teach when she retires. Having made the decision to stop participating in the internal concours five years ago, she now coaches younger dancers in their solos for that competition. Lise-Marie Jourdain, who is married to a former dancer and has a young child, always knew she wanted to be a teacher and took her diploma at age 21; three years ago she started teaching a little on a regular basis, and will teach when she retires. The only one not yet planning for the future is Katie Bonnell, who is completely focused on dancing — she took a mandatory English course necessary to pursue a degree “only to get it out of the way.”

Not long after my interview with Amanda Clark, who has a master’s degree in international relations, she left Pacific Northwest Ballet to shift her focus to international development and diplomacy. According to the company, she left “very quietly and with little fanfare.” In a farewell note to her former colleagues, Clark said that while she was “sorry for not announcing my decision publicly,” she was “grateful for the opportunity to say goodbye to ballet in my own way.”

It might seem tragic to some that the dream of being a prima ballerina is what draws dancers to large companies where most are fated to dance in the corps de ballet. As a result, many decide to go to smaller groups where there is more mobility in the ranks or no ranks at all. But, in fact, only a handful of principal dancers will perform *Swan Queen* or *Giselle*, and many will stop performing those roles after a certain age, while corps dancers (who typically dance in almost every scene) will revisit ballets such as *Giselle* and *Swan Lake* over and over again, teaching them to new members of the corps and discovering new things in the music and choreography along the way until, as with *Doisneau*, these ballets become inseparable from who they are.

One could even say without much exaggeration that because of the huge range of many companies' repertoires, encompassing the romantic, classical, neoclassical, modernist and contemporary eras, many dancers in the corps are living embodiments of the art form's history. But such a grandiose claim is not likely to be made by them. Lorna Geddes says it more simply: "In the corps, you don't get pigeonholed as you do as a soloist where you are either a soubrette or a sylph or a contemporary dancer — in the corps you do different things and different styles all the time."

Clearly, for dancers who choose to persevere within the corps, they can have careers of unimaginable richness. "In the blink of an eye, it was 22 years. It was a life," Jourdain says. "And like anything in life you have ups and downs — but you open yourself to other things and grow and stay motivated."

What about the realization that one will not become a principal dancer? "I dance a lot of contemporary and classical roles and am very happy with that," says Laffon. "I stayed here yet I'm proud of my friends who have left — that took courage. But after turning 30 I realized my life is in Paris and I love this company. The feeling is good." ¹⁰



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Russia's Perm Ballet

Welcoming a storied company's Canadian debut



Perm Ballet's Xenia Barbashyova and Alexander Taranov in Alexey Miroshnichenko's *Nocturne*
Photo: Damian Siqueiros

by Victor Swoboda



For its Canadian debut at Montreal's Place des Arts last February, Perm Ballet mounted a sumptuous staging of Natalia Makarova's *Swan Lake* that brought attention to a large-scale company whose accomplishments and storied history were virtually unknown in Canada. Although the Russian company has often toured Europe and parts of Asia, its previous appearances on this side of the Atlantic were a few tours of the United States under the name Tchaikovsky Perm Ballet Theatre or simply Tchaikovsky Ballet.

Situated at the foot of the Ural Mountains about 1,100 kilometres east of Moscow, Perm was the birthplace of Sergei Diaghilev, the legendary impresario who created the original Ballets Russes. In 1870, Diaghilev's family was a force behind the construction of the local opera house, which today bears the name of Tchaikovsky, who was born nearby. Perm Ballet performs in this theatre, one of the very few in Russia to have a flat rather than a raked stage.

Ironically, it was during the dark years of the Second World War that ballet culture in Perm took a leap forward. Threatened by advancing Nazi forces, the Kirov Ballet (now Mariinsky) decided to move the entire company from Leningrad (now St. Petersburg) to safety in Perm (known at the time as Molotov). The Kirov's initial show in 1942 in Perm's opera house featured young dancers who went on to illustrious careers, among them Irina Kolpakova and Yuri Grigorovich. Following the war, the Kirov's dancers and teachers inspired Perm's government to open a local ballet school as a way to continue the Kirov teaching methods.

The first director of the school, officially called the Perm State Choreographic College, was Ekaterina Heidenreikh, a former Kirov soloist whose links to St. Petersburg's ballet tradition extended to pre-revolutionary Russia. One of Heidenreikh's students, Ninel Pidemskaia, who died last year, taught in the school for 28 years and served as director from 1986-1996. The threads of Russia's ballet history continue to weave through the school, which has become the main source feeding Perm Ballet.

"Ninety-nine percent of our company dancers have come out of the school," said artistic director and choreographer Alexey Miroshnichenko during the Montreal visit. As a result, the company dancers have a uniform classical ballet style that was strikingly evident in the corps' lines in *Swan Lake* and in the interplay of dancers in duets, trios and quartets.

"What I most like about Perm Ballet is its atmosphere — we're all Perm school graduates," says dancer Nikita Chetverikov. "This common education seems to bring us together more as a troupe."

Chetverikov and his regular partner, Inna Bilash, gave passionate performances as *Swan Lake*'s leads. In 2014, they won Perm's Arabesque biannual ballet competition and, two years later, they teamed to win Russia's televised ballet contest, Le Grand Ballet. The same year, Chetverikov and Bilash appeared with eight other Perm Ballet dancers in the Stars of Russian Ballet at Montreal's Outremont Theatre. The Perm dancers performed a variety of classic and contemporary works, including Miroshnichenko's homage to the Balanchine style, *Variations on a Rococo Theme*, and two sensual duets, *Death of a Swan* and *Nocturne*.

Chetverikov and Bilash have passed virtually their entire professional lives under the direction of Miroshnichenko, whose appointment in 2009 brought a surge of fresh energy to the company. A graduate of St. Petersburg's illustrious Vaganova Institute, where he also studied choreography, Miroshnichenko joined the Mariinsky Ballet as a dancer. There he mounted his first works, including *The Wedding* to Stravinsky's music. As the 21st century began, the famed classical troupe was exploring Western contemporary dance, and, starting in 2004, Miroshnichenko served as the Mariinsky company rehearsal master for William Forsythe's works.

In 2005, Miroshnichenko was invited to create a work at the New York Choreographic Institute. Subsequently, New York City Ballet staged two of his works including *The Lady with the Little Dog* (2010). In the years leading up to his Perm appointment, many of the works Miroshnichenko created were in collaboration with Russian composer Leonid Desyatnikov.

“What I most like about Perm Ballet is its atmosphere – we're all Perm school graduates. This common education seems to bring us together more as a troupe.”

— Nikita Chetverikov

It took two years of persuasion to get Miroshnichenko to Perm.

“I had an interesting life before I came to Perm — travelling here and there, creating ballets, staging Forsythe. Why, I asked myself, go to Perm? Finally, Makhar Vaziev [the Mariinsky's director at the time] managed to convince me it was a good move.”

Miroshnichenko immediately set to work. “I saw the company's modern repertory consisted of only Balanchine and Robbins. So, in the 2010-2011 season, I programmed seven local premieres, including Jiri Kylian's *Svadebka* (*Les Noces*), Nicola Fontana's *Petrouchka*, Balanchine's highly complicated *Kammermusik No. 2* to Hindemith, Rostislav Zakharov's *The Fountain of Bakhchisarai*, and two of my works, *Variations on a Rococo Theme*, and *The Fool* to Prokofiev's music.”

The seven premieres — a considerable logistical as well as artistic feat — served as a strong statement of Miroshnichenko's intent to build a repertoire different from that of other Russian companies.

The Fool, for example, was Miroshnichenko's adaptation of an early Prokofiev ballet choreographed by Fyodor Slavinsky that was well received at its Paris premiere in 1921, only to disappear until Miroshnichenko's revival. His version features eye-catching multi-coloured sets by Sergei Martynov and costumes by Tatiana Noginova that evoke the spirit of Russian folk tales. Typical for Perm Ballet, the production values presented ballet in the grand style.

Miroshnichenko also brought in tried-and-true works like MacMillan's *Romeo and Juliet*, and staged the first Russian performances of Forsythe's *Second Detail*. In 2015, he staged his own full-length *Swan Lake*. Miroshnichenko's version, in which Rothbart plays a prominent role as Siegfried's antagonist, is staged in Perm whenever the Makarova version (introduced to the company in 2006) goes on tour. The fact that the company can mount two different full-sized *Swan Lakes* simultaneously testifies to the troupe's size and depth.

He believes his own creations were an essential reason why he was hired. “The presence of a resident choreographer creates a unique repertory. In the past, ballet companies were always directed by choreographers. Look at Petipa, Balanchine, Bournonville, Ashton and MacMillan. They created works for their own dancers,” he says. “I aim to create works using only my dancers, without guest artists. And today 80 percent of my company dancers have worked only with me.”

Miroshnichenko's other initial priority was improving dancers' salaries. Unlike federally funded Russian companies such as the Bolshoi and the Mariinsky, Perm Ballet is a regionally funded troupe. Salaries were low. “Our salaries today are three-and-a-half times higher than when I came. Keep in mind that in that time Russia had a financial crisis. I'd like Perm Ballet to have the same budget as the Mariinsky. That's probably not possible, but it's good to aim high,” he says.

Higher salaries, a varied, challenging repertoire, regular foreign tours and a collegial atmosphere encourage stars like

Chetverikov and Bilash to resist tempting offers from St. Petersburg and Moscow. But Miroshnichenko realizes that Perm, with its one million residents, cannot compare to the attractions of a St. Petersburg. Some dancers have left Perm for big-city companies even though there they face greater competition for roles and sharper political in-fighting.

“St. Petersburg has six ballet companies and Moscow has eight. They come to Perm looking for dancers, enticing them with bigger salaries. I tell young dancers that the main thing for them is repertory. For a dancer, you are what you dance.”

Under Miroshnichenko's direction, company dancers train and rehearse at a furious pace.

“Our workload has increased considerably,” says Chetverikov. “There are more projects going on than before, and we rehearse with many different choreographers. We work on different things at once — we need more than 24 hours in a day!”

The larger workload means studio space is a big problem. “We have only two not-so-large studios, so we're limited in the time we have to work,” adds Chetverikov.

“Sometimes two projects are going on at the same time and you find yourself working in two studios at once,” says Bilash.

“Plus, the studios are in an old building,” notes Chetverikov. “We're still seeing whether we'll get a new building.”

Like artistic directors everywhere, Miroshnichenko is constantly in search of funds, whether for new studios or to pay the licence fees for works by foreign choreographers, which



must be paid in hard currency, not in devalued Russian rubles. In the wake of Russia's financial crisis, sponsors who once supported Perm Ballet — principally Russian oil companies — have scaled back. "I'm quite worried about being able to extend licences for our contemporary repertory."

Another challenge is that veteran teachers at Perm's ballet school are getting on in years and the school has undergone administrative change. Ballet, moreover, is no longer such a coveted profession, according to Miroshnichenko.

"It's a tough career; salaries are low, people have other professional priorities. Today, ballet school is not a popular choice. Parents don't bring their kids so much any more. When I entered the Vaganova Institute in 1984, 50 boys competed for each place, and that was the boys! Now it's not like that."

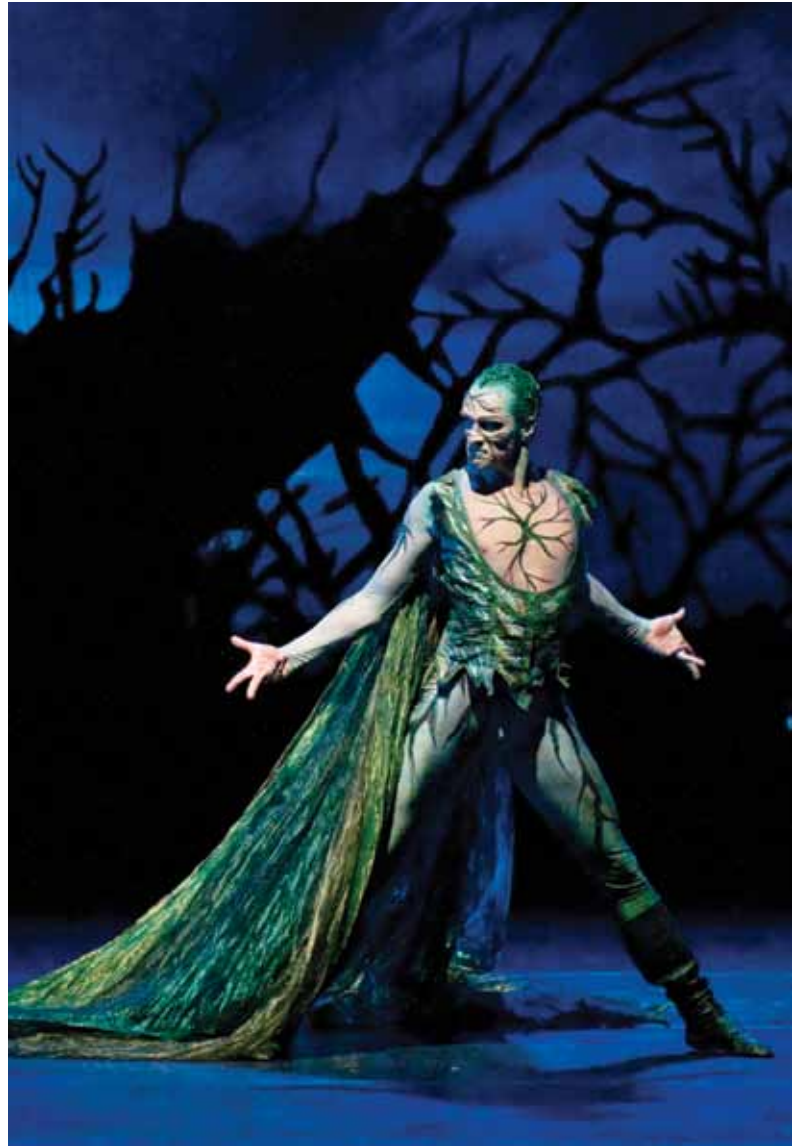
In conversation, Miroshnichenko gave every appearance of an astute artistic director who is able to use his extensive professional contacts, solid training, creative talent and force of personality to achieve high artistic goals. It was just as clear that he was under no illusions about the challenges of directing a big ballet troupe in Russia. To his dancers, Miroshnichenko says, he offers advice from *Alice in Wonderland*. "Alice said it was strange that she was running yet stood on the spot. The Queen replied that to stay on the spot, one has to run, but to get anywhere, one has to run twice as fast."

Under Miroshnichenko, Perm Ballet runs fast indeed. ▫

Top: Perm Ballet in *The Jester*
Photo: Anton Zavjyalov

Centre: Perm Ballet's Inna Bilash and Nikita Chetverikov in Alexey Miroshnichenko's *Cinderella*
Photo: Anton Zavjyalov

Bottom: Perm Ballet's Oleg Kulikov and company artists in Natalia Makarova's *Swan Lake*
Photo: Sasha Onyshchenko



**Photos of Alain Honorez
in performance with
Royal Ballet of Flanders**

**Top left: In David Dawson's
The Grey Area
Photo: Johan Persson**

**Top right: As Rothbart in
Marcia Haydée's *Swan Lake*
Photo: Patricio Melo**

**Centre: As Drosselmeyer in
Demis Volpi's *The Nutcracker*
Photo: Filip Van Roe**

**Right: With Wei Chen (right)
in David Dawson's *Faun(e)*
Photo: Costin Radu**



Photo: Filip Van Roe

by Judith Delmé

THE FANTASTIC WORLD OF ALAIN HONOREZ

A Flemish dancer drawn to drama

The figure rounding the corner on the street below me is unmistakably that of a dancer. Alain Honorez, with boot-clad feet turned out at 90 degrees and his slender figure wrapped in grey sweats (despite it being summer there's a constant need to keep muscles warm), is moving as swiftly and lithely as a cat. He'd promised me his precious lunch break for our interview and, concerned about being punctual, had texted to say he'd be two minutes late.

Sitting at my kitchen table at home in Antwerp cradling a coffee, the sun throwing a shadow across his lean features and tousled, shoulder-length hair, Honorez, a freelance dancer who often appears as a principal guest artist with Royal Ballet of Flanders, appears relaxed and animated despite a recent 22-hour return journey from Chile. He'd been rehearsing as a guest artist for a new, stimulating creation with Ballet de Santiago, in which he plays the brooding Bernarda in the ballet of the same name by Jaime Pinto.

These days the 38-year-old is "picky" (his word) about the parts he accepts. Having recently starred as Uncle Drosselmeyer in Demis Volpi's Tim Burton-esque *Nutcracker* and in a reprise of his role as Carabosse in Marcia Haydée's *The Sleeping Beauty*, both for Royal Ballet of Flanders, his propensity is most definitely for ballets with dramatic depth, ones in which the choreographers respect, even encourage, the dancer's creative input.

This imaginative streak was obvious at an early age. Honorez laughingly recounts sitting with his mother on an Antwerp tram when he was seven, and acting out an entire story, to the bemusement of onlookers.

As luck would have it, young Honorez spent a great deal of time with his theatre-loving grandparents. They were struck by his strong sense of rhythm and he was duly dispatched to dance class. The end result was that in his final year at the Royal Ballet School of Antwerp, he was plucked for the company by then-artistic director Robert Denvers.

"Robert favoured the young dancers and had us doing everything. I think it built the strength and stamina we were able to tap into when Kathy arrived." Under Kathryn Bennetts, who succeeded Denvers as director, the company shot to international heights.

A skinny 18-year-old, Honorez was in the third cast lineup to dance Mercutio in André Prokovsky's *Romeo and Juliet*, when illness struck the first two casts and the youngster was thrown onstage. In the role, he faced off with a Tybalt who was one of the most muscular dancers in the company. Honorez attacked the part and its fencing with such fury that the exhausted Tybalt asked him to bring it all down a notch.

With Bennetts' arrival in 2005 came the William Forsythe repertoire: *New Sleep*, *Impressing the Czar*, *Artifact* ... and the dancers thrived. They learned to explore space in a totally different fashion, to discover other possibilities of which their bodies were capable.

"With Bill, the line of the arms reaches out and beyond the fingers — that was how the energy had to flow," says Honorez. Today, this use of hands remains one of Honorez's hallmarks.

But Honorez was far more at home with the style of another choreographer whom Bennetts introduced: British-trained, Europe-based David Dawson. While Forsythe's style is

whip-sharp, angular and precise, Dawson wants fluid moves that melt and fuse seamlessly together.

The first Dawson ballet Honorez danced was *The Grey Area* (2002), which he describes as “quite the most difficult piece I had tackled up until then.” This was followed by *A Sweet Spell of Oblivion*, which is “ferociously speedy and quite beautiful, but one you can only dance when you’re young.”

Although Honorez was one of Dawson’s muses, he hit what one might call the Dawson predicament. “David pushes dancers way beyond their physical limits. I adored dancing his work, but had to go through hell to get there. It’s a very ambiguous relationship, but I admire him tremendously, his vision, his artistry, the way he presents his dancers; to me he is a level higher than an ordinary choreographer.”

During this fast-paced period, Haydée arrived in Antwerp from Chile, where she directs Ballet de Santiago, to set her 1987 *Sleeping Beauty*. It was on the condition she found the right person for the pivotal role, and she did indeed discover her Carabosse in Honorez.

“Marcia encouraged me to inhabit the role, allowing me creative licence. She saw it as a prototype of the wicked queen out of Walt Disney’s *Snow White* or Maleficent in *Sleeping Beauty*. Both these characters caught my imagination, and I delved into the details, in particular the laugh and the hands. When I descend a staircase in the prologue, it’s with feminine grace, in stark contrast to the vicious confrontation with the queen.”

sweating blood. Honorez began to feel less and less at home in plotless works, in what he considered “steps for the sake of steps.”

There were dramatic compensations, however, with lead roles in Jiri Kylián’s powerful *Symphony of Psalms* and Christian Spuck’s insightful and amusing *The Return of Ulysses*. Spuck’s modern take on the characters encouraged his dancers’ freedom to explore, enabling the dance, to Honorez’s way of thinking, to flow effortlessly.

He blames himself in part for what followed, for not taking time out when he felt both physically and emotionally drained. Pushed to the limit by six weeks of arduous rehearsal for Dawson’s *Faun(e)* and affected by a turbulent upheaval in the company ending with Bennetts’ abrupt and bitter departure in 2012, he was, although he only realized it later, in the throes of burnout. He put his career on hold and it took almost a year before he was ready to resume dancing. Although new director Assis Carreiro lasted less than two years at the helm of the Flanders troupe, in that time she’d persuaded Honorez to return as guest artist and to star in a ballet from rising choreographer Demis Volpi.

Pieces of the puzzle started falling into place; Haydée, Kylián, Spuck, Volpi all espoused an inherently dramatic form of dance-making — one in which Honorez felt completely at home.

Volpi returned to the source of E.T.A. Hoffmann’s darkly psychological story for his version of *The Nutcracker*, which

HONOREZ WAS ON A HIGH DANCING THE HAYDÉE BALLETS. HE ADORED THE RICH VARIETY THEY OFFERED, AND THE ACCLAIM THAT CAME WITH INTERNATIONAL GUEST PERFORMANCES WAS HEADY.

Haydée later invited Honorez to dance the role in Chile. While there she discussed with him the part of Rothbart in a new *Swan Lake* for the Flanders company. Haydée told me, “I described for him a giant dragon-like lizard that exists in South America, which crawls over the ground and pounces by pressing its tail to the ground.”

Honorez elaborates: “Marcia envisioned Rothbart as an ugly creature ostracized by society and eaten up with jealousy toward anything beautiful.” By the time Haydée arrived for rehearsal, he had transformed himself into a leaping, loathsome reptile, which could still elicit feelings of pity. The opening in 2009 was unforgettable — the curtain went up on a motionless green-clad figure whose only movement was an arm that rippled almost involuntarily to the haunting swan theme in Tchaikovsky’s score.

Honorez was on a high dancing the Haydée ballets. He adored the rich variety they offered, and the acclaim that came with international guest performances was heady.

These coincided with a period of endless touring with Royal Ballet of Flanders’ calling card, *Impressing the Czar*, plus rehearsing Dawson’s anniversary ballet for the company, *The Third Light*, an abstract creation for which Dawson had the dancers

premiered in January 2015. No sugar-sweet piece of confectionary, it was peopled by real characters and central to it all was Uncle Drosselmeyer, a zany, half-droll, half-manic personage. “Demis suggested I take Johnny Depp as my inspiration,” says Honorez.

In an interview for the program notes, he explained, “The greatest challenge was to create from scratch a character in complete contrast to anything else I had previously done — someone introverted and mysterious rather than flamboyant and over-the-top.” Honorez relished the role, gaining plaudits from the press and public.

Last winter, I met again with Alain Honorez, who was once more in the middle of rehearsal, this time for *Requiem*, a new work from Royal Ballet of Flanders’ current artistic director Sidi Larbi Cherkaoui, set to Gabriel Fauré, which premiered in March 2017. Honorez admitted to having a few doubts initially as to whether he would or could connect with Larbi’s idiosyncratic and spare dance language. The connection was immediately apparent, however; one of the choreographer’s hallmarks is his inventive hand movements, and hands always play a key part in Honorez’s search for character. It was with evident satisfaction that he closed the interview with: “For us both it all starts with the hands.” ◊

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Artists of Les 7 doigts in *Cuisine and Confessions*
Photo: Alexandre Galliez

Everything and the Kitchen Sink

Cuisine and Confessions is new circus — with acrobatics, dance, storytelling (all true) and thrilling derring-do (on silks, a pole and a kitchen drying rack hanging from the ceiling) — by Montreal’s Les 7 doigts. Created by Shana Carroll and Sébastien Soldevila, it also has foodie appeal: the eight performers — who come from Russia, Argentina, France and the United States — bake banana bread during the show, which they pass out to the audience at evening’s end. They wash up, too, in the working, onstage kitchen sink. The show is at the National Arts Centre in Ottawa in July.



Astronaut costume design by Flora Gill and Ted Southern. Costume rendering by Gill, courtesy of Washington Ballet

Washington Ballet in Space

The Washington Ballet premiered Ethan Stiefel’s *Frontier*, inspired by former United States president John F. Kennedy and his historic aspirations for U.S. space travel, at the end of May. The ballet investigates space exploration through the perspective of the astronaut, delving into the emotional and physical rigours involved.

Costumes were designed by Flora Gill, founder of clothing label OHNE TITEL, and Ted Southern, owner of Final Frontier Design, a company that creates space suits and safety garments that enable human travel to space.

“The costumes ‘on earth’ are very similar to what an actual astronaut candidate might wear today,” says Gill. “The space suit is based more on forecasting about the future of space apparel — much more trim and flexible than current space suits.”

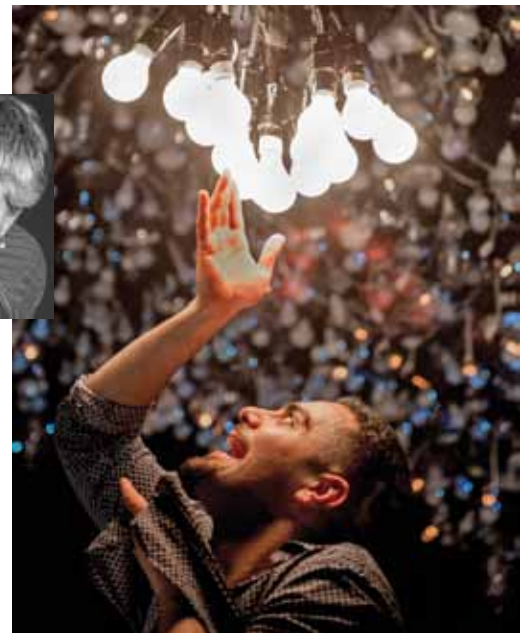
Frontier is the first work commissioned by artistic director Julie Kent, and was part of the Kennedy Center’s JFK Centennial Celebration.

Paras Terezakis
Photo: Yukiko Onley



Transforming Light

Greek-Canadian choreographer Paras Terezakis looks for utopia with *In Penumbra*, a 30th-anniversary premiere by his company, Kinesis Dance. *Penumbra* is the space where shadow meets light; here, the word evokes the grey area between our best and worst traits. At Vancouver’s Scotiabank Dance Centre in March, transformative lighting design by James Proudfoot featured a canopy of hundreds of lightbulbs, as well as a chandelier-like cluster of bulbs dangling from the ceiling. Hovering just out of the dancers’ reach, these glimmering lights served as an apt metaphor for an elusive utopia.



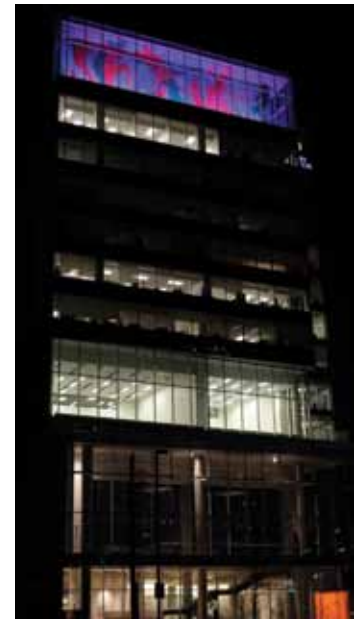
Arash Khakpour in Paras Terezakis’ *In Penumbra*
Photo: Chris Randle



Taking the Cake

Take the Cake, an art installation by Hadley+Maxwell, illuminates the top of Calgary's new Kahanoff II Tower, where the DJD Dance Centre occupies six floors. The mural represents shadows cast by DJD (Decidedly Jazz Danceworks) company members performing an interpretation of a cakewalk. The high chroma figures are animated by an accompanying multi-coloured LED light choreography that adds movement, making it appear as though the figures are parading across the top of the building.

The cakewalk was first practised in the 1850s by African-American slaves working on plantations. Parodying the minuet popular at the parties of plantation owners, participants would parade in pairs in a grand march with an exaggerated grace that was often comedic; the couple judged to be the winners would "take the cake." The cakewalk later became a popular form in musical theatre and contributed to the development of ragtime, jazz and contemporary competitive dance forms like breakdance, vogueing and freestyle battles.



Above: Hadley+Maxwell's *Take the Cake* at the top of Calgary's Kahanoff II Tower

Above left: DJD company dancers in studio shoot to create the mural

Photos: Noel Bégin



The Relevance of *Antigone*

Members of Noche Flamenca in *Antigona*
Photo: Paul Joseph

Noche Flamenca's presentation of Sophocles' *Antigone* began when artistic director Martín Santangelo witnessed a modern staging in New York, where the company is based. Santangelo was struck by the plight of its lead character, a strong-willed woman embattled by the state, which refused to give permission for the burial of her brother.

He drew parallels between this story and the 2010 court case of Spanish Judge Baltasar Garzón, who was suspended for publicly recognizing those who resisted General Francisco Franco by giving permission for families to bury relatives left in mass graves during Franco's dictatorship (1939-1975). Garzón's wish to honour the deceased echoed the story of *Antigone*, suggesting that the 2,500-year-old tale is still relevant today.

Company co-founder and choreographer Soledad Barrio dances the lead role in this flamenco *Antigona*, which has been touring since its premiere in 2014. It was presented in Vancouver in March, before travelling to Abu Dhabi for its Middle Eastern premiere in April.



National Arts Centre Celebrations

Jean Grand-Maitre returns to his roots for Canada's 150th anniversary | by Jennifer Fournier

To mark the 150th anniversary of the Confederation of Canada, Ottawa's National Arts Centre facilitated the "meeting" of two art forms — music and dance. Intended as a celebration of Canadian choreographers and composers, the three-part project was fittingly titled *Encount3rs*.

The artistic partnerships brought together Alberta Ballet artistic director Jean Grand-Maitre and composer Andrew Staniland, who is on faculty at Memorial University of Newfoundland. Other collaborations included Ballet BC artistic director Emily Molnar and "musical scientist" Nicole Lizée, and National Ballet of Canada principal dancer and choreographic associate Guillaume Côté and composer and pianist Kevin Lau.

The works were performed in April by dancers from the choreographers' home companies, with live music played by the National Arts Centre Orchestra under the direction of Alexander Shelley.

For Grand-Maitre, the commission was "a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity" to create without the commercial pressures he typically faces in his role leading Alberta Ballet. Rather than starting the creative process with a recognizable title that will sell tickets, *Encount3rs* has given him "permission to dream" free of his usual concerns. "This project enabled me to take risks and

explore avenues I haven't been able to travel in the last 10 years."

Alberta-born and raised Staniland is a composer with a strong mathematical bent. Their piece, *Caelestis* (Latin for celestial or heavenly), explores the beauty of mathematics in art and nature, and its tyranny over our daily lives. Phi, or the golden ratio, became a starting point for their collaboration, particularly its manifestation in the Fibonacci curve.

"Phi is represented in almost everything," says Grand-Maitre, "a bee, a flower, the Parthenon." From there, he began thinking how "we are disappearing into our iPhones, and technology is dehumanizing our landscapes. Math is the only religion calling us."

Grand-Maitre's intuitive approach to these ideas led him to contemplate more generally the balance between art, nature and technology, which, drawing on ballet vernacular, is expressed choreographically as an evolution from struggle to grace.

Caelestis marks a return to the aesthetic of his earlier abstract works, such as *The Winter Room* created for Alberta Ballet and *Frames of Mind* for the National Ballet of Canada. An early rehearsal affirmed Grand-Maitre's ability to combine formal neoclassical steps and patterns with a predatory and, at times, sinister quality to achieve an evocative and quite singular strangeness. There were references to

nature in a recurring sculptural half-kneeling pose that brought to mind insects in repose, and a sense of swarming as the men and women moved past each other in organized groups.

Grand-Maitre clearly relishes the creative freedom that abstraction allows him. "This piece is not narrative or character-driven. It's been a long time since I've been free to explore just the movement in the music."

Cathy Levy, the National Arts Centre's executive producer of dance, along with music director Shelley, are the visionaries behind *Encount3rs*. Audiences know Grand-Maitre mostly for his pop ballets about musical icons like Elton John and Joni Mitchell, says Levy, but she remembers the challenging contemporary ballets he created in Europe as a freelance choreographer. "That's why I was adamant Jean be part of the project," she says.

For Grand-Maitre, who was born in Hull (now part of Gatineau), Quebec, on the other side of the Ottawa River not far from the National Arts Centre, the occasion is especially meaningful. "The NAC is where I fell in love with the arts and discovered dance. I saw the Kirov, *A Chorus Line* ... and used to wait outside the stage door and watch the dancers get on the bus. I am so excited to come home and show off the company I have been directing and grooming." Artistic director of Alberta Ballet since 2002, Grand-Maitre selected 10 senior dancers for *Caelestis*, most of whom have collaborated with him on many creations and danced under his direction for most, or in some cases all, of their careers.

A wide range of emerging and established companies perform in the nation's capital every year. But even for sophisticated audiences, there is risk in presenting an evening of six new works of music and dance. Levy says there was much internal debate about whether to include *Encount3rs* in the National Art Centre's ballet subscription series where classics like *The Nutcracker*, *Swan Lake* and *Sleeping Beauty* usually appear. But, she says, "in conceiving any series, my mantra is 'balance.'"

After the sesquicentennial festivities are over, the ballets will live on in the repertoires of the choreographers' respective companies where they can be performed either to live orchestra or to recordings of the NAC Orchestra. The orchestral scores will also exist independently in the repertoire of the NAC Orchestra. ¹¹

Michael Crabb's Notebook

In July, Gradimir Pankov formally retires after 17 years as artistic director of Les Grands Ballets Canadiens de Montréal, passing the torch to Italian-born Ivan Cavallari, previously artistic director of France's Ballet de l'Opéra national du Rhin. Putting aside the fact that, for the third time in a row, the company passed over Canadian candidates (Macedonian-born Pankov succeeded American Lawrence Rhodes), the change of leadership was carefully planned. Cavallari's appointment was announced in April 2016 and he assumed his duties that July, with Pankov remaining until this summer to ensure a smooth transition.

It does not always happen so amicably. Last December, Winthrop Corey, a former National Ballet of Canada principal dancer, suddenly resigned as artistic director of Alabama-based Mobile Ballet after 30 years, owing to disagreements with the board of directors. The board is currently being sued by a trio of local company supporters who claim Mobile Ballet is mismanaged.

At the 26-dancer Sacramento Ballet in California, a public furor was unleashed and entrenched sides established after the board of directors' decision to replace the husband-and-wife team of Ron Cunningham and Carinne Binda in 2018. Cunningham has been artistic director since 1988; his wife co-artistic director since 1991. Assuming the Sacramento Ballet board wins this tussle, the couple can at least console themselves with having had a long run.

Sometimes long-serving directors need a gentle push. Witness Arnold Spohr who after 30 years at the helm of the Royal Winnipeg Ballet was finally convinced to pass the tiller to Henny Jurriens in 1988. When Jurriens and his wife tragically died in a car accident the following April, Spohr re-offered his services. After all, as artistic director emeritus, he already had an office down the hall. The board sagely deflected Spohr's overtures, although that hardly stopped him from offering succeeding RWB artistic directors advice, whether invited

or not. This turned out to be good experience for William Whitener, who, after a short stint at the RWB, took the top job at Kansas City Ballet in 1996, inheriting another artistic director emeritus, the illustrious Todd Bolender.

Then there are those who seem to keep going forever. Although Spohr reigned for 30 years at the RWB, he was a relatively modest 64 years old when he reluctantly agreed to retire. Compare that with Ben Stevenson who, in 2003, after 27 years as artistic director of Houston Ballet, "retired" at age 67, only to assume the leadership of what is now called Texas Ballet Theater, where as an octogenarian he still reigns.

Apparently, hard work keeps artistic directors spry into their senior years. John Neumeier, 78, remains head of Hamburg Ballet after more than four decades. Helgi Tómasson, 74, has sat behind his artistic director's desk at San Francisco Ballet for more than 30 years. Although he did not officially become sole ballet master-in-chief at New York City Ballet until 1990, Peter Martins, a youthful septuagenarian, has effectively ruled the company since George Balanchine's death in 1983. Perhaps the fact that these three men are also choreographers, Neumeier most notably, provides an added incentive to remain. Who would want to relinquish an immediate platform so long as the creative juices are still flowing?

Still, you can imagine the concern of the respective boards of directors as they weigh their responsibility to ensure a smooth succession in the event that desire, incapacity — or, Heaven forbid, sudden death — precipitates a vacancy in the artistic direction department.

And then there is the challenging prospect confronting the National Ballet of Canada's Karen Kain (after 12 seasons the company's longest-serving artistic director since founder Celia Franca), who is approaching the age where she might quite reasonably want to relinquish what is by any standard an onerous burden. Most would agree that overall, despite some arguable programming decisions, Kain is doing an admirable job in sustaining the National Ballet artistically and boosting its international profile in a challenging environment of rising costs, decreasing public funding and more competition for audiences.

Kain is also a money-magnet. Never

has the company, even with Franca, had a leader of such celebrity, glamour and charm. It is hard to imagine it happening again because the very circumstances of the ballet boom of the 1970s that made the extraordinarily talented dancer a household name in Canada no longer exist. In that sense, Kain is irreplaceable.

With a notable lack of fanfare late last year, the National Ballet hired as associate artistic director Christopher Stowell, a seasoned dancer and artistic director, and the child of ballet royalty Franca Russell and Kent Stowell, co-founding directors of Pacific Northwest Ballet. The National Ballet publicity department insists Stowell's appointment is in no way part of a succession plan. He's been hired to ease Kain's burden, which prompts the question, what has suddenly made it so much heavier?

Finally, a few dots to sort as you may choose. The National Ballet is currently pushing ahead with Soaring, a campaign to raise \$100 million in "creative capital" by 2020. In 2019, Kain will mark her 50th anniversary with the National Ballet. The following year she will turn 69. Kain's board could be forgiven for considering these facts with a measure of trepidation. ▫

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The Dance We Remember

A roundup of memorable performances

Dance International asked a range of contributors to share their memories of a dance performance that has stayed with them over the years.

The 1990 Canada Dance Festival was my crash course on contemporary dance. I was 26, a recent graduate of music and commerce, and about to start my first dance gig as marketing and business manager for Montreal's La La La Human Steps. Almost right away, I was dispatched to Ottawa to take in the festival and begin building my professional dance network.

Two performances remain with me today. First, Marie Chouinard in her solo *S.T.A.B. (Space, Time and Beyond)*, performed at the National Arts Centre, where the festival is still based. Seared into my memory is not so much the details, but the sense of being provoked and startled by the infinite range and possibility of physical gesture. Chouinard seemed to become a mythical erotic beast, emitting guttural sounds to punctuate the movement.

Second, Michael Montanaro's *Zman Doe Lost in Time*, presented in a hockey arena, was a blend of dance, animation, film, slide projection and music, integrating and forging new relationships between the various mediums. The work teemed with ideas, not only about the body, but also about the world around us. I remember a projection of an animated figure walking off the screen and into the realm of the real world onstage; a parachute that changed the massive performance area into a churning sea; the way three female figures emerged through the parachute and transformed the energy of the space as they walked calmly away, the projected city skyline off in the distance. When I think back on *Zman Doe*, I realize I was seeing the digital future of dance performance.

— JIM SMITH, PRODUCER, DANCEHOUSE, VANCOUVER

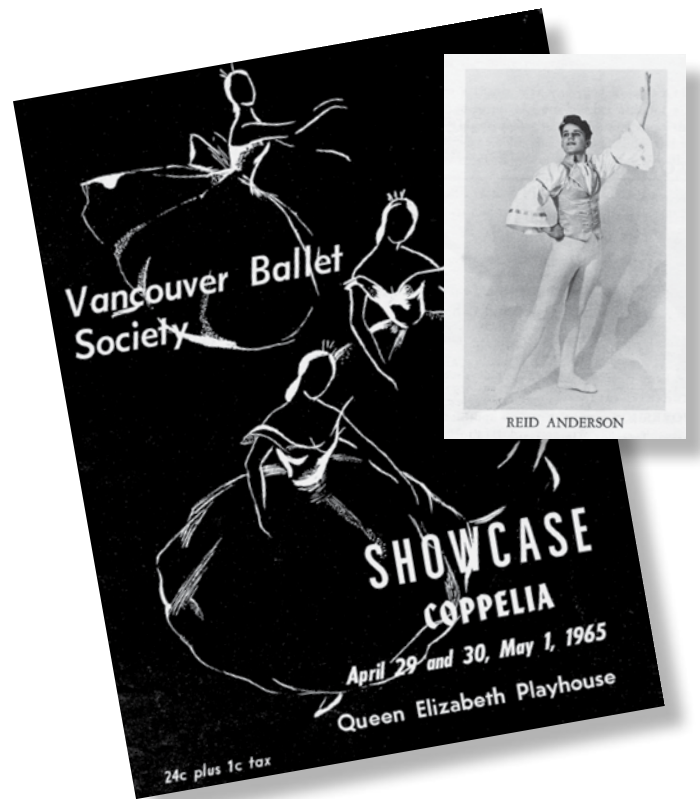
In the early 1980s, when I was in my late teens, I travelled alone by train from my home in Florence to Reggio Emilia. There, at the golden Teatro Municipale Valli, Pina Bausch's Tanztheater Wuppertal was making one of its first appearances in Italy.

Although I had already experienced radical contemporary choreography, their double bill of *Café Müller* and *Le Sacre du Printemps* appeared completely different. Really: it was an "other" thing. *Café Müller* puzzled and disconcerted me: all those ordinary people running up and down, with no real place to go, and that blind creature in white (Malou Airaudo) with those wonderful, sorrowing arms moving in the air. I was too young to really understand the meaning of that despair, of the sense of longing and absence. A man running erratically around kept hurtling the chairs scattered onstage, while a zealous lady with red hair tried to clear the way for him. I felt the work's dismay and anguish, and that this was something deep and strangely involving.

Then, *Sacre*, with its powerful, telluric force and terrific dynamics, the dancers' bodies shaking frantically as if they were crying out their wildness, fear, struggle, violence. I was overwhelmed. Bausch had shaken down all the usual restraints and had bravely staged the hidden side of the human soul. The chosen girl in her bloody dress became one of my unforgettable dance images.

— SILVIA POLETTI, DANCE CRITIC, FLORENCE

Program for *Coppélia*, with inset of Reid Anderson as Franz
Courtesy of Vancouver Ballet Society Archives



REID ANDERSON

I had only recently stopped playing with my Barbie and Ken dolls when my mother took me to see *Coppélia*, or *The Girl with Enamel Eyes*, my first full-length ballet. The story about Franz falling in love with a life-sized doll he mistakes for a real girl was right up my alley.

The comic ballet, choreographed by Arthur Saint-Léon to the bustling music of Léo Delibes, had premiered in 1870 at the Paris Opera, but the night we saw it onstage at the Vancouver Playhouse almost 100 years later, *Coppélia* seemed shiny and new. Every run and jump, every toss of the head and lift of the hand, swept me into the action as it raced past.

Among the performers, mostly senior students from local dance schools assembled by the Vancouver Ballet Society, was 16-year-old Reid Anderson, who would go on to direct the National Ballet of Canada and Germany's Stuttgart Ballet. In the role of Franz, Anderson inhabited each movement as if the shape and rhythm had been freshly made just for him. His dance unfolded instant by instant in an intense act of communication and I, for one, was with him every step of the way.

— KAIJA PEPPER, EDITOR,
DANCE INTERNATIONAL MAGAZINE



Earl Kraul and Veronica Tennant in the CBC production of the National Ballet of Canada's *Romeo and Juliet*
Photo: Courtney G. McMahon

At the age of 12, after taking ballet classes for six years, I saw my first live performance. It was *Romeo and Juliet* by the National Ballet of Canada (Veronica Tennant was Juliet), and I was seated way up in the upper balcony at the O'Keefe Centre (now the Sony Centre for the Performing Arts) in Toronto. I remember being enchanted by the beautiful port de bras and the sound of pointe shoes on the floor. I know now that ideally they should not make any sound, but at the time I was enthralled by the gentle tap, tap, tap. Seeing a live performance ignited my love of dance and the memory is still as vibrant and meaningful today.

— ARLENE MINKHORST, DIRECTOR OF CANADA'S ROYAL WINNIPEG BALLET SCHOOL

I will never forget her: Maria Tallchief, in George Balanchine's *Firebird*, a flaring flash of red and feathers across the stage of New York City Center, in a grand jeté that could have been jet propelled. It was power personified, and scary as hell. Scariest than the ballet's monsters, more frightening than Kastchei the Wizard.

It was 1949, during New York City Ballet's inaugural run of Balanchine's version of a work that premiered in 1910 with the Ballets Russes. I loved the colour of Chagall's designs, the drama and tenderness in Stravinsky's score, the lulling liquidity of Tallchief's dancing in the berceuse, and the pretty princess and her friends. Above all, Tallchief as bird-woman, soothing, terrifying, liberating, made this ballet an empowering experience for a young girl on the cusp of adolescence. Especially at a time when the expected response to the question, "What do you want to be when you grow up?" was, "A wife, a mother." Or, if you were really ambitious, a teacher or writer.

In the same year, I saw Margot Fonteyn in *The Sleeping Beauty* and Moira Shearer in *Cinderella*, but it was Tallchief, with a little help from George Balanchine, who hooked me on ballet, for life.

Decades later, I knew what the Dance Theatre of Harlem's Stephanie Dabney meant when she told me she would be a kinder Firebird in the Caribbean version of the ballet John Taras had made for that company in 1982. (She was.)

— MARTHA ULLMAN WEST, DANCE CRITIC, PORTLAND, OREGON

Before I was even old enough to attend school, my mom started taking me to musicals. Some were community productions of classics like *Oliver!* and *My Fair Lady*. Others were touring shows; I remember being in awe at the decadent set of *Show Boat* at a large downtown theatre. For productions of that scale, we'd bring binoculars to see faces up close. I had this longing to be on the inside, to really know who these people were, and once I could read I studied the programs to memorize the performers' names.

When I was seven, in 1994, my parents took me to see a local Vancouver contemporary dance company, Jumpstart, which was premiering artistic director Lee Eisler's *Matters of the Flesh*. Not only were we sitting in the front row of the small black-box theatre, but our seats were cushions on the floor — onstage with the performers! I couldn't believe I was allowed to be so close to their world.

Although I didn't know how to categorize what I was seeing — the show had no storyline to speak of, and the costumes had zero sparkles or ruffles — I do remember having a sense that the dancers were showing me who they were, and that this performance called for a new level of attention and focus. It was a vulnerable, delicate thing that I was actually a part of, rather than some huge spectacle that would go on regardless of whether or not I was in the balcony peering through binoculars.

— JENN EDWARDS, FREELANCE DANCE ARTIST, VANCOUVER



Hannah Stilwell of Decidedly Jazz Danceworks in Vicki Adams Willis' *Timesplay*
Photo: Anne Georg

studying dance for years and had seen many performances — my grandmother took me to ballet, which she loved; my father was a professor at the University of Calgary, and I was well versed in what the dance department there had to offer. But that year, 1984, I saw three different companies that changed everything: Mummenschanz, La La La Human Steps and Decidedly Jazz Danceworks.

The whimsy and shape shifting of Mummenschanz, the Swiss “mask-theatre” company, changed my sense of possibility of what could happen onstage. What they did wasn’t dance, but there was so much movement, simple, concise and complex all at the same time, unlike anything I had seen. I can’t remember the name of the piece, but the T-shirt I bought at intermission had an image of a character from the show on it. I wore it until it fell apart.

Then there was La La La, from Montreal. The piece was Édouard Lock’s *Human Sex*, which I was kind of embarrassed to be going to with my parents, but I soon forgot about that and everything else, hypnotized by what was happening onstage. Who was that wild, blonde, androgynous person? (Louise Lecavalier.) How could she throw herself in the air and to the ground like that? The rawness, the grit, the courage! I started practising barrel rolls, and can still pull off a pretty mean one.

In their inaugural performance at home in Calgary, DJD included a piece I fell in love with: *Timesplay*, set to music by Dave Brubeck, choreographed by artistic director Vicki Adams Willis. My parents had several Brubeck albums, and I went home and put them on, trying to dance like the performers I’d just seen. There was something in the way their bodies and spirits connected to that music; there was this joy, but also a kind of beautiful ache.

After I became a dancer with DJD, I got to dance *Timesplay* many times. It is a difficult piece: physically, technically and musically challenging. Even though I have heard the music too many times, those first bars of Brubeck’s *Take 5* still quicken me.

— KIMBERLEY COOPER, ARTISTIC DIRECTOR,
DECIDEDLY JAZZ DANCEWORKS, CALGARY

In December 1999, when I was nine, my mum allowed me to stay up late to watch the gala performance celebrating the re-opening of London’s Royal Opera House, televised live on BBC. The evening began with a large portrait of the Royal Ballet’s founder, Dame Ninette de Valois, slowly rising above the stage and Darcey Bussell gracefully walking down a staircase to dance *Sleeping Beauty*’s Rose Adagio. With the camera focused on Bussell’s face, I was impressed with the determination in her eyes to stay on balance on pointe as she held, one after another, the hand of each of her three suitors to slowly turn, while holding her leg in attitude.

Zenaida Yanowsky’s Hostess solo in Bronislava Nijinska’s *Les Biches* was more modern than the other repertoire of that evening. Performed in what looked like softer, demi-pointe shoes, I was drawn to the varying speed of Yanowsky’s dynamic and intricate footwork. The style of her energetic, yet effortless jumps to Poulenc’s score, while displaying a soft elegance in the upper body, became vividly imprinted in my mind.

The evening culminated with the youngest girl and boy from the Royal Ballet School, whom the commentator stated were nine years old, the same age as me. They climbed a steep set of upstage stairs to Stravinsky’s *The Firebird*, then turned to face the audience, standing alongside the school’s full-time students and the entire company of the Royal Ballet. This tableau was my first glimpse of the symmetry, grandeur and hierarchy within the classical art form of ballet.

— NAOMI COCKSHUTT, WEBSITE AND
SOCIAL MEDIA MANAGER, LONDON
BALLET CIRCLE

Breaking the Sound Barrier

Antoine Hunter and Cai Glover
deftly navigate dance and deafness

by Toba Singer



Antoine Hunter in his work *Risk*
Photo: R.J. Muna

“When I saw Oakland Ballet’s *Nutcracker* at the age of five, it wasn’t about the *développés*. It was about the gestures and communication,” says Antoine Hunter, artistic director of Urban Jazz Dance Company in San Francisco. Hunter, who is Deaf,* grew up feeling as if he were being held hostage to a hearing world — uncaptioned TV cartoons made no sense — but that feeling vanished when he saw *Nutcracker*. “Others laughed, I laughed, everyone was laughing together at the tipsy uncle onstage.”

While learning American Sign Language (ASL) as a child, Hunter began to realize that the deaf and the hearing were two separate cultures. Later, when he began dance training — first at Oakland’s Skyline High School, which has an extensive performing arts program, and then with the Paul Taylor Dance School, among others — he recognized that the steps and gestures of dance could act as a bridge between them.

Once he started teaching dance, Hunter worked to create an ASL-based vocabulary for his integrated classes. He developed many of his ideas as a teacher when he realized that the deaf dancers he worked with tended to possess interpretive depth many hearing dancers struggle to attain. Convinced that words cannot fully express feelings, Hunter believes, “Hearing people wait for words to explain. Deaf people go directly to expression.”

His teaching took off, and members of Savage Dance Company, a ballet-based jazz group with whom he has performed, began taking his intermediate-level jazz class at Berkeley’s Shawl-Anderson Dance Center. Their artistic director hoped it would help them find emotional eloquence through Hunter’s emphasis on opening the body through the spine and hips, so that feeling can flow from the centre outward.

Often, hearing people assume vibration is a deaf person’s only way into music, but Hunter also credits subtle cues from less obvious indicators, such as shaking stage lights signaling that a recording has started. “My great-grandfather played jazz on a record player. I could feel a ‘snap, crackle and pop,’ like I saw in the Rice Krispies cereal commercial on TV,” he says. Though Hunter couldn’t hear the instruments, he saw their impact on others. He reports staring at album cover illustrations to internalize the feelings they conveyed.

Among his favourite songs is Whitney Houston’s *I Will Always Love You*, because of the directness of the lyrics. In 2015, he used *Call Me, Maybe* by Canadian singer/songwriter Carly Rae Jepsen when he was choreographing, using roller skates, for a Portland children’s project. The performers included Ryan Lane, who plays Travis, one of several deaf characters in the U.S. TV series, *Switched at Birth*. Hunter says, “I set it in 24 hours, and worried it would end up cheesy, but it was colourful, capturing the free feeling I was after.”

Generally, lyrics introduce stress, and Hunter prefers instrumental music — he mentions *Seven Steps to Heaven* and *High Speed Chase*, both by Miles Davis — where he has freedom to do what he wants without being bound by the words.

Recent commissions for San Francisco companies, such as *All Blues to Deafhood* (ODC Theater), *Body of a Black Man* (AfroSolo Theatre Company) and *The Finest* (Dance Mission Theater), are characterized by periods of silence, so the audience can experience what it is like to be deaf, and include gestures from ASL, integrated into jazz, modern and classical ballet movement.

Cultural identity is the core value of the annual Bay Area International Deaf Dance Festival that Hunter inaugurated in 2013 and continues to produce. Held this year in August at San Francisco’s Dance Mission Theater, it is the nodal point for Hunter’s embrace of movement, teaching, choreographing, mentoring, commitment to social advancement, outreach to the Black community, and encouragement of deaf and hearing dancers from other countries, which have included Turkey, Mexico, the Philippines and England. Political figures, entertainers, dance artists and deaf agencies attend. The result is an abundance of cultural collaborations.

* Deaf, spelled with a capital “D,” is used to indicate a community of people with a range of hearing loss who share distinct sign languages, traditions, histories and values; Antoine Hunter is a passionate activist for Deaf culture. In this article, we mostly spell deaf with a lower case “d” to describe the auditory condition.

“It’s not about abandoning perfection, but changing our idea of what it means to be perfect.” — Cai Glover

Cai Glover dances with Montreal’s Cas Public. He lost his hearing to meningitis at age eight, and on his return to school in his hometown of Prince George, British Columbia, couldn’t cope with no longer being able to hear his classmates. So he resorted to “passing,” pretending to understand. Luckily, at that age, interactions were mostly via games and play, with plenty of visual cues.

A cochlear implant in his right ear at age nine brought a glut of auditory information, but the device did not always work. So Glover continued to pretend he was “getting it” and sought to hide deaf traits because he didn’t want to seem different.

At age 10, he accompanied his sister to a local *Nutcracker* rehearsal and immediately saw dance as a way to express what he could not say with words, and joined the cast. The following year, he began to take ballet classes and, at 18, moved to Vancouver to study at Pacific Dance Arts.

Dance training presented its own problems. While teachers couldn’t expect Glover to follow music on his own, neither did they want him to mimic others to reconcile the counts. Without realizing it, to build a platform for independence he developed what he calls an “inner metronome,” constructing a melody in his head to correspond with what he saw dancers doing in class.

Now that Glover is a professional, the fact he cannot be persuaded by the music can appeal to contemporary choreographers, some of whom have a keen interest in discovering and celebrating nuances that a deaf dancer might introduce, complementing music in sometimes unexpected ways. In the contemporary dance world, Glover says, “There is a reverence for avoiding obvious interpretations.”

At Atlanta Ballet, where he started his professional career, Glover was too young to realize he could make certain demands. He was still trying to pass, confused about how to acknowledge the hearing he did have, however intermittent, through his cochlear implant. He believes now that he placed the company in the awkward position of not knowing what help was

needed. He also experienced one obvious instance of discrimination, when a ballet mistress insisted he wear a wig “to cover up your thingies,” referring to his hearing aids. He was moved to the back line in the next rehearsal, though felt certain his frontline work had been just fine.

Stage fright can provoke anxieties for any dancer. For a deaf dancer there’s sometimes an out. Glover says he feels most free when his implant processor stops working: “I forget my mortality!” His artistic director at Cas Public, H el ene Blackburn, told him she can tell when it’s on the fritz — it’s when he dances best.

To avoid his needs becoming a focus, Glover is reluctant to slow conversations down, and becomes defensive when someone tries to help, though it can be difficult to follow larger conversations about stagecraft technicalities when they bounce from one thread to another, and where a variety of voice tones tend to blend together. He looks forward to innovative Bluetooth speaker technologies that could make a difference.

Blackburn was the first choreographer to tell Glover that she saw his frustration. Glover says she honoured his difference, convinced it was what made him “so engaging and interesting.” Until Blackburn expressed this, he hadn’t heard such an encouraging point of view from anyone else. On the contrary, he had received compliments for not appearing to be deaf, grooming him for a life spent reaching futilely for “normal.” Blackburn’s words led Glover to respect himself for being authentically perceived, proud of the creative edge being hard of hearing lent to his dancing.

Glover reminds us that disability does not come just from within; much of it is externally imposed. For him, what is disabling is architectural design with no ramps and shows without closed captioning. Culture, he says, demands variety in its artistic expression, and dance can represent a diverse culture embracing difference.

Even ballet, he points out, “isn’t only for kings and queens anymore, and need not only represent royalty and classically determined physical perfection.” Perhaps, he adds, “it’s not about abandoning perfection, but changing our idea of what it means to be perfect.” ¹¹



Pierre Des Marais Presents

The man behind Montreal's Danse Danse

BY LINDE HOWE-BECK

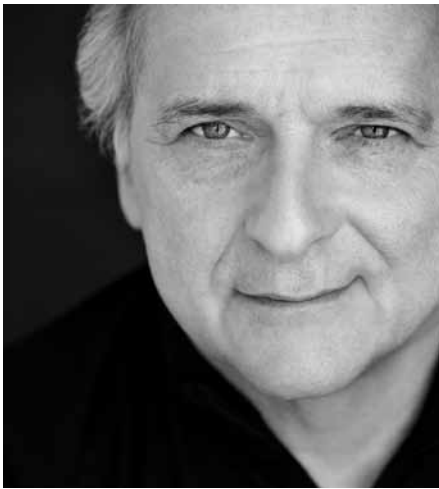


Photo: Monic Richard

It's a good bet that when 18-year-old Pierre Des Marais left his Montreal home for Vancouver with his girlfriend, the last thing he was thinking about was a career in dance. Yet, with time on his hands in a new city, and with only social dancing as background, he decided to enrol in modern dance classes. Decades later, Des Marais is a major presenter of contemporary dance back in Quebec, and an influential voice in Canadian as well as international circles.

His choice of school while in Vancouver was serendipitous. It was the early 1970s, and Anna Wyman was about to fold her performing group of advanced students from her school into a company, Anna Wyman Dance Theatre, destined to become the best-known Canadian touring dance group of its era.

Des Marais was quickly bitten by the dance bug. He became a professional dancer, spending 11 years with the Wyman company, performing in 1,100 shows and cementing a lifelong commitment to the art form.

His parents didn't approve of his decision, however; his defection to Vancouver had caused a family uproar and his choice of a life in dance engendered even more resentment. It took years — and a reception for the dance company that was attended by the governor general and the prime minister of the day — to convince them that dance might be an acceptable career after all.

"I had a great time with Anna Wyman," Des Marais says in his quiet, low-key way. Back then, dancers often shouldered additional production and administrative tasks, and Des Marais discovered he had other talents besides dancing. After becoming the first recipient of the Canada Council's apprenticeship program — during which he shadowed the Royal Winnipeg Ballet's legendary touring maestro Mark Porteous for three months — he returned to Vancouver to oversee the Wyman group's very active touring schedule, which included 92 days in Europe in 1983. By 1987, he had become general director of another key Vancouver group, Karen Jamieson Dance Company.

Three years later, he was lured back home to become production manager of La La La Human Steps, beginning a period of rapid learning during Montreal's dance boom when its cutting-edge groups matured and began their conquests of world stages. In 1992, he began three years as general director of Fondation Jean-Pierre Perreault, simultaneously overseeing triple editions in Ottawa of the Canada Dance Festival as associate producer.

Today, Des Marais is co-founder and artistic and executive director of Danse Danse, a not-for-profit presenting company in Montreal. He is an anchor of the Canadian dance establishment, travelling the world to ferret out the best in contemporary dance as well as nurturing home-grown talents. Danse Danse, now 19 years old, enjoys continuous critical and popular acclaim, a fine example of Canadian arts administration and growth. "I am satisfied," says Des Marais. "But still we don't rest on our laurels."

Five years ago, he responded to a worrying trend: while the number of very large companies remained robust, he noted a continuous decrease of Canadian mid-sized

groups. In order to fill the gap, Danse Danse decided to help small companies get the experience needed to grow by establishing a project that includes a residency and a three-week performance run in Cinquième Salle, a 300-seat theatre in Montreal's vast Place des Arts complex.

When Danse Danse first approached small groups, initial offers to help with their growth were met with resistance. Des Marais believes they had reined in their ambitions because they feared losing their government funding if they risked change.

Des Marais knows the importance of risk and its vital role in artistic achievement. His own years working with Montreal's pioneering modern dance companies taught him much about daring. He especially credits his time as general director of Compagnie Marie Chouinard (1996-2000) for teaching him about dreaming.

"Marie was truly my great mentor. She was always willing to take risks. It was the most exciting time of my career. We were able to build."

He knows, too, that it takes time as well as opportunity to expand a company. But he's betting that with talent and support, the situation will change. Rubberbandance, for example, has been actively nurtured by Danse Danse for a couple of seasons and will premiere its first large work in 2018-2019 at Théâtre Maisonneuve, a 2,000-seat theatre in Place des Arts. Vancouver's Shay Kuebler/Radical System Art and two Montreal groups, Compagnie Dave St-Pierre and Tentacle Tribe, benefitted from the residency program during the 2016-2017 season.

Danse Danse grew out of LOMA, a group formed in 1998 by representatives (including Des Marais) of La La La Human Steps, O Vertigo, Marie Chouinard and the Agora de la danse to fill a presenting niche left by the demise of the Festival international de nouvelle danse. Within two years, LOMA gave birth to Danse Danse with Des Marais and Clothilde Cardinal as co-founders.

Soon after its inauguration, Danse Danse made an innovative decision to focus on spectators instead of creators. Des Marais and Cardinal wanted to introduce audiences to the ever-expanding variety of Canadian and international contemporary dance, to educate, stimulate and please. This was a radical idea at a time when the priority among many in the dance community was artistic expression, and spectators were valued mostly as ticket buyers.

Today, Danse Danse is proudly market-driven, selling 30,000 tickets annually, of which 50 percent are to 2,700 dedicated subscribers; government subsidies make up less than one-third of revenues. Des Marais believes Danse Danse is Canada's largest presenting company, crediting success to independence, networking, "goodwill negotiations" with the companies they present and, especially, subscribers, who are "truly, truly, truly our backbone."

He sees himself as a builder with an insatiable thirst for discovery. "When I see a new company, I'm like a little kid ... I think there are many ways to make dance even more popular."

He programs each Danse Danse season as if planning a visual voyage. "On a trip you reach peaks and valleys, but everything along the way is valid — the great, the [eye] candy and the challenging. We're not always successful, but that's not for lack of trying."

Seasons are crammed with discovery, from small local groups to big international ones like María Pagés Compañía, Dada Masilo Dance Factory Johannesburg, Batsheva Dance Company or Nederlands Dans Theater. Ten to 12 companies are presented for up to five nights at Place des Arts theatres, which range from 300 to 3,000 seats. Frequently there are shows at Grand Théâtre de Québec in Quebec City as well.

Regardless of reputation, the director's policy is never to book a show Danse Danse hasn't seen live. This requires travelling. These days he shares this task with programming and development director Caroline Ohrt. Each spends about one month a year travelling across continents to watch shows on their wish list.

Although now in his mid-60s, Des Marais shows no signs of slowing down. Quite the contrary. Next year for its 20th anniversary, Danse Danse will present 15 productions in 70 performances in Montreal and Quebec City, a 30 percent increase over this season.

"I'm still like a kid in a sandbox," he says. "Danse Danse was my dream, is my dream and continues to be my dream." ^{DI}



Pierre Des Marais appeared with Vicky Wood on the cover of *Vandance*, the precursor of *Dance International*, in July 1978, representing the Anna Wyman Dance Theatre. The company was included in a feature written by Elizabeth Zimmer titled "Canadian Choreography Now: A Sampling of Attitudes, Midsummer 1978."

Trisha Brown 1936-2017



Trisha Brown and her company dancers in Brown's *Set and Reset*, 1996
Photo: Chris Callis



Photo: Marc Ginot

Best known as an integral part of the revolutionary 1970s' dance scene, Trisha Brown continued to explore her craft for the rest of her life, creating around 100 dances and six operas. She had a gift for sourcing pure movement impulses and meticulously crafting them into complex works of art, filling rigid compositional structures with lush, exuberant dance vocabulary.

The American postmodern dance legend passed away on March 18 at the age of 80. Having grown up in Washington State, Brown cited the woods of the Pacific Northwest as her first artistic inspiration. She studied traditional modern dance at Mills College in Oakland, California, but shortly after graduating moved to New York, studying with Merce Cunningham, José Limón and Anna Halprin. Rejecting narrative, emotion and conventional musicality in her work, the artist was a champion of pure movement and abstraction. Brown helped establish Judson Dance Theater and Grand Union before founding Trisha Brown Dance Company in 1970.

There is a defiant simplicity in Brown's early works. *Man Walking Down the Side of a Building* (1970) is exactly how it sounds; a man in a harness walks his horizontal body toward the ground. In *Roof Piece* (1971), several dancers clad in red transmit movement material across SoHo rooftops. Her solo works, particularly *Accumulation* and *Watermotor*, capture the profound spontaneity of great improvisation within choreographies that are completely

set. Watching these solos on video today is like inhaling the pure essence of Brown's aesthetic. It's like witnessing her later group works distilled into one body.

Brown later moved onto proscenium stages and made intricate ensemble pieces such as *Glacial Decoy* (1979), danced in silence, with costumes by visual artist Robert Rauschenberg, which entered the Paris Opera Ballet repertoire in 2003 [and is featured on the cover of this issue]. For the internationally beloved *Set and Reset* (1983), Brown collaborated with composer Laurie Anderson and Rauschenberg. These works speak to Brown's distinctive interplay between structure and freedom. The movement itself is so playful it seems improvised, but a view of the entire group reveals clear moments of unison between a couple of people, then two more, then another three, until they all fall into unison and then back into fragmentation. Legs swing, arms are flung, and geometric shapes form and dissolve in a comforting rhythm. It's all so casually human — the kind of movement we can imagine ourselves doing — and yet it's also so specific. Fittingly, Brown is quoted as calling herself “a bricklayer with a sense of humour.”

In her later years, Brown began to choreograph to more traditional forms of music and warmed to more classical collaborations. *M.O.* (1995), based on Bach's *Musical Offering*, was choreographed measure-for-measure to the sheet music. She brought her particular brand of abstraction to operas such as *L'Orfeo* (1998) and *Pygmalion* (2010). In 1995, Brown created a duet with Mikhail Baryshnikov entitled *You can see us*. For *El Trilogy* (2000) she turned to the jazz compositions of Dave Douglas for inspiration. Her last piece, whimsically titled *I'm going to toss my arms – if you catch them they're yours*, was made in 2011.

In 1991, Brown became the first woman to receive a MacArthur Genius Grant. She also served on the United States' National Council on the Arts from 1994 to 1997, received a National Medal of the Arts in 2002, and was given a New York Bessie Award for lifetime achievement in 2011. Beneath the accolades, at the heart of Trisha Brown's work, was a celebration of the human experience as expressed by the body. Her vision, diligence and generosity made a permanent mark on contemporary dance as we know it.

— JENN EDWARDS



Photo: Courtesy of Chiriaeff Archives

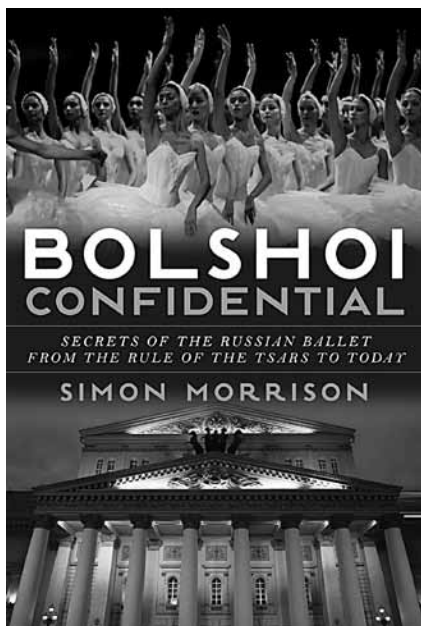
Uriel Luft 1933-2017

Uriel Luft, who was integral to the development of Les Grands Ballets Canadiens de Montréal, died on March 28 at age 83. General manager from 1961-1974, he helped artistic director and company founder Ludmilla Chiriaeff, to whom he was married,

build the group into a major force, masterminding several early tours.

Born in Berlin, Luft arrived in Montreal in 1957, where in his role of impresario he later presented La La La Human Steps, Les Ballets Jazz de Montréal (now BJM Danse) and independent dance artist Margie Gillis, among others, introducing them to a wider national and international public. He organized tours for major European and Asian companies, and in the 1980s helped launch the first modern dance series in Montreal and Toronto.

In the *Montreal Gazette*, Gillis describes Luft's passion for dance. “He loved it, he loved us and he loved making that deal. He was really the quintessential I-care-about-the-arts, I-care-about-the-conditions-needed-to-work person.”



BOLSHOI CONFIDENTIAL: SECRETS OF THE RUSSIAN BALLET FROM THE RULE OF THE TSARS TO TODAY

By Simon Morrison

www.penguinrandomhouse.ca

One evening in 1928 at the Bolshoi in Moscow, two 20-year-old friends, Natalie Aksenova and Agnessa Koreleva, dancers and “students of theatrical decoration,” climbed to the theatre’s uppermost flies, bound themselves together with a silk scarf and jumped. Their 70-foot suicide-pact leap occurred near the end of a performance of the Soviet censor-approved ballet *The Red Poppy*, apparently calculated to coincide with the moment when the fictional heroine is about to die. Ekaterina Geltser, the heroine ballerina, was facing downstage. She heard what she later described as an “awful crunching sound.” It was only when the curtain came down — yes, the show was danced to its rousing *dram-balet* conclusion — did Geltser see the bodies, one motionless, the other still slightly twitching.

The young women had chosen death as the only solution to their shared and unrequited love for the designer Mikhail Kurilko. Another Bolshoi house designer, Fyodor Fyodorovsky, was initially arrested. Then it was Kurilko’s turn. Avel Enukidze, a high-level apparatchik and notorious groper of young ballerinas, then inserted himself into the proceedings, and both men were freed.

Jump back in time some 80 years to the sorry tale of Avdotya Arshinina, a teenaged dancer at the bottom of the Bolshoi’s rigid “Table of Ranks.” She was dumped at the door of a Moscow hospital, delirious and suffering the marks of a hideous gang rape. It was later alleged that Arshinina’s father had sold her to Prince Boris Cherkassky for 10,000 rubles.

Cherkassky stewed in jail for several months, but was eventually released. The father was convicted and banished to Siberia.

According to Princeton music professor Simon Morrison, author of an enthralling new page-turner about the Bolshoi’s long and turbulent history, such sordid goings-on were not uncommon. Favoured senior ballerinas moonlighted as mistresses to the socially exalted. Lesser souls such as Arshinina, without the political leverage and protection of aristocratic patrons, were effectively treated as sex slaves.

During the reign of Tsar Nicholas I, the Imperial Ballet, so Morrison relates, functioned as “a harem of sorts for the court.” Older noblemen looked to the Bolshoi’s academy, trolling the classes for promising targets and, in Morrison’s chilling description, plucked them “like fruit from hothouse gardens.”

Then there were all the heated internal rivalries, shifting allegiances and duplicitous dealings as a parade of administrators, ballet masters and ballerinas jostled for power or privileged treatment. Competitiveness among the dancers could reach extremes, especially when they mobilized their fans to disrupt rivals’ performances.

Colourful instances Morrison cites include that of Luisa Weiss, who, in 1845, had an apple thrown at her during a curtain call. Weiss had powerful ties to the court and although the apple served more to humiliate than wound, a full investigation followed. Théodore Guerinot, the fiery ballet master, was implicated, as was his favoured ballerina and Weiss rival, Ekaterina Sankovskaya.

More lurid was the case of the dead cat. The victim this time was another Sankovskaya rival, Elena Andreyanova. Her advantages, apart from great talent, included the intimate favours of Alexander Gedeonov, director of the Imperial Theatres in both Moscow and the Tsarist Russian capital, St. Petersburg.

Imagine the fallout when Sankovskaya’s clique, the Sankovisti, hired a Moscow tradesman with a strong arm and good aim to lob a deceased feline across the orchestra pit so it landed at Andreyanova’s feet. Bedlam ensued. In the aftermath, the Sankovisti’s student leader was banished and extra police assigned to Andreyanova’s subsequent appearances.

Not much seems to have changed over the Bolshoi’s 240-year existence.

Morrison opens his history close to the present, with the notorious 2013 acid attack on then Bolshoi artistic director Sergei Filin. He also closes in present times with a not entirely hopeful appraisal of the Bolshoi’s future under Russia’s latest iteration of corrupt authoritarian government. Yet, as the rest of his book vividly relates, the Bolshoi has weathered a succession of scandals and calamities since its late 18th-century foundation, not least the terrifying Stalinist era during which all artists operated in fear of their lives.

Of course, it was not all scandal and calamity, and many of *Bolshoi Confidential’s* most absorbing passages detail its many artistic achievements. For decades, St. Petersburg enjoyed primacy; Moscow was viewed as a provincial backwater. But relative isolation and imperial neglect allowed the Moscow theatre to develop its own character.

Although Morrison makes occasional reference to the opera, his primary focus is the ballet, justifiably so because it is ballet that defines what is today recognized worldwide as the Bolshoi brand.

While Morrison excels at portraiture — and what a gallery of rogues and heroes it is — his book discusses aesthetic trends and the emergence of a distinct Bolshoi style. This, he correctly acknowledges, is in constant evolution while retaining some essential Russianness that is more easily sensed than described.

— **MICHAEL CRABB**

MEDIA | WATCH

THE ART OF MOVEMENT
By Ken Broward and Deborah Ory
Black Dog and Leventhal Publishers
blackdogandleventhal.com



PARIS OPERA BALLET
KENNETH MACMILLAN'S
L'HISTOIRE DE MANON
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+ 11 minutes bonus
belairclassiques.com

The cover photo of this big, beautifully produced book shows dancer Masha Dashkina Maddux (Martha Graham Dance Company) frozen in mid-flight, long tresses flowing, rose-pink dress billowing. She could be one of Botticelli's Three Graces. Photographers Ken Broward and Deborah Ory of NYC Dance Project repeatedly show dancers as harmoniously proportioned and serenely poised. It's a Renaissance notion of beauty that might not apply to much contemporary dance today, but which nonetheless still has widespread currency.

Dance students may gaze wistfully at shots of famous dancers in textbook examples of a *jeté*, *sissonne*, *brisé volé* or other classical ballet pose. With so many similar images, comparisons are inevitable. Who has the best extension in a grand *jeté* — Xander Parish (Mariinsky Ballet), Daniel Harder (Alvin Ailey American Dance Theater) or Julian MacKay (Royal Ballet)? Which male abdomen is most ripped — Gregory Dean's (Royal Danish Ballet) or Daniil Simkin's (American Ballet Theatre)? Who sports the most brilliant gown or tutu? Too many spectacular creations to enumerate.

Dance caught in flight indeed inspires us. Sometimes, though, Broward and Ory impose a meditative stillness where the sentiment calls for raw passion. A clinch between Sterling Baca (American Ballet Theatre) and Nayara Lopes (Dance Theatre of Harlem) carries no heat. There's heavier simmering when Dayesi Torriente (National Ballet of Cuba; now with Pennsylvania Ballet) holds tight to elusive Arian Molina Soca (Pennsylvania Ballet). But the eroticism that invigorates dance — yes, ballet, too — is best suggested simply by Simkin and Céline Cassone (Les Ballets Jazz de Montréal) and their intertwined bare legs.

More insightful are photos that hint at the creative impulse or personality behind the image. Kyle Abraham (Abraham.In.Motion) delights himself and us striking spontaneous poses in a 16-shot montage. Standing atop a crate, hands in pockets, Angel Corella (artistic director, Pennsylvania Ballet) in frock coat and tie gently mocks the artificiality of art. Prominent shoulder tattoos reveal the spirit of Joaquin De Luz (New York City Ballet), shot in casual profile, even more than his photo in impressive flight.

In a *New York Times* interview, Alvin Ailey artistic director Robert Battle admitted that, in youth, he imitated the photos of dancers in dance magazines. *The Art of Movement* celebrates dance with images to inspire today's generation of dancers and tomorrow's, too.

— VICTOR SWOBODA



THE ROYAL BALLET
LIAM SCARLETT'S FRANKENSTEIN
Opus Arte
130 minutes + 14 minutes bonus
opusarte.com

Frankenstein, Liam Scarlett's first full-length ballet, premiered on London's Royal Opera House main stage in 2016, when he was barely 30. The reception from critics was lukewarm at best; audiences, on the other hand, loved it.

Scarlett's ballet is based on Mary Shelley's 1818 Gothic novel. Obsessed by his mother's death, Victor Frankenstein succeeds in creating a new life in the form of the horribly disfigured Creature, who is not pleased to discover the truth behind its existence and vows revenge on its maker. There are certainly flaws in the ballet: overlong ensemble scenes, an unnecessary tavern scene and some underdeveloped characters (especially Victor's fiancée Elizabeth and his friend Henry). The dialogues between Victor and the Creature are central to the novel's philosophical arguments, and the two needed more time onstage together to articulate their relationship.

Frankenstein is still a gripping experience, even on DVD. John Macfarlane's period designs are splendidly realized, especially the anatomy theatre, which could have come straight out of Hammer Horror films, complete with jars of body parts and a galvanization scene packed with flashes, sparks and whirring contraptions. Lowell Liebermann's commissioned score rises to the occasion when required, and there are some fantastically creepy moments; I almost jumped out of my skin when the Creature first stirred into life. Scarlett delivers some beautiful pas de deux for Victor and Elizabeth (Federico Bonelli and Laura Morera), but the star of the show is Steven McRae's Creature — pathetic, terrifying, touching and menacing by turns; his outstanding performance gives the ballet its full emotional impact. The DVD's extras include informative clips discussing the choreography, design and music.

— HEATHER BRAY

Recorded in May 2015, this DVD is not only an outstanding presentation of Kenneth MacMillan's classic, but also captures the farewell performance of much-loved Paris Opera étoile Aurélie Dupont, who recently succeeded Benjamin Millepied as the company's director.

Choreographed in 1974, *Manon* traces the corruption and downfall of a beautiful but poor young woman in 18th-century France. Aided by superb set and costume designs by Nicholas Georgiadis, MacMillan creates a teeming world of beggars, prostitutes, convicts and predatory gentlemen. The ballet is perhaps best known for the series of stunning pas de deux for Manon and her beloved Des Grieux, each one articulating a new stage in their relationship. Dupont's interpretation is nuanced and intelligent; her Manon longs for love and comfort, and ultimately she makes her own decision to sell herself to a wealthy protector — influenced, but not forced, by her brother. There is a heartrending moment in Act 2 where we see her absorb the full consequences of her actions.

Italian superstar Roberto Bolle is her Des Grieux; both inhabit their characters with conviction. Their electric onstage chemistry makes the tragic conclusion of the ballet genuinely moving.

Benjamin Pech is a truly chilling Monsieur G.M. and Karl Paquette an equally frightening gaoler.

The DVD includes an excellent bonus interview with Dupont, who discusses her approach to the role and her career.

— HEATHER BRAY

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**Les Grands Ballets Canadiens de Montréal's
National Centre for Dance Therapy
Photo: Damian Siqueiros / Zetaproduction**



INSIDE ED

The Dance Therapist as Creative Artist

by Patricia P. Capello

In writing about her method of choreography, German modern dance pioneer Mary Wigman discovered that her task was to seek out a common feeling among her dancers, what dance/movement therapists might call a theme. Wigman would then acknowledge this theme, after which her dancers would improvise freely from it. As a choreographer, she would look at the common denominator coming from the different personalities within the group. Just as a dance/movement therapist would, Wigman accepted what was offered from the range of personalities and used her creative ability to find the link that bound them together into one key expressive idea. From this link, the structure of the dance in both the art form and the therapeutic session is built.

Dance/movement therapists develop movement statements with their bodies in a way that is not exclusively predetermined by skill or practice, but, rather, as creators who can improvise spontaneously. They tend to be comfortable with change and are able to handle new situations with confidence, strength and courage. As therapists, we face this dynamic of change constantly in the moods, behaviours and climate of the group itself.

Dance/movement therapists share the creative person's ability to be spontaneous: in our case, in developing dances through original and organic movements offered by the client. We achieve this spontaneity by being fully concentrated on the present, the here and now, as it is occurring. To do this, we must forget the past and not dwell in the future. This "ever presentness" is a phenomenological aspect of dance, since as we move there is no past or future, simply a present. Being genuinely there for the client (without preconceived prejudices or expectations),

and openly spontaneous with a dance that is original, defines the dance/movement therapist as creator.

As therapists and creators, we accept the movements of clients (barring physical or environmental abuse). Unlike the dance teacher or choreographer, we are not product oriented; we do not edit, pick and choose, correct, improve, doubt, reject, judge or evaluate. We accept the individual's movements and let them flow upon us; we let the dance be itself.

It is intrinsic to our training that we prepare ourselves to the extent that we are ready to receive and open to all that is offered in the session. We are taught to do this without shock or prejudice.

Being therapists and creators, we are often engaged in moral and ethical issues. We see a movement and act upon it, choosing to reflect, mirror, enlarge, accentuate, emphasize, moderate or diminish it according to the needs of the client. In doing so, we are actively allowing something (in this case the movement) to live or die. While we are giving life to or creating one sequence of movement, we are necessarily destroying another. Our therapeutic decision, in the form of movement expression, is therefore a creative life event.

In our role as dance/movement therapists, we often try to link movement material to emotional sources. It is within the creative process that we may be able to find new and unexpected connections. We must, therefore, as creators and therapists be free in the sense that we are not anchored to or restricted by one method of thinking or one formula for symbolic associations and relationships.

As dance/movement therapists, we must exhibit creative qualities such as a capacity for being there; courage in our abilities; adaptability to change; ability for spontaneity and improvisation; skill in finding unique connections; accepting the client and their own creative process; and ultimately permitting the beginning of healing. ▽

Dance/movement therapist Patricia P. Capello is a faculty member of the 92 Y/Harkness Dance Center's Alternate Route Program in Dance/Movement Therapy both in New York and at Les Grands Ballets' National Centre for Dance Therapy in Montreal.

Winnipeg



by Holly Harris

There's little doubt that HIV/AIDS has changed the dance world forever, with many artists lost since the pandemic first took hold during the 1980s. It has also fueled generations of choreographers to create powerful works as an artistic response. The premiere of Winnipeg's Contemporary Dancers *As Though I Had Wings* by artistic director Brent Lott, inspired by the work and social activism of late American visual artist Keith Haring, and the rallying cry of "silence = death" by AIDS coalition ACT UP, is the latest offering in that sober legacy, presented in January at the Rachel Browne Theatre.

Based on evocative poetry by Jaik Josephson (Lott's life partner), the 54-minute production for seven dancers is infused with the pulsating energy of Studio 54 in New York, which became an incubator for the deadly virus. Winnipeg-based composer Shirley Grierson's driving score includes poignant songs performed by the cast, with upright bassist Ashley Au creating fascinating sub-text as an all-knowing witness.

The show's potent images unfold as a series of vignettes. There are suggestions of eye exams (which led to diagnosis), where the dancers, seated on wooden cubes, blindly stare into space as Johanna Riley waves a finger in front of their faces. In another, moans of pleasure morph into shrieks of pain, a visceral testament to AIDS' razor's edge of love, sex and death. One of the most striking moments comes when silhouetted dancers, holding hands, balance and

tiptoe across cubes as if they are stepping stones. This evocation of childhood paper dolls speaks to the fragility of life.

At times, Lott's often gestural choreography felt underdeveloped, with an overabundance of unison movement appearing even more one-dimensional when cast against video designer jaymez' starkly graphic images. The show also arguably would have been stronger had there been a greater emotional arc.

The Royal Winnipeg Ballet presented its annual mixed repertoire program, held across the street from its usual Centennial Concert Hall at the Pantages Playhouse Theatre for a three-show run at the end of January. Performed with recorded music, it provided a rare opportunity to see the 77-year-old company return to the stage where it first found its footing as a world-famous company under its late, legendary artistic director Arnold Spohr.

The eclectic 90-minute bill featuring four works showcased two Royal Winnipeg Ballet rising stars: corps de ballet dancers Saeka Shirai and Yue Shi reprised their *Don Quixote Pas De Deux*, which earned them a silver medal at the 2016 Varna International Ballet Competition. Shirai's pristine lines and confidence beyond her years easily handled Marius Petipa's choreographic bag of tricks, among them fouettés, pirouettes and piqué turns, while Shi's sky-high scissor leaps seemed suspended in the air.

The program also featured the company premiere of American choreographer and Paul Taylor muse Lila York's *Celts* (1995),

which premiered one year before the *Riverdance* phenomenon swept North America. Fueled by a pastiche score including music by the Chieftains and Celtic Thunder, the New York-based choreographer (who created the RWB's 2014 adaptation of Margaret Atwood's *The Handmaid's Tale*) fuses ballet, modern, classical and Irish folk dance into an explosion of sights and sound.

Bodies fly on and offstage. Yosuke Mino appeared like a grinning leprechaun during his Green Man solo, while Jo-Ann Sundermeier as the Red Woman and Dmitri Dovgoselets, the Red Man, deliver an exuberant, rhythmically pounding duet. Sophia Lee displayed flawless control during her Brown Woman solo.

The male ensemble was a highlight, with Dmitri Dovgoselets leading the charge as six bare-chested men in costume designer Tunji Dada's short, velvety red skirts shake their fists, tumble, cartwheel and hurl their bodies at each other like rutting bucks.

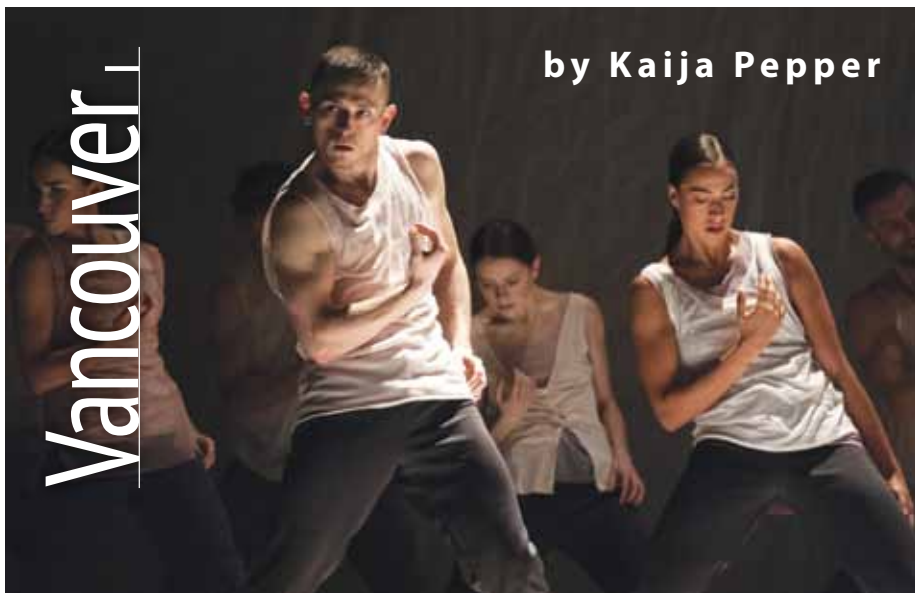
William Forsythe's *The Vertiginous Thrill of Exactitude*, last staged by the Royal Winnipeg Ballet in 2012, is a kaleidoscope of kinetic movement. The company dancers, wearing Stephen Galloway's lime green tutus and red bodysuits, kept pace throughout its highly technical demands, executing Forsythe's nail-biting choreography with crisp precision.

Montreal-based Mark Godden's *Angels in the Architecture* (1992) is an architecturally conceived, 25-minute work that juxtaposes angular movement vocabulary with fluid lyrical lines in an ode to the simplicity of the Shaker lifestyle. Several sections, such as the men's ensemble, appeared funkier than the prim Shakers might have allowed, feeling out of place even within Godden's contemporary aesthetic.

However, the stark visual images of the corn brooms and wooden Shaker chairs, with their slats at one point suggesting prison bars for the women to peer through, are evocative. And Godden discovers the passion behind the piety, with a stirring finale danced to Aaron Copland's iconic arrangement of the Shaker hymn *Simple Gifts*.

Finally, RWB artistic director André Lewis, with late Cree elder and activist Mary Richard, and Cree activist/producer/actor Tina Keeper, have been awarded a Canadian Meritorious Service Medal for 2014's *Going Home Star: Truth and Reconciliation*. The ballet, choreographed by Godden and featuring Christos Hatzis' Juno-nominated score, was supported by the Truth and Reconciliation Commission. ■

by Kaija Pepper



“As long as you are here I am too.” I am still not sure whether this line of text, projected on the back wall during Jan Martens’ *Sweat Baby Sweat*, was a warning or a promise. The Belgian choreographer’s 2011 duet opened the PuSh International Performing Arts Festival’s dance programming in January.

At first, I took the dry, task-like interaction between Kimmy Ligtoet and Steven Michel, clad in skimpy bathing suits, as an interesting display of slow-motion acrobatics that often looked like advanced couple’s yoga. Near the end, I even took their mouth-to-mouth connection as simply more esoteric yoga, that is, without emotional resonance. But “the kiss” went on so long, with so much energy, that a romantic subtext began to suggest itself. Although the minimalism and repetition left several of us restless, some of the subtleties were astonishingly intimate, such as the quiet, persistent way the dancers’ rib cages pulsed toward each other.

The other PuSh show I saw at Scotiabank Dance Centre carried a warning in its title: *FOLK-S, will you still love me tomorrow?* (2012). Italian Alessandro Sciaroni similarly built his piece on repetition: pretty much the sole choreographic vocabulary is the lively thigh- and shoe-slapping schuhplattler. Again, the audience was restless, yet there were many chuckles as the six performers worked the traditional Bavarian dance for all its worth, jumping mid-plattler straight up into the air for a collective moment of silence or

trying it to hip-hop music.

The Vancouver premiere of Kyle Abraham’s *Abraham.In.Motion* in March arrived courtesy of the Chutzpah! Festival. There’s a bit of a buzz around New York-based, Pittsburgh-born Abraham, with his 2013 MacArthur Fellowship and his duet with New York City Ballet’s Wendy Whelan as part of her Restless Creature project. Judging from the three works we saw at the Norman Rothstein Theatre — including an excerpt from *Dearest Home*, set to premiere at Yerba Buena Center for the Arts in May — Abraham follows his own artistic path. The movement was refreshingly not super-fast, super-intense or super-flexible. Instead, the virtuosity of a trained dancer was balanced with a low-key physical expression that opened up a friendlier human dimension, perhaps reflecting Abraham’s roots in late 1970s hip-hop culture.

Mid-March, Ballet BC presented a quartet of works by local artists, a gesture intended to commemorate our country’s 150th anniversary. Crystal Pite was one of them: the company danced her *Solo Echo* in 2015, but a second sight of this elegiac work was welcome. Created for Nederlands Dans Theater in 2012 and set to Brahms, *Solo Echo* was full of mysterious stealth as the seven dancers crept and collapsed with a range of emotional expression. Moments of virtuosity in which they were fully, physically in the moment, as in Andrew Barte’s gush backward into a full-body release that took him almost parallel to the floor, upped the ante in terms of theatrical expression.

But I’ve jumped to the evening’s end. *Anthem* by Lisa Gelley and Josh Martin, whose Company 605 has steadily built a place for itself since its founding in 2006, opened. Typically, the tension and pulse of street dance forms give their work a contemporary vibe.

Anthem, for 13 dancers in grey pants and pale tops, champions individuality. There were scenarios where the dancers seemed to be just hanging out on their own before being drawn into the action that grows in waves. Or where the stillness of a few framed the movement of others. Brandon Alley embodied the cool 605 style with exciting precision: his wiry muscular frame arrived precisely at the movement’s edge, going just there and no further.

Wen Wei Wang is an established Chinese-Canadian choreographer who typically explores his cultural roots in his work. In *Swan*, he sets a bomb off in the middle of two iconic female-driven classical ballets — *Swan Lake* and *The Dying Swan*, both of which are clearly evoked choreographically. And in the music — Sammy Chien’s superb sound design uses excerpts from Tchaikovsky’s *Swan Lake* and Saint-Saëns’ *The Swan*, as well as bird sounds, electroacoustic noise and haunting echo effects to evoke a world in disorder. Amid the rubble, Wang constructs his muscular, male-driven version.

Two ballet barres evoked a dance locale, in which two male-female couples, one white, one black, engaged, the men facilitating the women’s balances as they stretched and pivoted on pointe. The focus, however, was on two lone bare-chested men in black pleather trousers and sturdy jazz runners that allowed them to balance on their toes. Christoph von Riedemann opened the piece with a long-legged, thrusting solo, and Barte ended it, straddling and slumped atop the barres.

Finally, Lesley Telford — formerly a dancer with Nederlands Dans Theater — contributed *If I were 2*, a duet for Emily Chessa and Alley. Breathing deeply into the precision-built jerk and flow of the choreography, the two worked companionably side-by-side, their dance set to live poetry by Barbara Adler. Although I felt somewhat caught in the middle of sound and vision, *If I were 2* contributed to the evening’s rich sense of possibility and style in contemporary ballet. ▫

When James Kudelka introduced a puppet doll into his choreography in 2009, its presence seemed at times a distraction or, worse, a gimmick; but this was just the beginning. Kudelka explored this unusual approach in a number of subsequent works, achieving notable success three years ago with *Malcolm*, effectively a duet for Kudelka himself and the titular puppet. That emotionally concentrated, even unsettling work demonstrated just how much “life” and character a skillful handler can imbue into an inanimate object. The same may be said of *Love, Sex & Brahms*, presented in March by Coleman Lemieux & Compagnie and, in addition to such compelling performers as Evelyn Hart and Bill Coleman, featuring another puppet in a pivotal role — Sarkis, “Malcolm’s cousin,” as Kudelka describes him.

The hour-long chamber work is an extended version for an enlarged cast of *#lovesexbrahms*, choreographed for a 2015 program devised by pianist Andrew Burashko and featuring Brahms’ beloved solo piano intermezzi.

The setting is domestic, Edwardian and on the surface socially respectable — a salon or perhaps a house party. While characters are clearly defined, their relationships are less distinct, fluid and sometimes freighted with past experience. There are multiple possible narratives at work, interweaving and overlapping in a dance that unfolds episodically, always alert to Brahms’ mood of romantic longing. The choreography is

rooted in the act of walking, highly evolved and inflected, a heightened promenade that allows the cast to project as actors moving rather than as dancers trying to act.

Throughout, Sarkis the puppet occupies an enigmatic and changing role — a catalyst, a trigger of memories, a hovering conscience and, at times, an interceder in fraught encounters. Sarkis is never less than an active component in this porous drama of love, lust and melancholic reflection; never a distraction or gimmick.

Using personal infirmity as the motivating idea for a dance work is tricky business, but, in her *Infinite Storms*, Nova Bhattacharya, a chronic victim of debilitating migraine attacks, skillfully manages to vault the personal to achieve something more universal and poetic. The components of the hour-long work for five women, including Bhattacharya, at times seem disconnected, but *Infinite Storms* moves beyond obvious references to specific suffering to a more generalized impression of how pain can be endured and its burden made bearable by the support and compassion of others.

As she works on a major new project, Peggy Baker offered a different perspective on existing works in a four-part program, SplitScreen, at the intimate studio-like Theatre Centre. The emphasis was on intriguing juxtapositions and textural contrasts, solos and ensembles. Baker herself reprised *Epilogue*, from 2013, in which two wooden chairs become her metaphorical partners

in an emotional mini-epic that reflects on loss and moving beyond it. The program included *Yang*, choreographed by Baker in 1998 as a male solo, reconfigured in 2003 as a male/female duet and now as what might best be described as a pair of solos for two men, performed simultaneously. Thierry De Mey’s rhythmically complex percussion score propels Ric Brown and David Norsworthy in a fast-paced dance; their sheer physicality is thrilling to watch.

Hari Krishnan exploded any number of stereotypical cultural assumptions in a witty and provocative new work called *Holy Cow(s)!* Although of Indian descent, Krishnan, who commutes weekly from Toronto to Middletown, Connecticut, where he is an associate professor of dance at Wesleyan University, was born and raised in Singapore. He has lived in Canada for more than a quarter century. He is volubly gay, a proclaimed feminist, a beef-eating Hindu and a New York Bessie Award-winning exponent of bharatanatyam, elements of which intrude into the eclectic, hybrid movement vocabulary of *Holy Cow(s)!*

Apart from dishing Trumpian bigotry and misogyny, and scrambling South Asian gender stereotypes, Krishnan’s cast of five men and two women — the former often sporting black tulle tutus — relish every opportunity for exuberant parody. In the end, it’s more than Krishnan’s exasperated response to the way he, too, often finds himself prejudged; it’s a big shout-out for “Anything Goes.”

On the big ballet front, the National Ballet of Canada fielded the “family-oriented” *Pinocchio* (reviewed on page 58), followed by a mixed bill for audiences who actually like dance. Apart from a revival of Jerome Robbins’ *The Concert* — 60 years old and showing it — and another New York City Ballet import, Balanchine’s neo-Neapolitan romp, *Tarantella*, the highlight was the North American premiere of British choreographer Wayne McGregor’s *Genus*.

Inspired by McGregor’s reading of Darwin’s *On the Origin of Species* and other scientific stimuli, *Genus* has a different mood from *Chroma*, acquired by the National Ballet with huge success in 2010. McGregor’s hyper-physicality, sudden dynamic shifts, rippling torsos, almost inconceivable articulations and strange sculptural formations are accompanied by a slightly distanced, even meditative tone. Until now, it has only been danced by its 2007 originating company, the Paris Opera Ballet. ▯

Toronto |



by Michael Crabb

Tyler Gledhill and Evelyn Hart in James Kudelka’s *Love, Sex & Brahms*
Photo: Jeremy Mimmagh

Montreal

by Victor Swoboda



Scandal and controversy! It's been awhile since Montreal's dance scene had a good ruckus, and the 2017 winter season had two. The initial scandal involved, not unusually, local choreographer Dave St-Pierre and his latest show, *Suie* (Soot), created with Anne Le Beau. Repercussions were such that *Suie's* presenter, the prestigious Montreal series Danse Danse, offered tickets to its other shows to patrons upset by *Suie*. The unprecedented gesture garnered national media attention.

Suie's spectators were handed earplugs as they entered the Cinquième Salle, the smallest performance venue at Montreal's premier showplace, Place des Arts. *Suie's* soundscape pushed up the decibels, true, but it was projected visuals of a woman urinating "flames" on St-Pierre lying under a pile of dirt that pushed some spectators to head for the door.

In a subsequent scene, Le Beau struggled to free her hand stuck in a vending machine, as, in turn, did Bernard Martin, who later had difficulty extricating his hand from between Le Beau's thighs. St-Pierre's works have regularly

expressed his contention that big commerce — here represented by the vending machine — poisons people's sex lives. But his symbolism and humour often remain heavy handed, and *Suie* was no exception. After years of his shows, we know what he's against. Perhaps it's time that he showed us what he stands for.

Soon after the St-Pierre debacle, controversy arose over the surprising announcement by BJM Danse that it had acquired exclusive rights to Leonard Cohen's music and published texts for the next five years. BJM bought up the rights to protect its Cohen homage called *Dance Me*, which will have its premiere in December 2017 and tour extensively thereafter. Fine for BJM, but its announcement came less than two weeks before Margie Gillis planned to present a retrospective of her solos called Legacy Project, in which one of the invited dancers, Susan Paulson, was scheduled to perform Gillis' well-known solo, *Blue*, to Cohen's *Famous Blue Raincoat*.

Despite Gillis' appeals, BJM declined to grant her permission to use the Cohen song on such short notice. Magnanimous as always, Gillis publicly expressed goodwill toward BJM, but asked Paulson nonetheless to dance the choreography without music and under a new title, *Presence of Absence*.

Paulson did so, magnificently, to lead off the show, also at the Cinquième Salle, following a brief silent prelude that served to introduce the evening's nine dancers. Seated almost the entire time on a wooden chair, Paulson executed her arm, leg and head gestures with such rhythmic cohesion that the piece resonated loudly by its very silence. Other powerful performances followed, notably Troy Ogilvie transmitting Molly Bloom's narrative with gestures in *Bloom* (1989), and Marc Daigle as a haunting figure in the existential *Little Animal* (1986). Adam Barruch, Caitlin Griffin, Ruth Levin, Lucy May and Elise Boileau rounded out a strong cast that gave new life to Gillis' creations. But the most fluid mover of all was Gillis herself, at 63, in *Life is a Fleeting Moment* (2017).

Scandals unfortunately outshone a major event in Montreal dance — the first performances at the downtown

studio-theatres in the still-under-renovation Wilder Building opposite Place des Arts. Two occupants — Tangente and Agora de la Danse — had already moved in. Two others, Les Grands Ballets Canadiens and École de danse contemporaine de Montréal, are scheduled to join them by June.

Tangente staged a triple bill of African-origin choreographers in the François Sullivan studio, one of four studios named for Quebec dance luminaries. Comfortable, red-coloured banked seats gave easy views of the expansive black-box theatre floor. Attendants in identical all-black uniforms added a further note of plush.

Montreal's Ghislaine Doté performed a humorous text-heavy solo, *Skin Box*, which expressed black performers' frustrations in a stage world where priority goes to Caucasians. After her came two British-based choreographers — Fumi Adewole in *The Sleepwalker*, a work about dreams, and Alesandra Seutin in *Ceci n'est pas noire*, in which, like a tough elementary school teacher, she virtually badgered the audience into interactivity. It was an uneven bill that showed the diversity of black contemporary dance.

In Russia, Perm Ballet is held in high regard, and its touring troupe of 78 made a memorable Canadian debut at Place des Arts' Salle Wilfrid-Pelletier in a splendid *Swan Lake* using Makarova's Petipa/Ivanov-inspired staging. Décor and gorgeous costumes created a grand-manner setting for a crack swan corps trained in the Vaganova style at the company's own school. Inna Bilash and Nikita Chetverikov convincingly stamped their own characters on the Odette and Siegfried roles, generating a tense, passionate struggle in their duets. In the same roles, Alexandra Surodeeva and Ruslan Savdenov performed admirably, though their tension was somewhat muted. In the role of Siegfried's friend, Benno, Alexander Taranov had an impressive light jump, while 18-year-old Denis Tolmazov revealed a big talent to watch out for. Sold-out audiences gave Perm Ballet prolonged ovations. For a week at the end of February, Montreal glittered with a classical ballet glamour that is seen here too rarely. ▫

Artistic director Helgi Tomason manifests inordinate pride in the number of new works he commissions for San Francisco Ballet — and a festival of new works has been announced for April-May 2018. But this past season's novelties have so far proven flimsy or misjudged.

The problem with Jiri Bubenicek's *Fragile Vessels* (January 24) was a delusion of grandeur. Eight years ago, the Czech choreographer prepared a fine trio set to the slow movement of Rachmaninoff's *Piano Concerto No. 2*. Danced intensely on the War Memorial Opera House stage by Dores André, Joseph Walsh and Wei Wang, it suggested the corrosive sensuality of Kenneth MacMillan at his best. The threesome began with primeval squirming on the floor and rose to pansexual links and lifts, a fascinating episode.

Unfortunately, ambition struck. This setting of the entire concerto, which is not dance music, for all its charms, was a rambling, unfocused affair that aches to be important but lacks resonance. The opening movement united 14 corps and six soloists and introduced a series of endlessly repetitive lifts. The finale highlighted Koto Ishihara and Francisco Mungamba. They looked fine, but rarely seemed romantically inspired. The florid décor and under-par pianism did not help the choreographer's case.

Two nights later, San Francisco Ballet

resident choreographer Yuri Possokhov again referenced his Russian cultural background by unfurling *Optimistic Tragedy*, inspired by the 1933 play and film of that title, as well as the silent film classic *Battleship Potemkin*, a portion of which was projected in Alexander V. Nichols' brilliant Constructivist décor.

Possokhov planned the piece as a tribute to those who sacrifice in general, and to Soviet sailors who, a century ago, revolted against the system and perished for their efforts. Possokhov's creation may not probe psychologically, but the vividly mounted ballet sizzled with the immediacy of a revolutionary propaganda poster. The plot is skeletal. A new commissar (Lorena Feijoo, who retires after this season) slipped into a torrid duet with the ship's captain (Luke Ingham), flirted with the ship's crew, shot an anarchist and brandished a revolutionary flag before she perished. Dressed in shiny black, Feijoo suggested that ideology and sensuality are connected.

All of it moves with the abruptness of a silent movie, propelled by Ilya Demutsky's original score. The all-male ensemble numbers yield pounding unisons, folk motifs, circle dances and grid patterns. At the end, you're ready to sign anything.

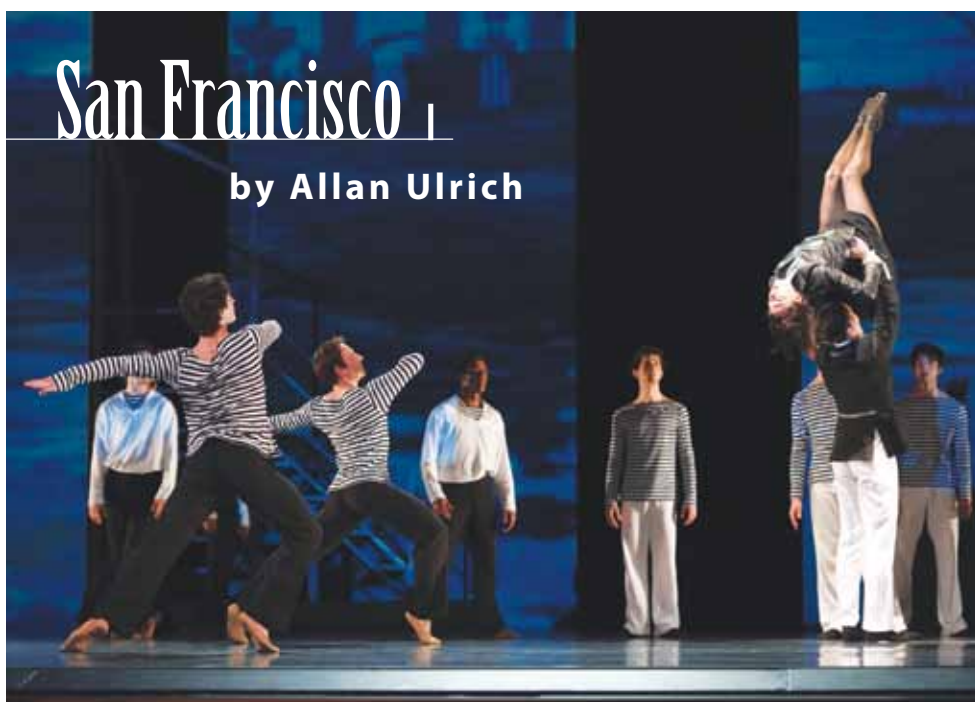
Perhaps the most anticipated arrival of the season proved a mixed success. Co-commissioned by the Royal Ballet, Covent Garden, where it was unveiled in May 2016, Liam Scarlett's full-evening

Frankenstein opened here on February 17. The critical press was divided, while audiences were enthusiastic. But the feeling persisted that the material was intractable. Scarlett went back to Mary Shelley's 1818 Gothic novel, structuring it in the grand narrative manner beloved by patrons of the Royal. For many of us, it was a long three-hour slog. The story is really about scientist Victor Frankenstein, his beloved Elizabeth Lavenza and the unnamed creature, who ultimately becomes the third side of a love triangle.

But Scarlett takes his time with the narrative, introducing so many peripheral characters that you need a synopsis to figure out who they are. Details in novels do not always register onstage. Here, we get incidents like the hanging of governess Justine Moritz (Sasha de Sola), falsely accused of murdering young William Frankenstein (Max Berman-Rosenberg) that could have been easily trimmed. An early scene in a cemetery slows the pace before it even gets going. Victor's friend, Henry, is almost omnipresent, but, frankly, it doesn't matter when a dancer like Angelo Greco transforms every appearance into an airborne star turn.

Then, Scarlett believes that no scene is complete without a corps ensemble of chambermaids, tavern wenches, garden partygoers or wedding guests. The tone varies disconcertingly. The gory scene in John Macfarlane's brilliantly designed Ingolstadt anatomy theatre is played for laughs as students dance in unison brandishing sundry body parts. At 30, Scarlett still has much to learn about fashioning narrative.

He made a good start by commissioning a workable score by Lowell Liebermann and he has fashioned duets of uncommon fluidity and invention. There are three of them for Victor and Elizabeth, and they range from voluptuous to courtly to a climactic pairing for Victor and the Creature. Both Joseph Walsh and Frances Chung as the Frankensteins were marvellous at the opening performance. From neck to instep, the Canadian ballerina created a portrait of lyric vulnerability in a manner that marked a career high. As the Creature, Vitor Luiz found the right balance of barbarity and neediness. One could only wish him a better ballet. *DI*



San Francisco Ballet in Yuri Possokhov's *Optimistic Tragedy*
Photo: Erik Tomasson

NEW YORK

by Robert Greskovic



Five years along and counting, what New York City Ballet has dubbed its Art Series continues to frame the company's winter stint at its home in Lincoln Center. This year's visual art installation, which like previous ones overran the theatre's lobby spaces, was the effort of Finnish artist Santtu Mustonen, currently working in Brooklyn.

A painter of sorts, Mustonen's daubs and ribbons of colour covered shiny surfaces that hung like pictures on the lobby walls. Elsewhere, ever-changing animated versions of these strokes of colour were projected on large screens hanging over the theatre's promenade area. A central piece had a kind of A-frame structure creating a roof over a mirrored floor. Beyond the fact that these projected expanses of moving colour looked more decorative than vital, Mustonen's installations required the lobby lights to remain low, making for uninviting intermission activity.

For three nights, there were special \$30 tickets for all seats, and Mustonen's efforts were trumpeted as this year's "art" reason to come to New York City Ballet. There's no telling precisely what the individuals who bought into this promotion made of the art or dance. Many of them, by my non-scientific assessment of two nights, seemed part of the younger generation of theatregoers. Any

number seemed to be at the ballet for the first time. Certainly, the reaction of the seemingly capacity audiences was enthusiastic, especially in the case of one of the world premieres, *The Times Are Racing*, by NYCB resident choreographer Justin Peck (presented on two nights).

Peck, still a company soloist, has now created 11 dances for NYCB. *The Times Are Racing* strikes me as his most accomplished and resonant work so far. From the start, Peck's command of theatrically crafted dancemaking has been consistently impressive. In particular, his configurations of grouped dancers and his imaginative ways of animating them have been striking. What's largely been missing, for me, has been an internal, abiding momentum to take each ballet's inventiveness beyond visual cleverness to dramatic or poetic heights. Up to this point, what you saw is what you got.

Before its premiere, *The Times Are Racing* was promoted as Peck's "sneaker ballet," a term that seems neither especially compelling to the younger audiences nor a very fresh one for those familiar with NYCB fare, including Jerome Robbins' sneaker-shod *N.Y. Export: Opus Jazz*, from 1958. Sneakers seem more a catchy hook for ballet in the 1950s or 1960s than in the second decade of the 21st century.

Further advance promotion focused on how Peck's thinking evolved as he created his ballet. A change came as he

found himself more socially aware in the wake of the U.S. presidential election last fall, which made him (and many others in the arts) wary of conservative, restrictive policies. Without making his dance an agitprop effort per se, Peck ended up creating an animated gathering of young folk who telescope feelings of passion and resistance. His music, selected before the election, was an electronic, four-movement selection from Dan Deacon's *America*, a 2012 album reportedly composed in some frustration about the state of the country and the world. *The Times Are Racing's* costuming, which resembles chic casual wear, on which such words as Unite, Defy, React and Fight stand out as graphics, was provided by Humberto Leon, whose Opening Ceremony store has made a name for itself on the fashion circuit.

Peck's dancemaking, drawing harmoniously on Deacon's throbbing and pulsing rhythms, puts his cast in stirring huddles as well as in lines that suggest vertebrae of live wires. From these artfully animated groups, he draws out some featured individuals for memorable moments. Physically sharp and lively Sean Suozzi has a scene in which he's linked with three women as if they are pretzel-like puzzle pieces. Elsewhere, Peck himself takes the stage to buddy with Robert Fairchild for a beguiling spell of soft-shoe tap dancing executed in sneakers.

None of these effects, however, is all that different from the visual felicities of Peck's previous ballets. What gives *The Times* its gravity is the duet Peck has shaped for Tiler Peck (no relation) and Amar Ramasar. The presence of these two sneakered individuals and their coupled dancing, spiked with impressive acrobatics and lifts, provides *The Times* with its lodestone centre. Peck's dramatic presentation of this man and woman as more than just two virtuosic dancers comes in part from the use of their eyes and their concentrated focus on each other, which tell a story of rapport mixed with one of questioning and another of solace in unsettling times. At one point, Tiler Peck is raised up almost as if she is a scout on a promontory looking out from a strategic vantage point. Fairchild has a similar peak moment; to close *The Times Are Racing*, he's the lone individual left standing until he too fades into the group. ⁰¹

London

by Sanjoy Roy



Three much anticipated projects marked the first quarter of 2017, and though they couldn't be more contrasting, you could still group them all beneath a single tagline: the Royal Ballet and its outliers.

First was *Les Enfants Terribles*, a dance-opera choreographed and directed by Javier De Frutos, and produced by the Royal Ballet as part of the Barbican Theatre's celebration of composer Philip Glass' 80th birthday. De Frutos, whose background is in contemporary dance, has worked with the Royal Ballet before, but never on this scale. Furthermore, despite notable successes — including some splendid pieces for the Royal New Zealand Ballet — he has never been the choreographer of choice for the more risk-averse. His work has often brewed a mixture of sex, death, violence and religion, and he is more fascinated by transgression than he is fearful of offence. Yet he also has an instinct for psychodrama and considerably more compositional skill than he is generally given credit for. All in all, then, De Frutos seemed a promising choice to direct this musical adaptation of Jean Cocteau's pent-up story of perversion and cruelty.

In the end, the promise wasn't fulfilled

— not so much because of the choreography, but because the piece as a whole was overproduced. With a striking but busy set (by Jean-Marc Puissant) of moveable walls, beds, bathtubs and staircases — the walls sometimes acting as a screen for Tal Rosner's digital video projections — plus distant surtitles and a time-spanning story that is difficult to follow, the stage felt crowded even without the performers on it.

A shame, because the choreography, though underdeveloped, has much to recommend it. The opera's four young singers were simultaneously embodied by up to four dancers at a time. The dancers were an A-list ensemble: Zenaida Yanowsky and Edward Watson, two of the Royal's most distinctive principals, and Jonathan Goddard and Clemmie Sveaas, two of the country's best contemporary dancers, are closely matched by Royal soloists Thomas Whitehead and Kristen McNally, and contemporary dancers Thomasin Gülgeç and Gemma Nixon. Frustratingly, they never had quite enough to do; the demands of storytelling kept cutting their set-pieces short.

Yet while it was there, the choreography was eminently engaging. The opening bathtub scene, for the dancers only,

was a polymorphously perverse playtime of disrobings, taunts and humiliations, all bristling with bare-legged, blatantly tumescent développés and arabesques — and it showed what the story does not tell: that the dark secret of the siblings' dysfunction is incest. There was a marvellous frolic with the dancers tumbling headlong over a couch and a mesmerising sleepwalking scene, the men drifting along over stairs and through windows like multiple shadows cast by the same figure.

In fact, the work's most striking achievement was to make perfect sense of having multiple performers playing the same character. The device deepened rather than confused their identities; we saw the layered, sometimes contradictory and often unconscious impulses embodied within a single character — psychological harmonics, like counterparts to the broken chords endlessly modulated and refracted through Glass' spiky piano score.

Les Enfants Terribles may not achieve its own ambitions, but you can see its potential to do so. Not so with Sergei Polunin's strikingly misjudged triple bill at Sadler's Wells Theatre. The subject of Steven Cantor's recent feature-length documentary *Dancer*, Polunin was just

21 and already a principal when he walked out of the Royal Ballet in 2012. He wandered between several dance projects before making what was intended as his swansong: David LaChapelle's 2015 pop video to Hozier's burning protest song *Take Me to Church*. The video went viral, and suddenly Polunin had a fan base far beyond the confines of the dance world. He returned to dancing (though not to the Royal), becoming both on- and offstage partner to the Royal's star ballerina Natalia Osipova; and Project Polunin, funded off the back of his newfound fame, was formed to showcase a new artistic direction.

Alas, it had everything else — backers, fans, star names (Osipova was dancing, too) — but artistic direction was precisely what it lacked. The program opener was Vladimir Vasiliev's 1971 *Icarus, the Night Before the Flight*. Polunin and Osipova have the chops to power through this relentlessly overwrought duet — all chest-baring bounds and declamatory, monolithic gestures — but artistically it's pure hokum.

Next up was Andrey Kaydanovskiy's 2016 quartet *Tea or Coffee*, danced by members of the Moscow Stanislavsky Ballet, for whom it was created. A piecemeal montage of non-sequiturs linked by the sound of smashing crockery, this gave the sense of an artist genuinely exploring thematic ideas — and being genuinely flummoxed by the results.

Whatever Polunin (assisted by the Royal Ballet's Valentino Zucchetti) was trying to explore in his own piece *Narcissus and Echo* is a mystery — even, I suspect, unto himself. Sporting nothing but lilac booties, golden wristbands and a gem-encrusted codpiece, he cavorted with four springy Theban youths in translucent gauze and a diaphanous female contingent of nymphs, led by a tasselled Osipova. Oddly, he passed most of the middle section slumbering inertly atop a giant gym ball painted like the planet Jupiter.

Did I mention that all this happens in outer space? Well, there was a backdrop of Mars and Venus and some starry galaxies — two of which lit up in the final section to show colourized video clips of Polunin looking moody and enigmatic, while the onstage Polunin gazed perilously into a smoking crater that has opened up on the planet's crust.

A left-field artist with a taste for the

outré (I thought of Canadian filmmaker Guy Maddin) might just about make something of this melange of comic-strip mythology, arch erotics, cod psychology and outrageous symbolism (a smoking orifice, for goodness' sake!), but this *Narcissus*, ironically, betrays not one iota of self-awareness.

More than any number of fans or funders, Polunin might benefit most from a trustworthy guiding hand at this stage of his career. Crystal Pite on the other hand — an opposite in so many ways — has grown into a position where she can confidently command a free rein.

Flight Pattern, a response to the mass movements of refugees that mark our age and Pite's first commission for the Royal Ballet, draws power from its own deceptive simplicity. Set to the insistent adagio of Gorecki's Symphony No. 3, *Flight Pattern* is essentially an ensemble work with cameos for two soloists.

The opening saw the grey-coated cast of 36 shuffling in slow-moving queues that meandered melancholically toward

an encampment in which they bed down upon their own clothes. Kristen McNally cradled her empty coat until we read into it not only a child that she has lost, but a sense of all that she has loved and left behind. The cast rose again into the work's longest and most beautiful sequence, the dancers no longer in lines but rather in shifting formations that pool and plume, straggle and separate as restlessly as the currents of the open ocean. Their arms arched, their bodies hunched and tilted. All was angled and unsettled, and yet moved as constantly and continuously as Gorecki's slow score.

If McNally and Marcelino Sambé closed the piece with a focus on the personal, it's the mass of unidentified dancers we remember most, disappearing beneath snowfall and behind a closing curtain with no end to their passage.

Flight Pattern is deeply unclassical not just in its movement but in its mindset — and the Royal is all the better for outliers like this. *oi*

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by François Fargue **Paris**

What does it take to become an étoile? Hard work and talent, not to mention luck. Hugo Marchand, recently made an étoile in Japan, got his happy break as a last-minute replacement for Matthieu Ganio, who had to bail out of the Paris Opera Ballet tour in Japan in March because of an injury. At only 24, Marchand, as James in Pierre Lacotte's *La Sylphide*, attained the highest sphere in the Paris Opera galaxy just months after two equally young dancers, Germain Louvet, 23 and Léonore Baulac, 26, were jointly named étoiles following their performance in *Swan Lake* on December 31.

Aurélié Dupont, who took on her position as Paris Opera Ballet's artistic director last September, has not pulled any punches, duly rewarding three of her most outstanding dancers. They had previously been given ample pride of place by former director Benjamin Millepied, who constantly voiced his faith in youth and diversity. Paradoxically, though, during his brief leadership he only named one étoile, Laura Hecquet, who was neither very young (she was 30) nor the epitome of modernity. But then Millepied, as all of us, is not a man without contradictions. For all his revolutionary attempts at shaking up the

Paris Opera institution, he will also be remembered as the director who repeatedly insisted on digging up some of the least appealing Balanchine or even Robbins oldies for the recalcitrant French audiences.

This is how poor Marchand, fresh from his triumph in Japan, ended up in Paris as a gold, stilted Oberon in Balanchine's 1962 *A Midsummer Night's Dream*. Why name someone so young and handsome an étoile only to put him in a ballet so old and sadly vacuous? And while calling on Christian Lacroix for new costumes may have served as a publicity stunt, his predictably luxurious velvet and muslin added not an ounce of magic, mystery or poetry to a ballet that is all wavy arms and exhausting agitation versus the pompous posturing of King Oberon and Queen Titania. Only the hunting hounds were a fabulous sight — and the cute donkey to a degree — but then they ran around so much, you wonder why they were made so beautiful in the first place. Having said that, the athletic Marchand made the most of it to show off his stylish demeanour and impeccable petite batterie, if not his spinning skills. Tall dancers often fail to excel at that.

The good news in this *Dream* is the second act that takes us from the forest into a duke's palatial abode for a wedding ceremony, the main highlight

of which is arguably a slow and purely riveting pas de deux, which premier danseur Florian Magnenet and sujet Marion Barbeau pulled off with exquisite technique and beautiful sensitivity. As well, once the duke's court withdrew, the forest denizens returned for a dark and scintillating finale that saw the ballet take an enchanting turn that almost made up for the insipid first act, whose only saving grace was to reveal a few promising dancers, such as the young Antoine Kirschner as the ubiquitous Puck or Hannah O'Neill as Titania.

Similar comments may be levelled at Wayne McGregor's *Tree of Codes*, whose funky ending offered a final uplifting respite from a show that was both repetitive and grindingly agitated. First created in Manchester in 2015, it came to the Garnier as a synesthetic sensation, with psychedelic visual packaging courtesy of much-hyped artist Olafur Eliasson, Jamie xx's hippy tunes and McGregor's now famous unbridled contortions. Not to mention an incomprehensible subtext, involving Jonathan Safran Foer's obscure and cultish book *Tree of Codes*, meant to be a reconstruction of another book by Bruno Schulz, *The Street of Crocodiles*. It looks impressive enough as a highbrow reference on paper, but does little to make sense of what McGregor was trying to achieve aside from showcasing the vertiginous agility of his dancers.

Indeed, one unfamiliar with his style will be duly impressed by it. His dancers, who boast great physical diversity and are all compelling to watch, move about, if rather relentlessly, among a bunch of Paris Opera dancers cherry-picked by McGregor, who is now quite an habitu  of the premises. Included in his selection are the impressive Marie-Agn s Gillot and étoile J r mie B lingard who has always been strong in contemporary repertoire.

McGregor's serpentine moves are undeniably impressive at first, but soon look like random improvisation, give or take some rare memorable solos or constructed interaction between the dancers. This is a ballet that is apt to impress those unfamiliar with contemporary dance, who will be thrilled by the dancers' virtuosity and Eliasson's funky lighting without questioning the actual point of it all. *DI*

Despite a reputation for being one of the most important flamenco festivals in the world, the Jerez Festival found itself facing the possibility that there would be no 21st edition. The first close call came in December 2015, when the Spanish tax agency forced the dissolution of the Villamarta Theatre Foundation — the organization in charge of the municipal theatre and Jerez Festival — under the local reform law that prohibits any municipal company from having more than two years of financial losses. The law was passed by the conservative Partido Popular in the midst of the economic crisis.

“In 2013 and 2014, we had losses, like almost all theatres in Spain,” explains Isamay Benavente, director of the Villamarta Theatre and Jerez Festival. “The only difference from other theatres was we weren’t able to add money to the foundation at the end of the year to balance the budget. With a longer time frame, we would have, but, in two years, it was impossible. So this law forced us to dissolve the company and prohibited us from starting a new one to continue managing the theatre.” Ultimately, Jerez’s municipal government decided to transfer the functions of the dissolved foundation to the already existing Fundarte (the University Foundation for the Performing Arts and Flamenco of Jerez), but not without first hitting a major roadblock.

Before being officially extinguished on December 31, 2016, Spain’s Ministry of Economy required that the prior foundation’s budget be balanced. In response, the city budgeted additional funding for the theatre in 2016 to cover the debt, but when this amended budget was put up for a city council vote, members of Partido Popular and Ganemos parties kept the budget from being approved, a move that would not only cut the city off from access to opera, ballet and flamenco, but also lay off 27 employees in a city already hard hit by unemployment.

After staff meetings with local politicians, public protests, a Change.org petition and the threat of a strike, a second vote saw the passing of the amended budget thanks to the abstention of Ganemos party members. At two-and-a-half months before the start of the XXI Jerez Festival, it was announced the event would continue at least one more year.

Benavente doesn’t think the instability surrounding the festival has harmed it, but admits it has made growth impossible. There is no doubt the festival has suffered due in large part to the economic crisis, but persistent rumblings amidst press and festival regulars that the Jerez Festival needs to consider a change in its approach to programming seem to ring louder than ever: this edition’s programming fell flat due to the near complete disappearance of other styles of Spanish dance and of up-and-coming artists, which in the past have lent a breath of fresh air to the large-scale format productions that dominate.

The XXI festival’s best and worst per-

Anabel Rivera, Sandra Zarzana and Samara Montañez. Music (feminine) and dance (masculine) meld physically and conceptually, inextricably sustaining each other, attracting, repelling, comforting and supporting. The respect and tenderness with which the flamenco art form and the work’s subject matter are handled make this a classic work of choreography and dramaturgy, both of which rest squarely in Guerrero’s more than capable hands.

Far less convincingly was Farruquito’s *Baile Moreno*, an homage to his father, flamenco singer Juan “El Moreno.” The piece presents generic moments in a man’s life, straining to make Farruquito’s



Jerez

by Justine Bayod Espoz

formances not only showcased the desire to innovate amongst some flamenco artists and the need to cling to tradition among others, but also, in the two works discussed below, explored gender roles in polarizing manners.

Flamenco virtuoso Eduardo Guerrero surpassed high expectations with what can easily be described as the best production of his career. *Guerrero*, meaning “warrior” in Spanish, employed General Sun Tzu’s *The Art of War* and the concept that “the greatest victory is that which requires no battle” to explore a man’s lifelong relationship with women. The three female roles — mother, lover and friend — were poetically portrayed by three singers from Jerez:

lead appear as manly as possible. There’s a fight scene, a jubilant bar scene, women going out of their way to attract the hero and a wedding featuring the winner of the aforementioned battle for a mate. These clichéd depictions of masculinity and femininity not only boggle the 21st-century mind, but also reinforce antiquated notions about men in flamenco doing little more than macho posturing and bravado. Some may be able to overlook this as quaint gypsy culture, but it might be a little harder to forgive how under-rehearsed the show appeared, with dancers bumping into each other more than once and clumsily transitioning from one moment to the next. ¹¹

Uncertainty still weighs on the Italian dance world. Spring has arrived and it remains unclear who will be the new artistic director of La Scala Ballet in Milan following Mauro Bigonzetti's rapid departure or who will take over Aterballetto in Reggio Emilia, our most important independent company, after Cristina Bozzolini leaves in July. The announcement that decisions for both companies would be made in February has apparently been forgotten, and the usual Italian *laissez-faire* attitude seems to be prevailing.

This, however, is only the tip of the iceberg of the country's general situation, which, after decades of mistakes by artists' unions and of negligence by politicians and administrators, is going to explode. Or better to say implode, as the ballet companies inside opera houses are continuing to disappear.

In the 1980s, there were 11 national opera houses in Italy with their own ballet companies. Now, after the recent dismissal of Arena di Verona Ballet, there are only four — La Scala, Rome Opera Ballet, Naples' San Carlo company and the Palermo Massimo company. Perhaps soon just the larger two in Milan and Rome will remain. Some are rising up to protest these closures. As I file this report, an online petition signed by more than 15,000 people addressed to Italy's President Sergio Mattarella has been launched

requesting the revival of the closed companies in order to restore our cultural heritage and offer jobs to young Italians.

Of course, this is a dream. The reality is that to save ballet in Italy, the rules of employment at the opera houses need to be changed with no more permanent jobs until retirement. Also, we have to consider the art form not only as cultural heritage that should be protected at the same level as the opera, we need to recognize it as a lively and beloved performing art that has incredible economic potential.

If only some of the Italian dance insiders had attended the very interesting conference, Positioning Ballet, organized by Dutch National Ballet artistic director Ted Brandsen last February! Many artistic directors of major ballet companies, from Canada to Russia to the United States, gathered in Amsterdam to discuss future strategies for the art, not only from the artistic side, but as a productive field that can be improved through international collaborations and common strategies.

Another important discussion was about being more influential in Europe's opera houses, where the balance always favours opera productions despite their related high costs. What impressed an external observer such as myself was the sense of vision from the artistic directors: a deep awareness of the story of the companies they are in charge of, and also a vision for the needed steps forward for the future of the art and their companies. I'm

sorry to say I was the only Italian present, another confirmation of how Italian dance people continue to live in dangerous isolation without acknowledging the precariousness of their position.

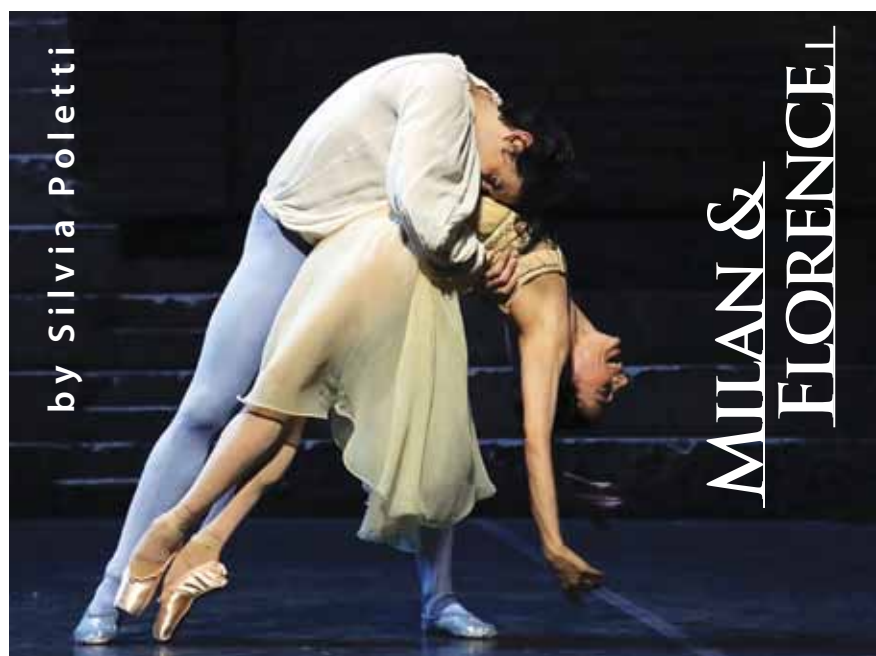
Meanwhile, Frédéric Olivieri, still in charge as interim company director of La Scala Ballet, restored the season that Bigonzetti left in draft form by presenting Kenneth MacMillan's *Romeo and Juliet*. Olivieri's ace in the hole was bringing back Alessandra Ferri, who danced on New Year's Eve to a sold-out house, on La Scala's stage.

Returning to the role that made her a legend, Ferri (who is not very politely sometimes defined today as the oldest ballerina on the world stage; she is 54) gave a master class in going deep to the source of the emotions: not a gesture, glance or attitude was superfluous. Her tiny figure is larger than life; you can guess exactly what she is feeling just by observing how the breath changes. This quality of acting makes the dance a medium through which she and her empathic partner, an intense Herman Cornejo, describe universal emotions. Also, Ferri's well-known musicality became an ideal body score to which she gave new tempos and tones that provided nuanced expression.

This special *Romeo and Juliet* was supported by the lively confidence of the company. As well, in other performances, good news about the company's standards came from Nicoletta Manni and Timofej Andrijashenko in the lead roles, and by a 19-year-old newcomer, Martina Arduino, whose debut as Juliet was truly promising. At the moment, La Scala Ballet is the only one in the Italian landscape that could aim to be a national company.

Elsewhere, a wonderful surprise arrived for the Florence audience. Deprived of their opera house ballet company, which was disbanded two years ago, my fellow Florentines packed the new opera house for three Hamburg Ballet performances of artistic director John Neumeier's *Third Symphony of Gustav Mahler*. A masterpiece by the American-born choreographer, the ballet was a glorious celebration of the poetry of dance and its ability to translate in movement intimate feelings about life. Hamburg Ballet, led by Italian Silvia Azzoni in the role of the Angel, took Florence by storm. The visit was the talk of the town for several days.

If only our politicians really understood the treasure they are losing! ⁰¹



Alessandra Ferri and Herman Cornejo in La Scala Ballet's production of Kenneth MacMillan's *Romeo and Juliet*
Photo: Marco Brescia and Rudy Amisano

COPENHAGEN



by Anne-Marie Elmby

In January, Operaen, the largest stage of the Royal Danish Theatre, had a fine visit from Finnish National Ballet and its Danish artistic director Kenneth Greve as part of the celebrations marking 100 years of Finland's independence. They presented Greve's *The Snow Queen* (2012), inspired by Hans Christian Andersen's fairy tale.

The dramaturgic scheme resembled a traditional *Nutcracker*, with a family gathering, winter scenes and exotic dances as a logical part of the story. It was set in Finland, with a replica of an actual Helsinki square with fountain and marketplace, where young people danced the Finnish *jenka*. The Snow Queen's icy realm in Lapland had glittering snowflakes, trolls, witches with white tentacles and wolves with glowing eyes. There was a good Sami woman with children, a dancing lynx, an ice bear and Father Christmas, who the Finns claim lives in Finland.

The story revolves around Kay and Gerda, two children who are very fond of each other. But when Kay gets a splinter of the Snow Queen's magic mirror in his eye and another splinter crushes the glass lamp he gave Gerda for her birthday, he turns mean and the Snow Queen abducts him. Gerda's travels in search of Kay are represented in dances from the many countries she visits. Arriving in Lapland, she lands in a wild sauna party of trolls, who scare her until she realizes they are friendly and will help her free Kay.

Michal Krčmár and Salla Eerola, dancing the adult Kay and Gerda, confirmed, in a fine pas de deux, how the warmth of Gerda's love thaws Kay's frozen heart. Hanako Matsune danced the Snow Queen with ice-cold spite that shot out through her icicle-pointed fingertips.

When the Snow Queen was not dancing, she wheeled around on a Segway followed by her train of witches and wolves. During the interval, they passed through the foyer of Operaen, handing out multi-coloured light sticks to children to be lit during Act Two.

Erika Turunen and Mikki Kunttu co-created the grand scenography, which included a comfortable Biedermeier interior denoting the neighbouring homes. The Snow Queen's castle was a mountain built of spiky blue triangles around the fatal broken mirror, with her throne placed high above. Kunttu's ingenious video design showed the mirror splintering, a map of Gerda's travels and flickering northern lights in the Lapland scenes. Tuomas Kantelinen's score excellently underlined both the alarming and lyrical love scenes.

On March 10, the Royal Danish Ballet presented the first Danish performances of three exciting works by London's Wayne McGregor and Akram Khan, and Czech Jirí Kylián, under the title *Giant Steps*.

In *Infra* (2008), McGregor put his dancers into extreme positions, with backbends and crouches, bodies stretched to the utmost, in contrast to Julian Opie's digital stream of walking matchstick people. The dancers' close embrace in duets evoked strong emotions in their sculptural complexity. In a compelling moment, a female dancer sat alone, head in hands, while others in street clothes crossed the stage in robot-like fashion. Max Richter's minimalist music with frequent use of string instruments — often with a fast, waving musical line over deeper, longer notes — gave the dancers a free basis for their individual involvement.

In *Falling Angels* (1989), Kylián combines discipline and freedom. The intense

20 minutes is set to Steve Reich's *Drumming*, which provides an incessant primeval drive for the eight female dancers in black leotards, who constantly pushed on, often in unison, but with individual outbursts. The rhythmic shifting of the drums underscored angular positions recognized from Eastern dance, but also birth-related movements and sudden jumps, arms spreading like wings.

Vertical Road was created in 2010 for Khan's own group; here, for the first time, it was danced by a ballet company, with Khan selecting the five female and seven male dancers himself. One of Khan's inspirations was a poem by the 13th-century Sufi poet Rumi, which contemplates a journey from gravity to spiritual existence through the connecting force of love. Jesper Kongshaug's initially obscure lighting design created a mysterious atmosphere that was enhanced by powder clouds whirling from Kimie Nakano's long-skirted costumes as the warrior group jumped and spun around. Their hard, fiery movements matched Nitin Sawhney's aggressive music that ranged from deep rumbling to soul-ripping whines and the tick-tock of time passing.

Sebastian Haynes stood as the solitary individual opposed to the group, watching them and sometimes flaring up as if cast into rapture. His attempts to engage with a woman from the group triggered a close encounter with one of the men that was like a deadly fight between two animals. In the final moment, golden light showered down on Haynes from above and suggested an ultimate sublimation of his character.

This was only the first part of *Vertical Road*, but, according to Khan, he always creates his works so that a part of them can be presented as a complete entity. ▫

Larvik & Oslo



by Fredrik Rütter

One often says that elderly people carry a layer of patina; one can see inner strength from a long life, and the person exudes a special glow. This is very true when it comes to the 26 older women who perform in *Patina*, choreographed by Arne Fagerholt, former director of modern dance company Carte Blanche.

He started the project five years ago in Orkdal, a small town more or less in the middle of Norway. The idea came to him while watching a dance class with women who were all in their 70s, none of whom had ever been on a stage before. The plan was to perform the piece a couple of times, but fate wanted something else. The attention was enormous: the women were interviewed on television and they were invited to perform in the United States. Altogether they gave more than 40 performances.

But it did not end there. Two other Norwegian cities jumped on the idea and presented their own versions of the piece before yet another version came to Larvik, a city south of Oslo, where I saw it. A dance school in Larvik managed to find enough women who wanted to participate, all between the ages of 67

and 85, who gave five performances to full houses. An assistant took care of the initial rehearsals, and Fagerholt joined in during some weekends and the last week before the premiere. Next up is Bergen where *Patina* is a part of the Bergen International Festival program in June.

Fagerholt has the women enter the stage in the same formation as the corps de ballet does in the second act of *Swan Lake*, one by one, all doing the same hand movements. When all 26 are in place, they move forward to the line of shoes placed on the edge of the stage and select a pair. From that moment he has them work as an ensemble or in smaller groups, never giving any steps or movements beyond their capacity. They all really carried their patina with flying colours; there is one word that describes this very special dance happening, and that is dignity.

The Swedish Cullberg Ballet, which celebrated 50 years this April, toured to Dansens Hus in Oslo recently. The company was once beloved in Norway when Birgit Cullberg herself and then her son Mats Ek were artistic directors, partly because they presented fresh directions within the dance field, but also because Cullberg had worked a lot in our country after the Second World War. Today,

though, one might ask if the group should still be carrying her name.

The company presented the latest work, *Protagonist*, from Swedish-Dutch choreographer Jefta van Dinther. He is far from being the accomplished narrative choreographer that Cullberg was. There is not even much dance in van Dinther's piece; instead, the dancers stand still doing small movements, and walk and run a little. It's hard to say whether or not they are good dancers, since they are never challenged in that way. All 14 performers are listed as co-creators of the work, with the small amount of text that is spoken aloud written by van Dinther.

Toward the end, when the words Revolution and Evolution are shouted out, the performers start undressing while sinking nearly to the ground. Slowly they get back on to their feet so one shall, presumably, understand that a new evolution is on its way. And suddenly, with a blackout, the piece is over. Today, the company has lost its distinctiveness, and if one did not know that this was Cullberg Ballet, one would have a hard time telling.

Because of invitations to tour, the National Ballet of Norway has remounted two newly created works, Cina Espjord's version of Henrik Ibsen's *Ghosts* and Liam Scarlett's *Carmen*. Besides shows in Oslo, both toured to Vienna's Theater an der Wien.

As well, in March, Alexander Ekman's *A Swan Lake* (where in the second half the stage is covered with water) was seen in Paris at the Théâtre des Champs-Élysées for three shows.

The Norwegian National Ballet 2, the youth company of 10 dancers, together with Kingwings Crew, presented its 2016 version of *Romeo & Julie* at Teatros del Canal in Madrid in April. The Kingwings perform the Montagues in hip-hop style, while the ballet dancers perform the Capulets. Choreographer Patrick King, who has worked with the youth company since its inception in 2015, presents the meeting between Romeo and Julie through a meeting between styles that complicates the love story. One can definitely say that the 2016 premiere was a hit with young audiences, including many who had never been to the ballet before, who flocked to the sold out shows. ^{vi}

The M1 Singapore Fringe Festival saw the return of a well-loved collective after almost nine years away. Ah Hock and Peng Yu was started in 2002 by dancer-choreographers Aaron Khek and Ix Wong, taking its distinctive moniker from Khek's Chinese name (Ah Hock) and the term for "friends" in the Hokkien dialect (peng yu), a reference to the group's collaborators. But it seemed to have vanished after 2008 and was later reportedly defunct. In fact, a health crisis had forced the duo to put the collective on hold, though both men continued working on other projects at home and in Malaysia. *Skin Tight*, a festival commission, marked the comeback of Ah Hock and Peng Yu to the local scene.

Directed by cross-disciplinary artist Andrew Ng, this world premiere stood out for its use of zentai — close-fitting full-body suits that cover the head, face, hands and feet — the wearing of which first emerged as a subcultural hobby in Japan in the 1980s. The suits hide the wearers' sense of self and allow them to evade societal expectations, yet donning one also takes nerve and makes them more noticeable. This contradiction between anonymity and individuality was what Khek, Wong and performer-collaborator Joey Chua tried to probe in their bold, sometimes startling images.

As the audience filed into the Esplanade Theatre Studio, the cast of three was already onstage in monochrome office clothes. At different areas of a large red disc, Chua lay on her back, Khek held a briefcase while striding nowhere in slow motion and Wong calmly performed a series of Buddhist hand gestures, as if in a private ritual. Then the dancers began pacing stiffly across the floor, tracing circles and box-like patterns without touching one another. Zai Tang's soundscape of ringing telephones and clicking machines accompanied sequences miming paperwork, which were suspended by an electronic voiceover: "Please take some time off to rest and recuperate. Every automaton needs a holiday, after all."

Gradually, these corporate droids traded one sort of facelessness for another, as they re-entered wearing black wigs and flesh-toned zentai under their attire. Clearly feeling liberated, they posed for photos and pranced bawdily to a cheesy

J-pop tune before doffing their outer garments. At first, Chua guarded her genitals, but soon withdrew her hands, encouraged as it were by the suit in which she was safely enveloped. In one of the show's most evocative moments, Khek and Wong fastened their shirts together for a candidly loving duet. The conjoined tops became a robe that wrapped the men into tender shapes, their arms and legs passing through and out of its four long sleeves.

The show included a short film by Russell Morton showing the trio outdoors in Singapore while dressed in vividly hued zentai. They strolled along the corridors of public apartments and rode the subway; they did a routine of coordinated kicks in the central business district. Khek and Wong held each other by the hand — a faint echo of their twosome. While putting on zentai has spread to other parts of the globe, the trend remains a niche practice and, in the film, the performers looked absurdly out of place in their surroundings. For all its offbeat antics, however, *Skin Tight* poked serious fun at conventional ideas of identity.

Cloud Gate 2 had no trouble confirming its identity with its maiden concert in Singapore, even as some viewers may confuse the name with that of its celebrated parent company. This junior branch of Cloud Gate Dance Theatre was set up in 1999 to foster the work of young Taiwanese choreographers and

take the art to schools, villages and other corners of Taiwan. As a result, it has a repertoire and performing style separate from the main troupe. Its triple bill at the Esplanade Theatre, presented as part of Huayi — Chinese Festival of Arts, certainly came across as miles away from the pensive full-evening pageants of Lin Hwai-min, who founded both groups.

The program began with Huang Yi's *Wicked Fish*, set to the feverish, jarring strings of Greek-French composer Iannis Xenakis' *Shaar*. A grey-clad gang of 12 sliced through space like darting shoals of marine life; clusters and chains of movement broke into spiralling duets during which the dancers deftly switched roles.

The Wall, propelled by American composer Michael Gordon's agitated *Weather One*, displayed a more measured mania. Created by Cloud Gate 2's artistic director Cheng Tsung-lung during a bout of depression, it juxtaposed tense, jutting tics with curving, flowing passages. As two dozen performers trooped in rows, forming mobile fences with their bodies, they progressively swapped their black costumes for grey and white ones. Cheng's *Beckoning* brightened a blank white stage with pops of colour, inspired by the now-rare street rites of Taoist temple processions. But, despite the buoyantly percussive ensemble dancing and sparkling solo turns, the piece babbled on too long to retain interest. DI



Melbourne |

by Jordan Beth Vincent



For the first time, the city of Melbourne hosted Asia TOPA (Asia-Pacific Triennial of Performing Arts), a massive event across three months, beginning in January, designed to celebrate contemporary art, performance, food and culture.

Artists from China, Japan, India, Indonesia and Korea, among others, performed in Melbourne across a wide array of events and collaborations. This may sound like a broad remit — it certainly is, and more so because Asia TOPA does not have a central curatorial board. Rather, it employs a model in which individual venues from around the city program works under the festival banner. This is not a particularly unusual way to curate a festival here; in fact, Dance Massive, the contemporary dance festival that overlapped with Asia TOPA in March, is run with the same consortium model.

What Asia TOPA is trying to do, however, in its wide-ranging and diverse programming, is to raise some interesting questions about the relationship of Australia to its region, and to explore how collaborations across cultures and countries can inspire new art. The dance programming was challenging and contemporary (as in China's TAO Dance Theater's minimalist unison masterpieces, *6* and *8*). It also demonstrated partnerships between Asian and Australian artists in the development of new work (as in Circa's *One Beautiful Thing*, which involved Indian circus artists

performing the ancient gymnastic sport of mallakhamb) or brought repertoire that is controversial, such as the National Ballet of China's political drama, *Red Detachment of Women*. Responses to *Red Detachment of Women* were largely positive from the critics (with a few exceptions), although the work — created in 1964 and later depicted in the opera *Nixon in China* — did prompt protests in newspapers and outside the theatre.

One of the most successful programming choices in Asia TOPA was XO State, which was essentially a program within a program, in that it combined a full-length dusk event with a dark event (an after-hours art party with performances by a range of independent artists). Curated by Gideon Obarzanek and Filipino choreographer-dancer Eisa Jolson, XO State was framed as something cool, contemporary and edgy, with a focus on movement and music. One of the full-length premieres was *Attractor*, a contemporary dance collaboration between Melbourne-based Lucy Guerin Inc., with Townsville-based Dancenorth. With choreography by Obarzanek and Guerin, *Attractor* also involved Senwaya, a musical duo from Indonesia.

Obarzanek and Guerin have co-created together previously, most notably during Obarzanek's tenure as artistic director of Melbourne's Chunky Move. *Tense Dave* and *Two Faced Bastard* integrated Obarzanek's impulse to haul out and deconstruct big ideas with Guerin's penchant for exploring modes of communication. *Attractor* did both of these

things by combining the performances of the professional dancers from Dancenorth with audience participation.

A large group of audience members were brought onstage and given headphones, through which they were provided instructions about where to stand and how to move. While the rest of us were not privy to the conversations, we were aware that the communication was live and surprises were possible. These unrehearsed performers drew on simple sequences such as running, dancing wildly in place or reaching out to touch fellow participants, their activities providing an interesting counterbalance against the complexity of movement by Dancenorth. Against Senwaya's primal and persistent rhythms, the work began to feel increasingly ritualistic and communal, even if only a fraction of the bodies onstage knew what was coming next. This was a conversation that cut across multiple modes, but was fundamentally driven by the rhythm, the almost magpie influences of folk and heavy metal, and keening vocal explosions.

Since it first became a professional company in the mid-1980s, Dancenorth has had a number of directors as well as a long history of extensive tours throughout Southeast Asia. It is now under the directorship of dancer/choreographer Kyle Page, who spent much of his career at Garry Stewart's Australian Dance Theatre in Adelaide. Now, as an artistic director on the other side of the country, Page has populated

Dancenorth with dancers (and guest artists) who share his style and artistic lineage, such as Samantha Hines, who has also worked extensively with Australian Dance Theatre, and Josh Mu, who has performed with Chunky Move. With so many links and shared influences in training and choreographic style, *Attractor* felt like something that came full circle at its Melbourne premiere. This work integrates artists whose style and innovations have been central to the development of contemporary dance in Australia in recent years with artists who contradict the notion that distance hinders collaboration.

Amidst the excitement around Asia TOPA, Melbourne's contemporary dance community was also gearing up for Dance Massive, March 14-26. Now in its fifth iteration, Dance Massive engaged with Asia TOPA through a few shared events, such as Chunky Move's newest work, *Anti-Gravity*, which featured choreography by Anouk van Dijk with multimedia artist Ho Tzu Nyen.

Lucy Guerin Inc. also premiered a Dance Massive production, *Split*, featuring dancers Lilian Steiner and Melanie Lane. Many of Guerin's recent works, such as *Motion Picture* and *The Dark Chorus*, were created for large groups. *Split* is a pared-back and detailed look at the relationship between two women, operating in an increasingly shrinking space. Guerin is not an artist who is afraid to reveal her choreographic structures and, in *Split*, the context is

four sections of stage and four sections of movement, each of which are half the size and length of the previous one. Within this structure and confines, the women alternately co-exist and battle for supremacy. Guerin plays with notions of vulnerability and strength, displaying the nude female body — not as a sexualized object, but as a kind of battleground for negotiation.

The outlook of Dance Massive has long been international, with one of its key aims being to pitch Australian contemporary dance to international markets and producers, who fly into the country to explore how art (much of it already premiered) can be exported for touring.

The Australian Ballet programmed its own contemporary triple bill within the same period, *Faster*, with works by Wayne McGregor, Tim Harbour and David Bintley.

In effect, Melbourne audiences enjoyed two major contemporary arts festivals along with a contemporary performance by our major flagship arts company all within the first quarter of 2017. This was an opportunity to see a great deal of contemporary dance and performance from all around the world, in one almost overwhelming onslaught. Melbourne's cultural community is alive with ideas and inspiration, and no doubt the rest of the year will seem quiet by comparison. *or*

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Reviews

Miami City Ballet

Alexei Ratmansky / *The Fairy's Kiss*

Alexei Ratmansky has all the inconsistencies of a true artist. His new production of *The Fairy's Kiss* typifies his work: moments of heartfelt sincerity mixed with goofiness, and a few ideas that made you wonder what he was thinking. Miami City Ballet premiered Ratmansky's *Fairy's Kiss*, a co-production with the National Ballet of Canada, in February. I saw it the following month in Fort Lauderdale on a mixed bill that included Balanchine's *Walpurgisnacht Ballet* and Christopher Wheeldon's *Polyphonia*.

The ballet — first choreographed as *Le baiser de la fée* by Bronislava Nijinska in Paris in 1928 — is a dramatization of Hans Christian Andersen's tale of a young boy saved from freezing to death by a fairy, who returns to claim him at his wedding. Stravinsky's score, an homage to Tchaikovsky, is legendary for being hard to stage. Balanchine tried three times, finally settling on a plotless suite of dances.

Ratmansky opted to tell the story, which started with a mother shielding her newborn from freezing snow. The corps, in ice blue draperies, leaped and threaded line by line, then circled in *emboîtés*. For Ratmansky, snow is pretty and deadly — in his version of *The Nutcracker*, Clara and the Nutcracker Prince almost die. Here, the mother did die, but the Fairy saved the infant, who

was found by villagers and grew up into the ballet's central character, the Young Man.

Ratmansky played with opposites when casting the leads, pairing lush Simone Messmer as the Fairy with angular Renan Cerdeiro as the Young Man, and reversing that in the alternate cast, partnering sharp and icy Nathalia Arja with warm, rounded Kleber Rebello. Ratmansky often sees his heroes as innocent, and Rebello in particular, with his happy, floppy looseness, fit the mould.

Messmer, now a principal dancer with Miami City Ballet, was one of Ratmansky's muses at American Ballet Theatre, where he is artist in residence and she was a soloist. Moving from New York to San Francisco to Miami until she was recognized as a ballerina, Messmer is now one from the inside out, whirling in wearing a crown of ice shards and dancing with grand suspended carriage and lush stillness. As the Fairy, the smaller Arja was more of a creature and less of a woman, which made Ratmansky's screwball humour work better. For instance, after the Fairy found and kissed the baby, she tossed it and her minions played catch with the child. When Messmer did this, even though it was a prop doll, the audience gasped in horror. Arja, not seeming human herself, grabbed the doll like an inanimate toy and the tossing got a laugh.

The Fairy, disguised as a gypsy, later met and told the Young Man his fortune: he will not marry his bride-to-be. But then Ratmansky tweaked the story.

In the next scene, the Fairy disguised herself, veiled with an identical dress, as his bride. Their rapturous dance ended with him lifting her veil and kissing her deeply without checking to see if he was kissing the right bride. There was a moral in there somewhere.

Once he realized his mistake, the Young Man was terrified, but, as the sky warmed to orange, the Fairy impelled him forward in slow arabesques and things got bizarre. In his narrative versions, Balanchine was never satisfied with the endings, intended to be a long climb to a vertiginous height, symbolizing artists' eternal ambition toward the sublime. Ratmansky took that idea literally and, in homage to his predecessors, transformed the Young Man and revealed his true destiny as a choreographer — through a finale cobbled together from seemingly every ballet ever made.

At first it was ingenious: Ratmansky looped in *La Bayadère* as the arabesques of the leads were mirrored by a snaking line of couples. But the Young Man didn't even get to change out of his Tyrolean-inspired overalls while he was dreaming up bits and pieces from *Konservatoriet*, *Serenade*, *Apollo*, *Les Noces*, *Giselle* and *Swan Lake*. The excellent corps did the complex and melting formations justice, but the effect was partially inspiring and partially an ad for a two-DVD box set of ballet's greatest hits.

If Ratmansky has an affinity for the innocent fool, he plays one himself a little too often. For a man whose kind heart is in every ballet he makes, there are moments where he hits a jarring note — not of innocence, but ignorance. In *The Firebird* and *The Sleeping Beauty*, he put every corps maiden or fairy, no matter their race, in a blonde wig. It might work in Russia, but, in the United States, that's a comedy sketch.

Here, at the end, he has the Young Man raised in excelsis by the cast while the three main women — mother, lover and muse — lay down and pay homage to him. Oh, Alexei. Isn't it beyond time we all moved past the pretty but narrow boxes found in Balanchine's letter to Jacqueline Kennedy, now more than half a century old? "God creates, woman inspires and man assembles."

— LEIGH WITCHEL

Alonzo King / Shostakovich and Sand

It is pretty much impossible — certainly if you know anything about Dmitri Shostakovich's 15 string quartets, and perhaps even if you don't — not to look for specific narrative and emotional depth in Alonzo King's choreography for *Shostakovich*.

King's piece, created for his San Francisco-based LINES Ballet in 2014 — and presented in Victoria, British Columbia, at the Royal Theatre in March — begins and ends with *String Quartet No. 8 in C Minor*, written in 1960 shortly after the composer began to show the first symptoms of ALS (Lou Gehrig's disease) and finally, grimly, consented to join the Communist Party of the Soviet Union. A good friend, Lev Lebedinsky, said that Shostakovich planned to commit suicide around the time the quartet was published, with the work serving as his epitaph. The music seems to express the composer's turmoil, but you don't need to know anything of his personal life to hear the sadness and how, every now and then, the instruments sound like lonely, distant human voices.

King captures the unsettling tension in all of Shostakovich's string quartets, but not the darkness that is present even in the earliest of the four he chose to use, *String Quartet No. 2*, written in 1944. Instead, the choreographer concentrates on having his dancers display their technique. That technique is impressive — these are uniformly stunning classically trained dancers who have also mastered the contemporary idioms King layers into his pieces — but they remained mostly distant figures.

Throughout much of *Shostakovich*, the 11 dancers engaged in a series of fast, intricate male-female duets, involving some spectacular but also deliberately awkward lifts (in one, the woman was flipped upside down, legs wide apart) and questionable relationships (in another, the woman looked like a doll controlled by the man, until she forcibly took over). There were also interesting solos, including one by the dancer called Babatunji, carrying a long lit wand that seems to bring death as he forces it into his stomach like a sword, and then deliverance as he holds it aloft to the sky.

A solo by Michael Montgomery was the highlight, not for the choreography, but for the personality he brought to it. Montgomery alone seemed able to sink into the movement and made it appear like his own natural response to the music: his shoulders were relaxed, his back was fluid and his face was alive. The other dancers cannot overcome a choreography so cool it required them to show their technical prowess and nothing else — or perhaps they are naturally cool and distant, and that's why King chose them. They suit his work, which he describes on the company's website as “‘thought structures’ created by the manipulation of energies that exist in matter through laws, which govern the shapes and movement directions of everything that exists.”

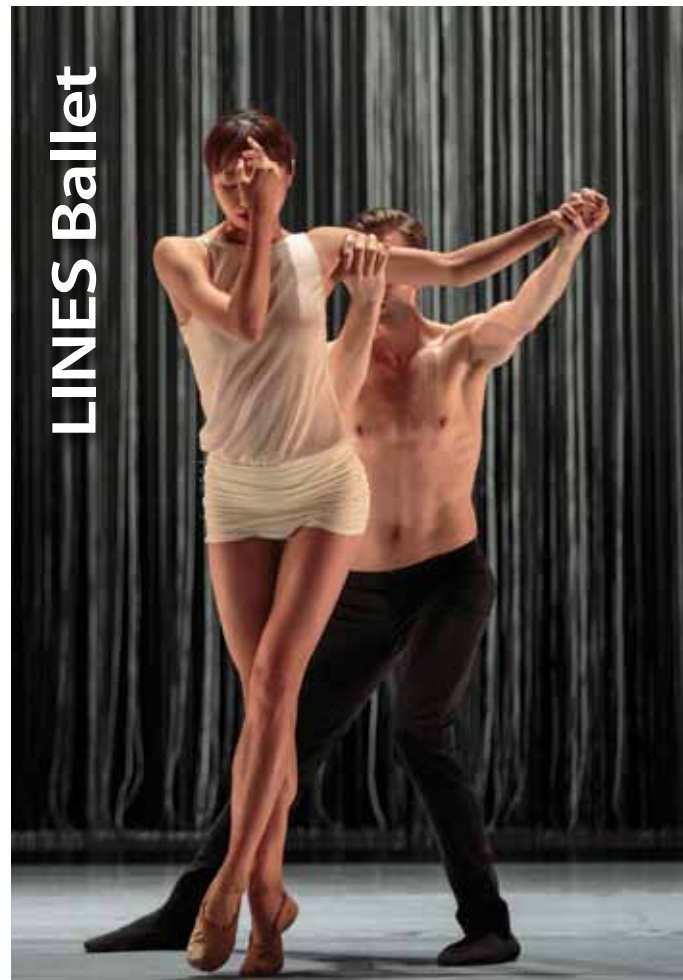
In the second piece, King again does not often choose to use the power of a large group moving together on a stage. Like *Shostakovich*, *Sand* (2016) was formed largely out of smaller images and groupings of one and two, occasionally three. Even when the full company was onstage, they rarely moved together, keeping themselves to themselves. There was no real sense of the collective, or of any true choreographic structure that unifies either the dance or the dancers. That's OK, as far as it goes. It is almost enough simply to admire the beauty of the dancers and especially the women's startlingly long arms and legs (Courtney Henry is six feet tall, but her arms look like they belong to someone a foot taller). But not quite.

Set to an original score by saxophonist Charles Lloyd and pianist Jason Moran, *Sand* is, for King, relatively loose in feel. The dancers' movements were freer than they were in *Shostakovich*, still with lots of repeated high extensions, but the women were off pointe and allowed a little more roundness to their backs and limbs. In the end, how-

ever, this piece felt even cooler than the earlier one, perhaps because there is less audible tension and purpose in the music. The music is lyrical, but not clear in how it wants to make us feel. It doesn't build to any kind of conclusion and nor does the dance, although it did end with the evening's one instance of true human connection, when a duet between Madeline DeVries and Robb Beresford on the first night, Maya Harr and Babatunji on the second, finished with the male dancer putting his head in the lap of the female, and she comforted him.

In the program notes for *Sand*, King writes, “You can hold sand by cupping your hands. When you grip it, it escapes through your fingers.” His choreography escapes the mind in much the same way: you want it to stick, because the dancers are talented and many of the images they create are striking, but it slips away nonetheless.

— ROBIN J. MILLER



Will Tuckett / *Pinocchio*

In March, the National Ballet of Canada added to its store of family-friendly ballets with a two-hour *Pinocchio*, commissioned from an award-winning doyen of the genre, British choreographer/dancer/director Will Tuckett, still appearing in his late 40s as a guest principal character artist with alma mater the Royal Ballet.

Judging by the reactions of young audience members, Tuckett's visually spectacular *Pinocchio* presses all the right pleasure buttons while offering parents the reassurance of an instructive tale about the virtues of diligence, obedience, kindness and truthfulness. Yet, for all its dazzling costumes, special effects and theatrical legerdemain, the production — apparently the

Good examples are Christopher Wheeldon's *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland*, a 2011 Royal Ballet/National Ballet co-production and the Canadian troupe's *Le Petit Prince*, choreographed by company principal Guillaume Côté.

Alice's Adventures in Wonderland risked allowing awesome designs and costumes to overwhelm the choreography, and *Le Petit Prince* had its flaws, yet both were ballets in the traditional sense in that they aimed to use movement as the primary means of storytelling. Not so with *Pinocchio*.

Collodi addressed his book to “i miei piccolo lettori” and wrote in a straightforward Italian suitable for young readers. Even so, he did not skimp when it came to reinforcing his moral strictures with dire accounts of the macabre perils awaiting unruly children.

The heavy lifting, so far as storytelling is concerned, is passed to a fairy guardian/mother figure and her escort of Blue Fairy Shadows who use spoken verse — sometimes cringe-worthy rhyming couplets — to signal what is going on, even when the movement is performing the same function more than adequately.

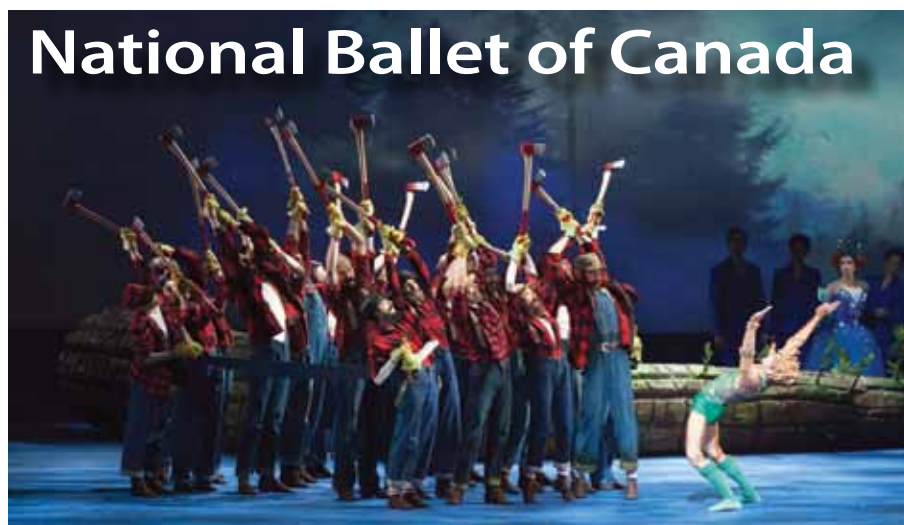
Given the liberties ballet librettists routinely take with literary sources, especially fairy tales, one can hardly fault Middleton for playing fast and loose with Collodi. Even so, some of his choices are questionable. Putting aside the often gratuitous, almost moronic intrusions of Canadiana — lumberjacks in red plaid, tourists sporting maple-leaf T-shirts, a Mountie in red serge and a Sam Steele Stetson, and a selection of Canadian-associated fauna — the decision to have Pinocchio emerge fully formed from the hollow trunk of a felled tree rather than be crafted by the hands of the wood carver Geppetto removes a key emotional element in their albeit peculiar relationship.

Tuckett and Middleton largely eschew the sentimentality of the 1940 Disney animated feature and retain hints of Collodi's grimness, but they allow such passing episodes as the meal Pinocchio shares with the scheming Fox and Cat at the Red Lobster Inn, and two big schoolroom scenes, to get out of hand. Meanwhile, the very clever episode where Pinocchio sells his schoolbook in return for admission to a marionette theatre — its puppet protagonists channelling Fokine's *Petrushka* — could have been happily extended.

Then there's the issue of adult dancers portraying children. At times, as in the schoolroom scenes, one is tempted to avert one's eyes. Yet, in the title role, first soloist Skylar Campbell vaulted this potential hazard. It cannot be easy for a skilled ballet artist to play wooden, but in a heart-touching performance that taxes both physical and dramatic skills, Campbell was never less than convincing.

Principal Elena Lobsanova made for a generally sympathetic Blue Fairy, and Jurgita Dronina and Dylan Tedaldi, playing characters who would not be misplaced in an Act III Petipa divertissement, made for an amusing Cat and Fox respectively. Paul Englishby's music, inflated with the epic sweep of a movie soundtrack and referencing any number of styles including Big Band, will not implant any earworms.

— MICHAEL CRABB



first full-length dance adaptation of 19th-century Italian writer Carlo Collodi's *Le avventure di Pinocchio* — will leave dance-lovers feeling short-changed. It's telling that the scenic wonders, including atmospheric lighting, projected backgrounds and animations by the British team of Colin Richmond (sets and costumes), Oliver Fenwick (lighting) and Douglas O'Connell (projections), take the lion's share of the applause.

In the olden days, ballets such as *Coppélia*, *La Fille mal gardée* and the ever-reliable *Nutcracker* — all dance-driven and propelled by memorably tuneful scores — served ballet companies' need for family-oriented fare. The first two on the list, however, are nowadays regarded as too old-fashioned to be reliable money-makers; thus the current proliferation of new family ballets with instantly recognizable titles.

Like Lewis Carroll's Alice books, *Pinocchio* unfolds episodically. Indeed, it first appeared in serialized instalments in an Italian children's weekly. Although at one point Collodi decided to have done with Pinocchio, hanging him from an oak branch to be tossed by the wind at the end of episode 15, he relented to popular pressure and revived him in what became a story of redemption with the wooden marionette finally achieving human boyhood.

This is the moral tale Tuckett, assisted by librettist and dramaturge Alasdair Middleton, aims to tell; but, rather than rely on dance to do so, Tuckett too often makes it seem an afterthought. This is a shame because much of his choreography is more than serviceable, particularly the way he conveys Pinocchio's evolution from jerky instability to more self-aware confidence.

Batsheva Dance Company



Ohad Naharin / *Last Work*

The latest creation by Ohad Naharin, the artistic director of Batsheva Dance Company, is emphatically called *Last Work*, though, according to an interview in the *New York Times*, he does not mean the title to be taken literally. Indeed, *Last Work* (2015) performed by the Israeli company at Seattle's Paramount Theatre in February, had little to do with finality. Rather, it portrayed a continuum of existence that seemed wholly unique, yet eerily connected with reality.

There was an absence of performance in *Last Work*, that is, the dancers didn't seem to address the audience with a deliberate intent to convey something. Rather, the audience was an observer to a continuous stream of introspective movements and interactions among the dancers.

Dancers entered and exited from a row of light grey panels tucked onto either side of the stage. The only other piece in the almost vacant set design by Zohar Shoenf was a long, raised step upstage; the black cavern surrounding the stage was left exposed.

The piece began with successive solos exhibiting a common language of varied jerky, jittery and fluid movements characteristic of the Gaga language, devised by Naharin, in which the company trains. They were concise and defined, and the dancers seemed largely prompted by

internal physical and emotional impulses rather than by the achievement of a particular outward physical form (Batsheva's dancers don't rehearse with mirrors). Among the ensemble and its eccentric gestures was one ordinary figure moving in a familiar way — a woman jogging at a constant pace on a treadmill upstage, though wearing a long blue dress. She continued this through the hour-long performance.

The soundtrack, by Maxim Warratt with original music by Germany's Grischka Lichtenberger, a composer in electronic music, cast a steady tone over most of the piece as it alternated between humming soundscapes and a softly sung folk song. Designer Eri Nakamura's costumes were mostly just as nondescript — a mix of tank tops, T-shirts and shorts — in dark, or near white or nude colours.

As the piece progressed, the oddities of the community that the dancers inhabited were revealed by their duets, but even more by the indifference from an ensemble who stood or sat observing them. Two women crept slowly in unison through a sequence of twitches, leg lifts and expansive arm extensions that seemed like a codified language, then inexplicably slapped themselves in the face. A man and a woman, who wore a short tutu, pressed against one another dancing with their hands clasped over each other's buttocks. The ensemble was watching them attentively from a row upstage, and three expressionless men in long dark robes watched while

walking closely around these duets. A woman also rode on the back of a man who crawled across the stage on all fours. This composition of familiar gestures in unusual circumstances raised the peculiarity of these scenes. Further, the complacency from the onstage observers normalized the dancers' behaviour and enhanced the strange dynamics of their community.

The piece rose suddenly to its climax in the last scene, led in by pulsating electro-dance music. Four distinct characters entered upstage — a man in a Hawaiian shirt who waved a large white flag, a man with a handheld device that made a loud grinding noise when swung in circular motions, a man in loose red pants who vigorously rubbed his rifle (resembling the motions of masturbation) until it fired confetti into the air and a man who screamed into a microphone. This deliberate shift away from the abstract movement language that, up until now, had dominated the piece, was difficult to reconcile. The screaming man attached the microphone stand to the floor with packing tape before he wrapped it around each dancer, including the woman on the treadmill, connecting the ensemble in a haphazard web.

Such forceful action from the screaming man and the aggravated tone of those four characters were not met by an equally urgent reaction from the ensemble. Instead, they complacently let themselves be bound. Though visually and audibly provocative, this scene seemed out of place with the more contemplative interactions of the previous scenes and brought the piece to a jarring end. Perhaps the intent was to leave us with an uncertainty about the world this ensemble inhabits. In this eerie community, the continuity of the runner on the treadmill became a beacon of comfort.

This piece presented a range of expressions in the Gaga language that seemed to test its boundaries; however, the variety came at a loss to overall cohesion. It has been two years since the premiere of *Last Work*. Maybe Naharin's next piece, yet unnamed and premiering at the Suzanne Dellal Centre in Tel Aviv in June 2017, will show how this language evolves.

— PIA LO

Wheeldon, Pastor, Dawson, Ratmansky / Made in Amsterdam 2

Dutch National Ballet's artistic director Ted Brandsen is, as far as ballet is concerned, a man for our times. During one February weekend alone, he scheduled not only *Made in Amsterdam 1 and 2* — “a mini festival of contemporary ballet” — but he set the two mixed bills at the epicentre of the company's two-day symposium on the future of the art form entitled *Positioning Ballet*.

The double program featured a marathon of eight works (premieres and revivals) by some of today's exceptional choreographers and several exciting newcomers, the scope of which was proof that balletic language is capable of infinite variety. The second program by David Dawson, Alexei Ratmansky, Krzysztof Pastor and Christopher Wheeldon, reviewed here, showed how well ballet can succeed in offering us a richer, more complex picture of life.

One of Dutch National Ballet's resident choreographers, Wheeldon was on a jazzy high when he created *Concerto Concordia* for the troupe, a piece that followed hard on the heels of his acclaimed 2015 musical *An American in Paris*. Revived for the festival, *Concerto Concordia* made for a lighthearted, super-slick opening.

Wheeldon echoed the light/dark score of Francis Poulenc's *Concerto for Two Pianos* by centering the ballet around the dance qualities of a lyrical and contemplative couple (protective Jozef Varga partnering fragile Anna Ol) and a breezy and explosive one (Nadia Yanowsky, rather solid alongside a quicksilver Remi Wortmeyer). Wheeldon further coloured the work with a corps of six couples, their arms and groupings sometimes reflecting George Balanchine's *Serenade*, albeit with some witty, geometric twists.

In contrast to this inconsequential yet charming piece was the evening's closing work, *Moving Rooms* by Pastor, also a resident choreographer of the company, and

also a work created for a previous season. A riveting, powerful ballet, its up-tempo pressure was dictated by the uncompromising drive in the music of both Alfred Schnittke and Henryk Górecki.

It opened on a single figure, long-limbed Vito Mazzeo, who carved out his own space with formal balletic poses subsequently taken up by a corps of 10, all clad in simple flesh-coloured costumes. As the squares of light on the floor shrank, the dancers battled to contain their jagged, inward-exploding movements; as the light magnified, they fought to stretch themselves outwards and upwards. When the



blocks of light shifted horizontally across the stage, the dancers were forced to follow with jumps that ate up space, at one point filling the stage like pieces on a chess board, silhouetted in the light. Calm returned with a centrally placed duet; a man and woman serenely sculpting the light-flooded space with intertwined plasticity until everything ended as dramatically as it began — motionless figures, blackout, silence.

Both these works were determined by their physicality; the emotional heart of the evening lay elsewhere, in two ballets that differed in scope, but not in intensity.

Citizen Nowhere is the title of Dawson's abstract distillation of *The Little Prince*, in

which the choreographer searched for the heart of Saint-Exupéry's fable. Melancholy, loneliness, despair, love and hope are universal human emotions, all inherent in the story, and were the essence of this poetic, if not totally satisfying, work.

Dawson emphasizes them by the sheer scale of his imagery, such as at the start when a lone dancer (Edo Wijnen) stands immobile, enclosed in the immensity of space. On designer Eno Henze's huge double screen, a myriad of numbers are projected as if to suggest the vastness of space or the factual as opposed to the imaginative. They morphed like a swarm of birds

into a giant lost planet, one of which sails slowly into the distance. The music (Szymon Brzoska) is composed of glacial, galactic sounds that shiver and echo. As Wijnen starts to move, to run — looking and searching — the figure of a second dancer in red fills the screen (Sasha Mukhamedov), the unfeeling rose of the story, followed by fragments of text — “what is essential is invisible to the eye,” “truth, love, a tear ...” Wijnen twisted his arms in anguish, his body torqued in a multitude of turns, head and chest lifted in an ecstatic arabesque, followed by a wild trajectory of runs taking in the stage and then a few moments of complete stillness, when the imagery truly touched the heart. Dawson's relentless movement, fine though it is, allows little time for reflection.

More powerful was Ratmansky's delicate miniature titled after its score by Tchaikovsky, *Souvenir d'un lieu cher*. Two couples (Vera Tsyganova and Varga, Ol and Artur Sheterikov) interacted in what could be a single relationship or memories of a past one. Like fractured shards of a broken painting, the images were many, and microscopic in detail. Ratmansky interrupts his beautifully inventive dance with ordinary gestures and moves: a woman turned to look at the trio who ignored her, then the four walked forward; one man stopped, his hand stretched out pleadingly; the other man lifted a woman lovingly, only to lower and enclose her protectively with his entire body.

— JUDITH DELMÉ

Jean-Christophe Maillot / *Cendrillon*

The Cinderella story remains a common trope in popular culture and art. In 2016, San Francisco Ballet performed Christopher Wheeldon's version and the National Ballet of Canada performed James Kudelka's, to name just two notable dance productions. And, in February of this year, Seattle's Pacific Northwest Ballet presented Jean-Christophe Maillot's *Cendrillon*, premiered by his company, Les Ballets de Monte-Carlo, in 1999.

It's no small feat to take Charles Perault's fairy tale, first adapted to ballet more than 200 years ago, and infuse it with a fresh perspective. Nevertheless, that's what Maillot has done with his stripped-down *Cendrillon*.

This is the second Maillot work Pacific Northwest Ballet has taken on (they performed his *Roméo et Juliette* in 2008 and 2016), and the two pieces share similarities: Prokofiev scores, classic love stories and a focus on a deeper human meaning.

At the heart of *Cendrillon* is a second love story between Cinderella's father and the wife he's grieving that brings out themes of memory, mourning and love. We are continually reminded of the mother: in Maillot's version, Cinderella is rescued not by a fairy godmother, but by her mother reincarnated in fairy form. Guest artist from Les Ballets de Monte-Carlo, April Ball, coated in glitter and wearing a tutu with a very narrow skirt, was a sprightly star of the show, impressing with precise footwork as the fairy and grace as the mother.

As the ballet begins, Cinderella (Noelani Pantastico on opening night) clutches her mother's dress as if clinging to memories that might slip through her fingers. Giant three-dimensional notebook pages surround her, covered in unintelligible cursive writing, a key part of the muted, minimalist set design by Ernest Pignon-Ernest. Through an upstage flashback, Cinderella's father (Seth Orza) tenderly dances with her mother, who tragically collapses.

The Stepmother (Lesley Rausch) enters, interrupting the sombre tone and, in her purple corset, uses her sexuality to control Cinderella's father. He seems torn between supporting his grieving daughter and pleasing his new wife who tries to seduce him at every turn, often

impeding his own movement. The Stepsisters (Rachel Foster and Sarah Ricard Orza) are not ugly in appearance, but in spirit. Like the Stepmother, they move forcefully, with a sharp, determined air. These sisters do not bumble around, and they are not a source of humour; their subtly bandaged heads suggest they are in a constant state of recovery from a cosmetic procedure.

The Pleasure Superintendents (Steven Loch and Miles Pertl), new characters introduced by Maillot, provide much humour, feeding off each other's silliness. At one point, they perform their own version of Cinderella's story along with four mannequins who kneel in a row and don pink and blue outfits to represent Cinderella's future babies.

Instead of the conventional elaborate gown and iconic glass shoes, Cinderella goes to the ball dressed in her mother's simple slip dress, her bare feet golden and sparkling, transformed by magic when the Pleasure Superintendents lift her to dip her feet in a mysterious bowl. Thus her feet, not the glass slipper, become the coveted object of the Prince's desire.

Cinderella enters the ballroom feet first; Dominique Drillot's lighting design puts all attention on them. The bright white stairs that serve as a grand entrance look like they are made from a folded piece of paper, matching Pignon-Ernest's motif of the large 3-D pages that move around the stage, dividing the space and serving as a backdrop for projections. Costume designer Jérôme Kaplan reflects the characters' personalities well through their outfits: the Stepmother arrives in a purple garment layered over her corset that features a large scorpion-like tail, and the Stepsisters are dressed in garish red, each with a gigantic bustle protruding off one hip.

Cinderella and the Prince (James Moore) dance as if they are the only two guests, waltzing serenely and later sharing a tender pas de deux where he seems to explore her entire body, slowly running his hands along her limbs.

Maillot's ballet pays little attention to stops and starts in Prokofiev's music. Each scene seamlessly melds into the next and nothing is included for the sake of spectacle; each sequence is as detailed and succinct as it needs to be to tell the story most efficiently. One element that jarred was the search for Cinderella, with the only stop in the Prince's quest being an unidentified place with red- and yellow-costumed "exotics." Some indication of what culture was being referenced would have been better, as opposed to a generic "other."

Once reunited, Cinderella and the Prince share another pas de deux of light jumps and a slow discovery of their bodies. Pantastico and Moore's tender partnership displayed a deep understanding of both their characters' romance and of each other. Holding his wife's dress, Cinderella's father echoes the opening scene while, atop the palace stairs, Cinderella, now in a golden gown, shares a long kiss with her Prince as golden glitter rains on them. These final images leave us to reflect on the magic of love and the power of memory.

— TESSA PERKINS DENEAULT





Top: Isabelle Poirier
Photo: Svetla Atanasova, 2015

Above right: Isabelle Poirier
Photo: Angelo Barsetti, 2015

Below right: Louise Bédard
Photo: Angelo Barsetti, 1996

Choreographic Toolkit at EC2 *Cartes postales de Chimère*

Cartes postales de Chimère (Postcards from Chimera) is a seminal solo work created and performed by Louise Bédard in 1996. In 2015, she remounted it with Isabelle Poirier and Lucie Vigneault, thus keeping an important piece of Quebec's contemporary dance heritage alive in the bodies of two of the present generation's most distinguished dancers.

In collaboration with Louise Bédard Danse, the Fondation Jean-Pierre Perreault created the choreographic toolkit *Cartes postales de Chimère* in order to document, preserve and transmit this valuable work for the future. The toolkit contains the necessary elements to understand and reconstruct the dance: biographical notes; choreographic notes and sketches; details about set design, costumes, make-up and lighting; press reviews; and videos of rehearsals, shows, interviews, etc.

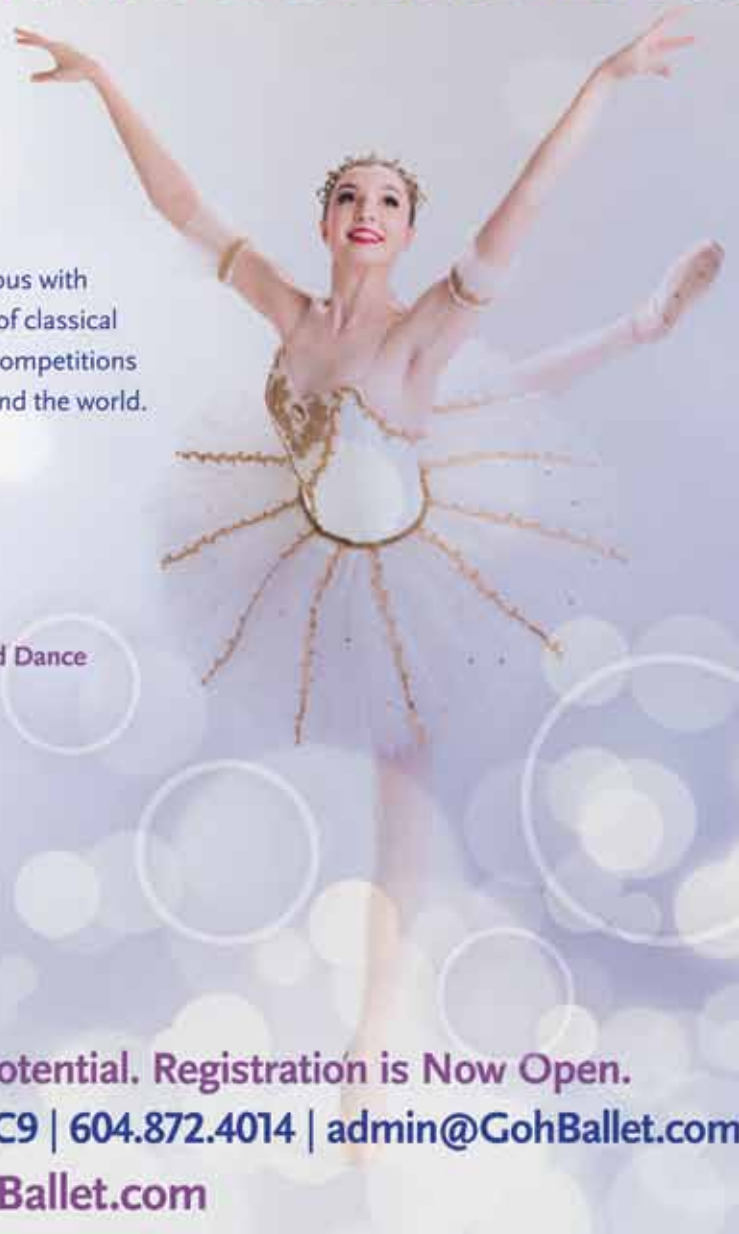
Excerpts of the toolkit are available on the digital platform EC2_Espaces chorégraphiques 2. EC2 explores traces and memories of dance, inviting visitors to recreate and re-enact, to reflect and discuss. Visit www.espaceschoregraphiques2.com.

— **LISE GAGNON, EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR**
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