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WINTER 2016 | \$7.50



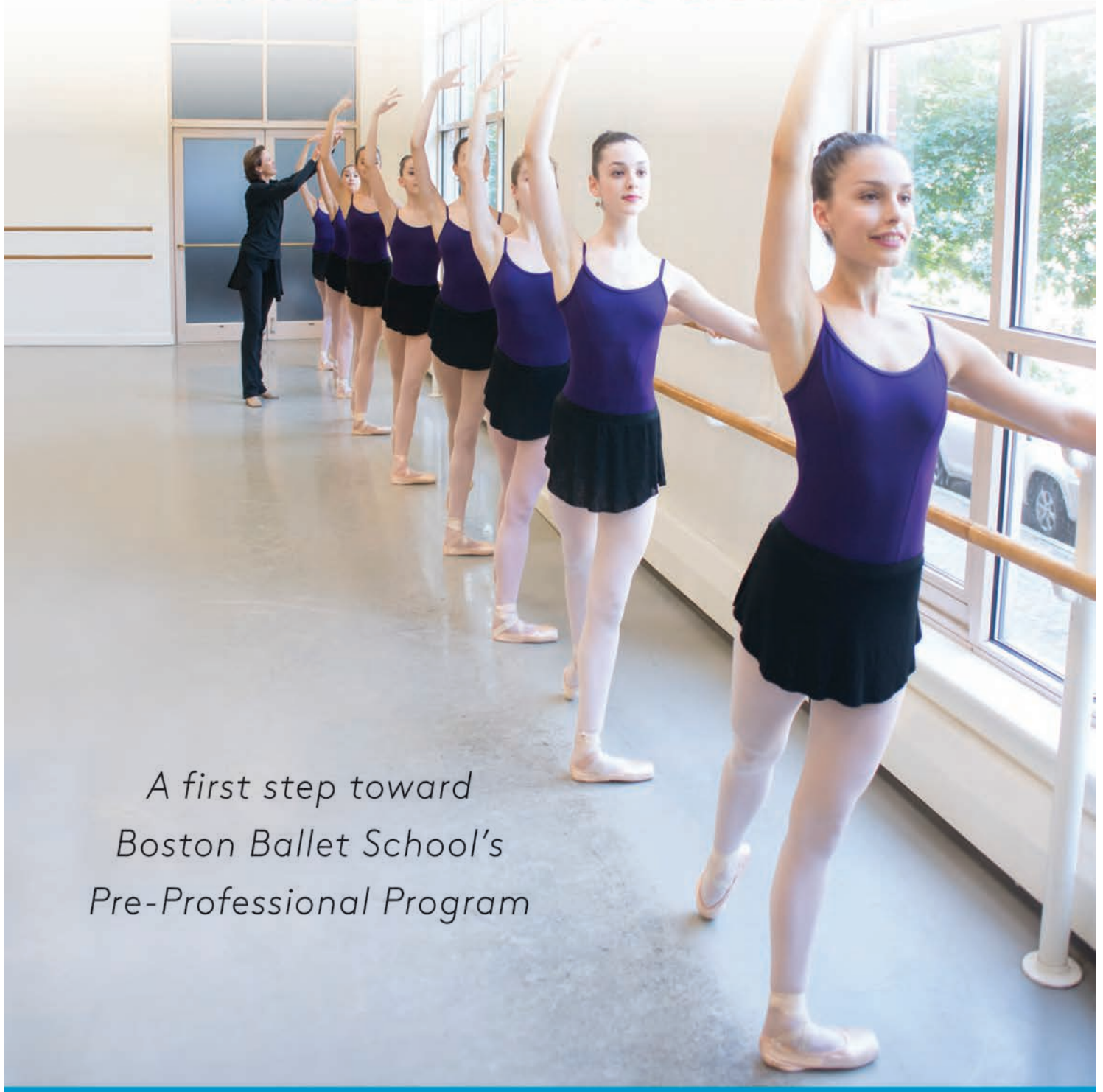
The China-Vancouver Connection

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WINTER 2016 | VOL. 44 No. 4

Publisher Vancouver Ballet Society
Editor Kaija Pepper
Art Direction Brenda Finamore
Copy Editor Margaret Jetelina
Fulfillment The Oyster Group
Printing Horseshoe Press Inc.
Mailing Mail-O-Matic
Advertising Jorssen Marketing
Social & Digital Media Deanna Peters

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

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

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Distributed in Canada by Magazines Canada

Distributed in the USA by Coast to Coast



Canada Council
for the Arts
Conseil des arts
du Canada

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



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

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



Information today is widely available on the internet — I get a fantastic amount of the latest dance news that way myself, and Dance International is available in a bright and shiny electronic edition at Kobo.com. What, I sometimes ask myself, is the use of a dance magazine in quarterly print format?

Yet, as a reader, I continue to believe in the humble hard copy, the one you hold in your hands and read, especially when — as happened to me the morning I wrote this — your server is down.

Either way — online or print — I know from many perspectives how important our conscientiously curated, fully edited space is to the world of dance.

Many dancers, choreographers, designers and artistic directors tell us how appreciative they are of the thoughtful professional attention we give. Writers, too, continue to pitch stories, some of which require extensive research. Rebecca Karpus' cover feature on Chinese cultural influence on Vancouver dance involved not just several interviews and studio visits, but also slogging away in the archives. As other paying outlets disappear, writers need us to support such efforts. Self-published blogs are wonderful, but don't tend to generate even a modest fee. Also, we grow through community: not just personally, but also professionally.

Dance International is proud to support that odd breed of person who dedicates their life to watching and writing about dance, building a goldmine of cultural capital. Gary Smith's interview with the great Alessandra Ferri, on page 10, is informed by his lifetime of attention. Over the years, Gary has travelled from his Hamilton, Ontario, home many times to see Ferri perform in nearby Toronto, and also in London, New York and Milan.

Happily, we also hear positive feedback from you, our readers: either directly in person and through email, or indirectly through magazine sales and subscriptions. Your support keeps us going. Thank you for believing in this public space for dance and dancers, writers and readers.

Besides Kobo, we are online with Twitter and Facebook. We also have a newly redesigned website: please visit danceinternational.org and invite your friends to drop by.

Kaija

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Dance International



DIMagazine

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and Wu Ning's *Rainy Alley*
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The Creative Gesture



A Banff Centre pilot program digs deep into making dance
by Kaija Pepper

Dancers from the Choreographic Lab,
Banff Centre for Arts and Creativity studio
Photo: Michael Slobodian



“Are you here? We can’t see you, the lights are in our eyes ... We can’t hear you when the music plays.”

These sentences were projected onto the backdrop near the beginning of *Still*, a 40-minute work co-created by mid-career artists taking part in the Banff Centre’s Creative Gesture workshop in summer 2016. The words reflect the performers’ point of view, which is almost the complete opposite to the typical audience perspective: sitting in the darkened auditorium, we see dancers best when the lights are up, and when the music sounds, we are swept into their experience.

By emphasizing the divide between us, the audience was brought into the onstage world from a different perspective. Relationship was created between dancer and spectator, so we could

slide easily into the piece. There were more words (some recorded, some spoken live); there were lights, of course, and costumes (white dresses and wraps) and props (long sticks).

There was also the set, which was one of the starting points for the piece. Early on, German costume and scenic designer Alexander Polzin created a central hanging sculpture of white ribbon, as well as a floor covered with a grid of small circles. The sculpture, especially when it lowered, and the dots, which guided the footfalls of the first solos, provided spatial parameters around which the movement could be organized: they were still points for the active moment of dance.

Still was presented at the Banff Centre’s Margaret Greenham Theatre, nestled in the Rocky Mountains of Alberta, at the end



Artistic Director of Dance Emily Molnar at Banff Centre for Arts and Creativity
Photo: Don Lee, courtesy Banff Centre for Arts and Creativity



Above and top: Artists of the Creative Gesture in *Still*
Photos: Don Lee, courtesy Banff Centre for Arts and Creativity



Artists of the Creative Gesture in *Exquisite Corpse*
Photo: Don Lee, courtesy Banff Centre for Arts and Creativity

of four weeks of an intensive workshop led by program director Stephan Laks. An ex-dancer (Les Grands Ballets Canadiens de Montréal, Göteborg Ballet and Bern Ballet), Laks currently works as a rehearsal director, mostly in Europe. I spoke with Laks and Emily Molnar, who took on the position of artistic director of dance at the Banff Centre in 2014, and who also heads Ballet BC in Vancouver, in their production office the morning after seeing the show.

The workshop for mid-career dancers, who gathered from companies across North America and Europe, was intended to provide “a developmental experience,” says Laks. The plan was that Brazilian-born, European-based Fernando Melo, a lead faculty member at the Creative Gesture, would create a new work on them. As it turned out, something different began to percolate in the hothouse space and time provided by the Banff Centre.

As they shared ways of working, and read the literature Laks assembled (from a short excerpt about cultivating a spirit of generosity to a scientific paper on how gesture is perceived during social interaction), the group was drawn to going further into the challenging unknown by co-creating the work. These experienced professional interpreters were, after all, used to being in a variety of creative processes that end up with them onstage in a performance. The focus shifted, not without some angst and soul-searching from leadership and participants, but in a spirit of exploration and adaptation in keeping with the pilot program's research intentions.

"A really important part of what this [inaugural] program taught us all was about leadership and ownership in the creative process," says Molnar. "And how much communication is needed."

How do you actually make a work with a group in which everyone is equally invested in decision-making? After a period of trial and error, of developing ideas, and as the performance date neared, the leadership team "began to collect all that energy" to help shape the final piece, says Molnar. In the program credits, the original 10 participants are listed as developing *Still*, with the four who remained with the choreographic process through to the end — Cecily Campbell, Mariko Kida, Shumpei Nemoto and Javier Perez — credited as creators.

The second contingent of the Creative Gesture workshop involved 12 emerging artists, also assembled from North America and Europe, who joined in as performers for *Still*. They also had their own piece, the 15-minute *Exquisite Corpse*, which opened the

a "final product"? Having a performance "gave the dancers something to puzzle," says Molnar.

"It also brings them into conversation with the audience," adds Laks. "Does this thing they have been working on actually work as performance?"

As for the surrealist's game, it was a means to an end. Laks explains: "We used it for what it supported in terms of bringing the emerging artists to a point of view that questioned authorship, questioned collaboration and ways of collaborating. And for drawing out associations to help them perform with new techniques, new tools."

New ways of working were key to what the Creative Gesture was designed to investigate. Faculty member Ellen Lauren, for instance, who co-directs SITI Company in New York, provided what Laks describes as "a window into a value system and a culture. The way they work in SITI Company is they sit down for three weeks at a table before even picking up a script. When they do, they have a body of topics and subjects, and they apply those."

This is, says Molnar, "a very different way of working from dance, where we tend to get up and start moving right away."

In the fifth and final week, participants from both mid-career and emerging groups, as well as a few new faces, were involved in a Choreographic Lab exploring improvisation with six choreographers, under the direction of Michael Schumacher. Today, choreographers commonly credit dancers as collaborators or even co-creators. In terms of generating material, says Laks, "improvisa-

A really important part of what this [inaugural] program taught us all was about leadership and ownership in the creative process. And how much communication is needed. — Emily Molnar

evening of performance at the neighbouring Eric Harvie Theatre (the two theatres are in the same complex), a kind of hors d'oeuvre assembled by three choreographers — Jermaine Spivey, Tilman O'Donnell and Adi Salant. The audience was invited to sit onstage, with the dancers performing in a rectangular "runway" that ran between rows of chairs, a setup that meant we could watch them closely and, also, the spectators across from us; and the performers, of course, were near enough, without lights in their eyes, to see the audience.

Each choreographer came to Banff for a week, contributing a "chapter" of the three-part work. The title and process were inspired by the surrealist's *Exquisite Corpse* collaborative technique, based on a parlour game in which each participant would draw an image or write a word, then fold the paper and pass it to the next person, resulting in a surprising collaged creation.

Exquisite Corpse was brash and bright, raw in its energy, and optimistic, too; the young dancers were committed to their act of communication, each chapter taking them into a different realm of aesthetic purpose. Spivey's opening featured mysterious, angular movement that I learned later was based on the ordeal of auditioning; O'Donnell's chapter built character and situation, incorporating quiet monologues directed to first-row audience members. The last section, from Batsheva co-artistic director Salant, was full-out Gaga-based movement to pulsing drums.

The audience smiled appreciatively throughout (I couldn't help but watch the faces across from me), but does a workshop need

tion is at the heart of the relationship between an interpreter and a choreographer." It is key to generating movement, and tools, tactics and strategies are key to good improvisation.

Schumacher is an ex-dancer with Ballet Frankfurt and Twyla Tharp Dance, among others, and co-creator with, notably, Jiri Kylián (for 2008's *Last Touch First*). He is also a master improviser. In his introductory session, Schumacher provided an eloquent entry into the improvising body, beginning with his own history in dance. He had wanted to be in musical theatre, but then discovered Juilliard School, in 1978, where American modern dance choreographer Hanya Holm gave "cryptic sessions, speaking about perception and awareness." Over time, as a performer, Schumacher moved from "a world of impulse, freedom and ecstasy," bothered that he couldn't remember afterward what had happened onstage, to somatic practice and "a world of awareness that helps me stay awake in performance." His understanding of the interaction between the intuitive and the rational side of performing grew.

Next year, this elite five-week opportunity that includes travel, accommodation, program fees and even a small stipend for successful candidates, will doubtless evolve. "We created an environment where questions could be asked," Molnar says of 2016's investigation into where emerging and mid-career interpreters are at today in their careers and creative lives. As Schumacher sensibly advised the dancers when they began to improvise after 45 minutes of sitting and listening: "I want you to go slow now, so you can keep this awareness later. We'll get to the fancy dancing." ▯

In Conversation

Prima ballerina
Alessandra Ferri
talks to Gary Smith
about being
fearless onstage



Alessandra Ferri and Alexandr Trusch
in Hamburg Ballet's production of
John Neumeier's *Duse*
Photo: Holger Badekow

Stepping into the bar of Hamburg's Side Hotel, a deconstructionist building with ugly lobby lights, Alessandra Ferri wraps her pale, diaphanous shawl tighter around her shoulders. Sitting gingerly on an uncomfortable banquette, she orders tea. "Herbal tea," she says. "No caffeine, it's lethal, caffeine and jet lag."

Ferri smiles one of her sweet smiles, which you recognize from when she played Juliet more than 30 years ago at Covent Garden. "That was a long time ago," she grins. "But life has a way of bringing you back, of helping you rediscover moments. Sometimes you have to come full circle to find out who you are and where you are going."

The tea arrives, and Ferri sniffs its heady aroma. "You're sure there's no caffeine?" she asks the waiter before taking a sip.

Born in Milan 53 years ago, Ferri trained at La Scala Ballet School. She was attracted to the musicality of dance, especially ballet. At 15, she joined London's Royal Ballet. At 19, she became one of the youngest principal dancers at Covent Garden.

In some perfectly logical way, she became a muse of the great Sir Kenneth MacMillan and the darling of the London ballet set. When she suddenly left for New York and American Ballet Theatre two years later, London fans were devastated. "I left because Misha [Mikhail Baryshnikov], director of the company then, asked me to dance at ABT. I was 21 and it was a great offer. Of course, I didn't plan any of it. I just did it. And, yes, I missed the Royal Ballet. It was my home, but you need to go out and see the world."

New York wasn't easy, Ferri admits. "In London, you were nurtured, given everything you needed. In New York, it was, 'Here's your costume. Get out there and do it. If you don't, someone else will.'"

Despite the success she achieved in her career, Ferri quit dance at 44.

"You reach an age where you start comparing yourself with who you once were. Things were changing around me. I felt in

a single moment an era of my life was finished. I just wanted to step away," she explains. "I lived for my children and thought they needed me. I gave up exercising. I was happy just being who I am. Ultimately I realized something was missing. Being a parent doesn't have to mean sacrificing yourself. My life was getting smaller and that was wrong."

Ferri discovered her two daughters, Emma and Matilde, now 15 and 18, had lives of their own and felt happy at home in New York City where they lived with their mother. (Ferri and their father, a photographer, are divorced.)

"They're Italian, my daughters, but they are American, too, with busy lives," she says. "And I began to go to Pilates and exercise class, and to rebuild my strength. Pain? Of course there is pain. That's always been there. It's part of a dancer's world. You work beyond such things."

In 2013, Ferri returned to dance in *The Piano Upstairs*, which she choreographed for Spoleto Festival. It was an important taste of something she craved. "Then I did *Chéri* for Martha Clarke at Signature Theater in New York and *Woolf Works* by Wayne MacGregor for the Royal Ballet in 2015." When artistic director Kevin Mackenzie suggested she dance Juliet again with American Ballet Theatre, she said, "Why not?"

"Of course it was risky. And, yes, it was courageous. But a whole new chapter opened in my life. Margot Fonteyn danced Juliet when she was 60. So, I just said yes."

When she returned to the role this July in New York, Ferri cast off memories of her earlier Juliet. "It was important not to remember how it felt back then. I had to not go down that road. At the premiere, I felt such honesty and truth onstage that night. Everything I had learned stayed with me and I used that. I had a wonderful partner in Herman Cornejo. I didn't want to dance with someone I had danced Juliet with before. It had to be all new."

Ferri doesn't deny her age and the effect that has on performance. "When you're young, you only understand the early part of Juliet's story. You need to understand how a dream can shatter. This time I wasn't performing the role. I was there, myself, the whole of myself. I wasn't afraid of the silence. I wasn't afraid of being still."

Was there pressure to be good? "Of course there was," she smiles. "Pressure is something you put on yourself. I'm very demanding, I know that, but my body somehow does what I want it to."

Her latest dramatic creation, the role of Eleanora Duse in John Neumeier's new ballet, *Duse*, premiered at the Hamburg Opera House in December 2015. The work about the great Italian actress is in many ways a confrontation between two stars.

"The parallels are interesting," Ferri says. "Duse was a very different person from me, but we shared experiences. I relate to her in many ways. It's important to remember she was an enormous star in North America, too, even though she didn't perform in English. I cannot become someone else, but I lend myself to the character and the role. She was so truthful onstage. She shared her most intimate moments, her human self."

Watching Ferri define the essence of Duse in Neumeier's ballet is to understand what theatrical illusion can be. At its best it is real and compelling, and Ferri finds the moments of theatre in Duse's life. There again onstage are her performances as Camille, Cleopatra and Juliet. There are her love affairs with beautiful young men. There are the passions that fueled not just

her performances, but also a lifetime of art.

"You stop thinking, you forget about yourself. You give your soul to the role you dance and don't feel afraid to go there. Dancing is about how you use your body to create. I don't feel younger, you understand, but I hope I look it onstage."

Ferri acknowledges that creation is harder now. "I have to take time to rest. I have to sleep. There's no coming home at two in the morning. I'm like a racecar, I need more time in the box."

Ferri will continue to dance as long as there are offers and audiences. *Duse* proves she has something new and thrilling to offer.

"I love the way John has fashioned *Duse* with jumbled memories, a non-linear thrust, different ages all tossed together. He broke the line between fantasy and reality. It's just like real life."

For Ferri, a whole new chapter has opened and she's prepared to live it. "Well, in a way, I feel my career is over. What I do now is just about joy. I'm not so concerned about dance, not so frightened. It's just something that makes me happy. I don't feel I need to impress anymore."

For a moment there is silence. Then Ferri looks at her hands. There are wrinkles now. Each is beautiful and real.

"Like Duse, I want to get at the truth. Her strength came from the courage of being herself. That's what John's ballet is about. It's amazing how art can erase for a moment all the ugliness around and leave us with a bit of beauty." ■



"Life has a way of bringing you back, of helping you rediscover moments."

Alessandra Ferri in American Ballet Theatre's *Romeo and Juliet*
Photo: Rosalie O'Connor



The China-Vancouver Connection

A celebration of cultural influence from Chinese-Canadians

Chinese immigration to British Columbia began in the late 1700s and has influenced Vancouver's culture, including dance, ever since. Although there is scarce documentation of Chinese performance around the time of the city's 1886 founding, there is evidence that the Chinese-Canadian community contributed substantially to Vancouver's early performing arts scene. By at least 1898, Chinese opera and theatre productions, which often included dance as combat and mime-based dance-acting, were being performed by both touring troupes from China and local Chinese cultural societies.

Records exist of acrobatic shows and lion and dragon dances at cultural events from the 1930s. These were often quite spectacular, as is evident from a description in the *China Town News* of a 1961 performance by the Vancouver Chinese Freemasons, in which the dragon measured 150 feet and required so much strength and endurance to manoeuvre that the performers needed to be switched out every eight minutes.

Also in 1961, the Jin Wah Sing Musical Association, founded in the 1930s and still active today, welcomed a renowned opera instructor onto their roster, Wong Toa. He was considered a strong influence on many local Chinese-Canadian performers, as the first teacher of his field and calibre in Canada.

Another contributing dynamic in early Vancouver was the group of nightclubs and supper clubs hidden away in Chinatown, considered a mysterious night out to non-Asian Vancouverites. One, the Marco Polo, was famous in the 1960s for its Asian chorus girls and "Canada's only Oriental revue."

by Rebecca Karpus



The Cave Supper Club in the downtown core gave Paddy Wing, one of Vancouver's first local dance stars, his start. Wing's family immigrated to B.C. early on, with his grandfather arriving in the mid-1800s for the Cariboo Gold Rush. In 1926, Wing was born in Quesnel, moving to Vancouver with his family as a teenager. After he won a dance contest with a tap solo at the Cave, his intended career as a bookkeeper took a back seat to his newfound passion in performance; within a few years, he became a professional entertainer.

Trained in tap dance by Vancouver's Ted Cawker, Wing perfected the "ballet tap" style, which became his signature solo, combining elements of tap with the grace of ballet. Dressed in a crisp black tuxedo with a top hat, cane and shiny Oxford tap shoes, he often escaped the racial typecasting of the time and epitomized the classic song and dance showman. Wing broke barriers for North American performers of Chinese descent and earned shining reviews not only in Vancouver, but across North America. In New York, he played a 32-week run at the China Doll nightclub.

Unlike Wing, Shanghai-born Lorita Leung arrived in Vancouver from Hong Kong in 1970 with years of professional Chinese dance experience behind her. She soon formed the Lorita Leung Dance Academy and the Lorita Leung Dance Company. According to Leung, the academy was the first of its scope in Vancouver, a formal Chinese dance institution organized independent of a cultural society. In 1993, the academy implemented the Beijing Dance Academy syllabus, a significant achievement. One of the Beijing syllabus goals is to "develop Chinese culture on a broader scale" by bringing Chinese dance overseas, as Leung has done. With her school and company, she pursued her "mission to educate" Vancouver audiences about Chinese dance, and has endeavoured to overturn stereotypes surrounding the art form.

The most persistent stereotype is that Chinese dance is a singular style, when, in fact, it takes many forms, including classical, folk (originating from China's majority Han ethnicity) and ethnic (originating from Chinese minority ethnic groups). This classification system was solidified in China during the 1950s, following a period when Chinese dance was more often part of opera and theatre. Leung's school focuses on classical, folk and ethnic, but also incorporates more modern styles, such as contemporary Chinese and Chinese contemporary: the former is Chinese dance with a contemporary dance influence; the latter, contemporary with a Chinese influence.

Leung's desire to expand her audience base to include more non-Chinese persons has proved elusive, however. Since multiculturalism is an established part of Canadian society, Leung wonders why Chinese dance is typically not included under the umbrella of mainstream dance. In time this may change; the group has performed as part of the Vancouver Dance Centre's Discover Dance! series, which places them downtown in a main locus of Vancouver contemporary dance.

Today, the company's artistic director is Leung's daughter, Jessica Jone, who also strives for less ghettoization of Chinese dance, and would like it to have a broader following in the city, the way flamenco does.

Jone, who was born and raised in Vancouver, has also spent considerable time in China. Her training was mostly comprised of Chinese dance from her mother and from the Beijing Dance Academy in China, and later included ballet at a local Vancouver studio, and contemporary dance, including Graham technique, at



Above left: Joseph Lee and Catie He of the Lorita Leung Dance Company in Gao Bo's *Zhuo Ma*
Photo: Lorita Leung

Below left: Wen Wei Wang and Qiu Xia He in *Made in China* by Wang and Gao Yanjinzi
Photo: Donald Lee

It's not just about making a contribution, but a connection.



**Above: Goh Ballet Youth Company in *Don Quixote*
Photo: Louis Li**



**Left: Lin Yee Goh, Choo Chiat Goh and Chan Hon Goh
Photo: Paul Lee**

Simon Fraser University. Jone's firsthand knowledge of styles and movement vocabularies is rich, evidenced by her insights into the similarities between classical Chinese dance's fundamental movement opposite exercises and Graham technique floor sequences.

She feels that one of the differences between Chinese and Western dance forms stems from ingrained cultural behaviour. She illustrates this by comparing classical Chinese movement and ballet vocabulary, something a master teacher in Beijing explained to her. Leonardo Da Vinci's Vitruvian Man, says Jone, "is completely square and open. Classical ballet is also very square and has a sense of openness. But, in Chinese culture, we are not that direct ... Culturally, the way we view the body is very different." Because of this, Chinese dance aesthetics are not as straightforwardly open and must include the yin yang, a traditional philosophical concept that is physically translated into the body through having some parts of the body shown and, at the same time, others hidden. For example, a twist of the torso will help avoid an overly direct stance, with part of the body frontally displayed and part facing another direction. "There is always a spiral," she states about Chinese dance movement, again bringing Graham technique to mind.

In 2004, Jone formed her own company, Moving Dragon, alongside her husband, Chengxin Wei. The company (which has been on break for a few years while Wei earned his master's degree at the University of Washington, then completed a stint as a visiting assistant professor at Ohio University) uses the pair's many influences to their advantage. Their work blurs the lines between Chinese and contemporary dance, leaving Jone to reflect on

where the company fits within Vancouver: "If you think of contemporary dance being the centre of the city's dance scene, then Chinese dance is on the outside. Moving Dragon is crossing over."

Wei, who was born in Dalian and immigrated to Vancouver from Guangdong province in 2000, also has experience in Chinese, ballet and contemporary dance. He was recruited by the Chinese government at age 11 to become a dancer, and trained at the Beijing Dance Academy, leading to a professional career at Guangdong Provincial Dance Theatre.

In Vancouver, in 2001, Wei became a full-time dancer with Ballet BC under the directorship of John Alleyne, remaining for six years. Alleyne was apparently fascinated by "quirks" in his movement, which were a result of his Chinese dance background and always seemed to surface. During his first few years with the company, says Wei, "I really wanted to get rid of my Chinese background. I wanted to assimilate to Western dance and thought I didn't need anything to do with Chinese dance because that was my past." When he realized people were interested and drawn to his movement qualities, he became proud of where he is from.

Wei capitalizes on his diverse training, performing with distinctive dramatic flair. Although his affable personality seeps through, he can also have an intense edge, as described in a 2008 *Globe and Mail* review of Ballet BC's *Four Seasons*: "The evening's most risk-taking moments came from Chengxin Wei ... Usually a bright force onstage, here he darkens his palette with floppy, melodramatic falls and sharp, painful-sounding gasps. Wei stumbles, then raises his fist to the air in weird triumph — a superb moment of character-driven dance."

Like Jone, Wei sees similarities between Chinese dance methodology and other dance practices, most prominently European Laban technique. Shen Yun, a complex training system in classical Chinese dance, is made up of eight principles involving contrast, such as lift versus sink, and expand versus contract. Laban Movement Analysis is also centred around concepts of contrast, such as the difference between sudden timing and sustained timing, and strong weight and light weight. Contrasting dynamics from both systems play a role in Wei's choreography, which could be referred to as contemporary with a Chinese edge. To Wei, his choreography is about the deconstruction of movement, leaving no trace of where Chinese dance begins and contemporary ends.

The influence of Chinese-Canadians is also evident in the city's ballet training, including key figures Li Yaming, Soo Nee Lee, and Lin Yee and Choo Chiat Goh. Choo Chiat Goh immigrated in 1976 and his wife, Lin Yee Goh, a year later, in order to leave China's Cultural Revolution behind. Both had been professional ballet dancers with Central Ballet of China (known today as the National Ballet of China), founded in 1959 under the guidance of Soviet dancer and ballet master Petr Gusev, who gave it a strong Russian foundation. In Vancouver, they established a small school in 1978, which has grown into the well-established Goh Ballet Academy.



Chinese dance aesthetics are not as straightforwardly open and must include the yin yang, a traditional philosophical concept that is physically translated into the body through having some parts of the body shown and, at the same time, others hidden.

A significant challenge was forming a ballet school within a Canadian context as a Chinese couple. A friend once asked Choo Chiat Goh how he would feel if a Caucasian person were to begin a Chinese opera school in China; to some Canadians during the 1970s, the idea of non-Europeans teaching ballet simply did not compute. In fact, the Gohs are well trained in the Russian Vaganova technique.

Choo Chiat Goh reminisces about arriving in Canada and having to learn many new dance styles, such as jazz and modern, in order to keep up with their Canadian students. The students are also challenged with new influences, as the school does sometimes teach and perform Chinese dances or choreography with Chinese influences.

The Gohs' daughter, Chan Hon Goh, has directed the school since 2010. She immigrated to Vancouver with her parents and, like them, began learning English and understanding Canadian society with no previous knowledge. "I don't see such a heavy Chinese-Canadian influence in any Canadian city but Vancouver," she says.

Although recognizing that racial prejudice is a current issue within ballet culture, she does not feel her Chinese background limited her career with the National Ballet of Canada, where she

became the first principal dancer of Chinese heritage in 1994. Chan Hon Goh warns that it can "be easy for dancers to use their racial heritage as a crutch," and believes that if she was not cast for a certain role, it was not because of race, but for "a real artistic reason," which she used as a source of motivation to improve.

Today, Chan Hon Goh's mission is to "produce some of the best dancers to feed into the professional world," by giving Vancouver ballet students the opportunities available in cities that host classical companies. Goh Ballet Youth Company stages works that are rarely, if ever, seen in Vancouver; in the past, this has included obscure ballets like *The Fairy Doll* (or *Die Puppenfee*, which premiered in Vienna in 1888 and is based on E.T.A. Hoffman's *The Sandman*). In 2009, Chan Hon Goh was the guiding force behind Goh Ballet's now annual production of *The Nutcracker*, choreographed by B.C.-born Anna-Marie Holmes, who stages classical ballets around the world. It is the only major homegrown production of this popular Christmas offering.

The eldest of these prominent dance artists and teachers, Paddy Wing, is the only one who appears to have lost touch with aspects of his Chinese heritage. He admits that now, at age 90, he cannot speak much Chinese. Racism was more prevalent in the past, but, today, encouraged by positive multicultural attitudes, many dance

artists draw heavily on their cultural backgrounds. One Vancouver artist who embraces a multicultural approach is Wen Wei Wang, who pulls from his personal experience as a Chinese-Canadian for almost all his work.

In China, Wang trained in dance at the Lanzhou Army Song and Dance Company, and in choreography at the People's Liberation Army Academy of Art. When he moved to Vancouver in 1991, he received his first professional Canadian contract early on — seven months of work alongside four others in a contemporary dance company. Generous by local standards, to Wang this arrangement was dispiriting; he was used to full-time year-long contracts with the company in Lanzhou, working alongside 500 dancers in massive rehearsal and performance venues, his fee including room and board.

Wang joined Ballet BC in 1993, staying for seven years, and then transitioned to choreographer. He founded his own group, Wen Wei Dance, in 2003, as a vehicle for his work. He has also choreographed on numerous other groups, including Montreal's BJM Danse, Alberta Ballet and Seattle's NW Dance Project. Upcoming in March 2017, Wang will premiere a new work with Ballet BC, as part of a B.C.-inspired bill programmed by artistic director Emily Molnar. It is a sign of the times to have the man who



at one point was experiencing extreme culture shock as a new immigrant now included as part of an evening of B.C. choreography.

Traces of Chinese culture are sprinkled in Wang's work, whether within the musical score or the narrative, and often emerging through props, such as chopsticks (*Made in China*), tiny shoes inspired by ancient foot-binding (*Unbound*) and Chinese opera pheasant feather headdresses (*Cock-Pit*). *Under the Skin*

and *Made in China* were co-choreographed by Wang and Beijing Modern Dance Company's artistic director Gao Yanjinzi, adding another aspect to his company's distinctive choreo-cultural voice.

Currently, Wang is working on a piece with five men of different heritages, exploring their individual journeys with cultural identity. In rehearsal, one dancer practises some choreography while Wang watches. The dancer's upper body movement is mid-range; "Smaller," Wang calls out, and the dancer shrinks his movement, but not enough. Finally, Wang demonstrates what he is looking for. His chest hums, his shoulder blades quiver, his eyes focus intently, yet he hardly moves a muscle. There is a buzzing to his movement, a sense of understated adventure that is nearly undetectable, but hypnotic. "Nothing is actually a lot," says Wang, "because of imagination."

This sort of subtle movement texture within his choreography is, he says, better received by Canadian audiences than Chinese ones. In 2006, *Unbound* premiered in Canada with much success, receiving the Isadora Award for Excellence in Choreography; in 2009, on a Chinese tour, audiences were less enthusiastic.

Wang describes his training from schools run by the People's Liberation Army as a highly formalized system, one that produced athletes more than artists. Such training, he says, went hand-in-hand with the flashy, commercial style of productions that are still popular in China.

Because Wang grew up in an atmosphere that he felt too often saw technique as a formula rather than a research project, he considers Canada a place of artistic retreat. "Canadians dance from the heart and Chinese from the brain," Wang says. As a teacher and choreographer, he strives to create a class and a rehearsal atmosphere where dancers constantly consider the bigger picture and are encouraged to ask questions, so that individual artistry is part of a dancer's training at all times.

After being asked how he has contributed to Vancouver dance, Wang brings up the many artists he has worked with through the years, for whom he has provided creative opportunities. He is passionate about hiring local emerging talent and is inspired by the careers he has seen young artists go on to develop. Then, Wang stops for a minute and clarifies the question: it is not just about making a contribution, he says, but "a connection."

Perhaps this idea is at the core of what all these Chinese-Canadian dance artists have offered — beyond their undoubted contribution to Vancouver, they have forged a real connection to the arts community, building a stronger and more vibrant dance scene. *DI*



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MIAMI CITY BALLET'S UNDERWATER SHAKESPEARE

MICHELE OKA DONER DESIGNS

A Midsummer Night's Dream



George Balanchine's ballet, *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, recently took an unusual twist through the Florida waterways, which inspired newly commissioned sets and costumes by Michele Oka Doner for Miami City Ballet's 30th anniversary season. Shakespeare's story of love, quarrels and marriage is set in a magical forest full of fairies and mortals. But Oka Doner, who has always been inspired by subtropical nature and bodies of water such as oceans and its inhabitants, says, "I felt Shakespeare's forests had been used enough dramatically."

Oka Doner was a natural choice as designer. Besides being born in Miami, the New York-based artist has an oeuvre spanning more than four decades, including public art commissions (notably for Miami International Airport); sculpture and work on paper found in galleries and museums; design in glass, silver and porcelain; and architectural pieces for homes, from fountains to doorbells. The ballet was Oka Doner's first foray into costume and the world of dance, a project that took two years to complete and premiered in March 2016 in Miami.

As her vision formed, Oka Doner found photographs in her studio taken underwater in the Port of Miami. These would inspire the ballet's painted show drop, which the audience sees during the overture. Additionally, Coral Castle, a standing land structure made of 1,000 tons of coral rock in Miami-Dade County, re-imagined from a 1940s vintage photograph taken by Hans Hannau, made its way into Act II as a projected backdrop.

Oka Doner's greatest design influence arose from her access to the University of Miami's Marine Invertebrate Museum. "Ninety-thousand jars containing almost one million specimens inspired and sustained the vision," she says. "I was able to study whole jellyfish and other sea creatures."

The artist wanted the colours, tones, textures and fabrics of the more than 150 costumes to be just right. "The littoral zone that separates the ocean from land contains a very distinct

palette," Oka Doner explains. "The golds and browns of sargassum seaweed are characteristic of Miami Beach and used throughout the ballet as the high note."

Costumes for most lead characters start on a pearly white base that serves as a canvas. Like a seashell, Doner's designs are not monochromatic, but contain dashes of colour from hand painting, appliqués, embroidery, beading and sequins.

Act I takes place near an estuary on Midsummer's Eve. The fairies are creating a commotion, with Oberon, King of the Fairies, quarrelling with Queen Titania. Dressed like a creature in a magical land, Oberon's white spandex

unitard is appliquéed with stretch velvet branching seaweed. The entire costume is painted and frosted with crystals. His cape is hemstitched, with a riot of painted organza representing seaweed.

Titania is decked out in an ensemble of frothy seaweed fronds made from three layers of organza, with metallic nets on top, liberally sprinkled with crystals. The frond pattern is hand painted on her bodice, with additional crystal-embellished fabric fronds attached. Fronds cover her skirt with a wavy



hemline. "Titania's costume has a bluish tone that evokes the colour of Miami Beach's ocean through the lens of a translucent jellyfish," says Oka Doner.

The designer's favourite character is Puck, who sprinkles the flower dust that casts the spell ensuring the sleeping Queen will fall in love with the first mortal she sees. Puck's costume is based on bright gold sargassum seaweed. Leaves are made from soft gold leather, with dyed and frizzled organza at the edges. All are connected with a gold cord and golden pearls, layered onto his stretch mesh tunic and attached to his spandex trunk.

As for Bottom, the mortal who becomes the object of Titania's affections, in Oka Doner's design he is transformed with the head of a manatee, a bulky creature also known as a sea cow.

In Miami City Ballet's version of *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, Hippolyta makes a grand entrance with seahorses. Her costume, Oka Doner's favourite, is based on the roots of mangroves, the shrubs or small trees that grow in tropical or subtropical coastal regions. The white leotard is hand crocheted, with a vein pattern made from metallic thread, sequins and beads. The tutu matches, with 3D appliqués made to look like mangrove roots.

At the dress rehearsal, Oka Doner was fascinated at how all the creative elements came together for the first time — choreography, dancers, music, costumes, scenery and lighting. It was a team effort in creativity. *DI*

Above left: Miami City Ballet in *A Midsummer Night's Dream*
Above right: Simone Messmer and Didier Bramaz in *A Midsummer Night's Dream*
Choreography by George Balanchine © The George Balanchine Trust
Photos: © Gene Schiavone

Top: Detail of opening show drop for
Miami City Ballet's *A Midsummer Night's Dream*
Photo: © Gene Schiavone



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Dreaming of Bakst

Designing Dreams, A Celebration of Léon Bakst, celebrates the 150th anniversary of the birth of this key Ballets Russes stage designer, who contributed to iconic shows including *Schéhérazade* (1910), *L'Après-midi d'un Faune* (1912) and *Daphnis et Chloé* (1912). The exhibition features more than 150 drawings, models and costumes, presented amid a décor by contemporary artist Nick Mauss. This presentation by the Nouveau Musée National de Monaco is at Villa Sauber until January 15, 2017.

Illustration: Nick Mauss: *Study After Two Drawings by Léon Bakst*, 2016 © Nick Mauss

Virtual Ballet

Dutch National Ballet is the first company in the world to launch a ballet especially created for virtual reality: *Night Fall* by former company dancer Peter Leung, to music by Robin Rimbaud, directed by Jip Samhoud. In *Night Fall*, which premiered in August at the VR Cinema in Amsterdam, the viewer feels like part of the corps de ballet in choreography inspired by the “white acts” from Romantic ballets. Leung says, “The filming was a totally new experience for me ... We had to hide away and not get in the camera’s sightline, as it films everything in 360 degrees.”



Maud Allan as Salomé
Photo: Courtesy of Dance Collection Danse

Maud Allan: An Edwardian Sensation, a new exhibition by Toronto’s Dance Collection Danse, runs in the DCD gallery until April 14, 2017. Toronto-born Maud Allan was a contemporary of the major forerunners of modern dance, Loie Fuller, Isadora Duncan and Ruth St. Denis. A provocative and charismatic dancer, Allan was renowned for her unique “dance interpretations,” rising to international stardom only to plummet into obscurity. The exhibit’s featured artifact is Allan’s scandalous 1906 *Vision of Salomé* costume, which recently spent two years at the Canadian Conservation Institute in Ottawa receiving treatment in preparation for public display.

Dutch National Ballet behind the scenes in *Night Fall*
Photo: Altin Kafira

Calling the Métis Jig



The Louis Riel Métis Dancers' Madelaine McCallum and artistic director Yvonne Chartrand
Photo: Chris Randle

The Louis Riel Métis Dancers is a Vancouver-based company named after the Métis politician who founded Manitoba in the 19th century and led two resistances to stand up for the rights of Métis, First Nations and European settlers. Riel was also an avid supporter of the arts, something founding artistic director Yvonne Chartrand often references when she quotes him during performances: "My people will sleep for 100 years, but when they awake, it will be the artists who give them their spirit back."

Recently, the company's eight young members joined forces with the Métis Silver Tip Swingers, a group of four elder dancers from the surrounding Lower Mainland area, in order for each group to learn dances

from the other. The Silver Tip Swingers also taught Métis square dance calls. Phil Lavallee, their caller, says there are very few Métis callers left. Other aspects of the tradition are also dying out; for instance, the Red River jig used to have more than 100 fancy steps, but now most dancers know about five contemporary style steps.

Recognizing ancestors and history was a prominent aspect of a typical rehearsal process, which began with everyone sitting in a circle. An elder opened with a story or a sharing of wisdom, then passed the ceremonial rock they were holding to the next person, who then became the speaker. He or she was given complete attention by the others, without interruption or conversation, which provided the groundwork for inspired ideas, reflections and healing stories to occur.

After the circle, Lavallee stood at the microphone and new dances were learned by following his call, the lilt of his voice gracefully pairing with the jump of the fiddle. Calling is a bit like singing, poetry and facilitation all mixed together, and there is a subtle dialogue between caller, musicians and dancers.

The Métis jig is the cornerstone of the dance. The traditional jig keeps the feet close to the ground, although more contemporary styles have a higher step. Dancers wear square dance outfits and shoes called clickers, which have two pieces of metal on the toe and on the heel that click together, similar to a tap shoe. The jig is danced to the fiddle, which was easy to pack in a canoe at a time when rivers were used as highways, and the Métis created a unique style of fiddle playing called "crooked music." The European style was a 4/4 beat, a square 1234, 1234. The Métis add and drop an extra note improvisationally, for instance 1234, 123, 12345, 1234. A Métis jigger must listen carefully so as to stay with the changing rhythms of the fiddle.

The spirit of community and the cultural process of circle sharing makes people dance differently. It makes people see each other differently. When elders teach, young and old laugh together. The spirit of the Métis lives through keeping artistic traditions going from one generation to the next.

— HAILEY McCLOSKEY

Toronto Debut

Youth America Grand Prix will hold its first semi-finals in Canada February 10-12 at the Toronto Convention Centre. Among the jury members are Arlene Minkhorst, director of the Royal Winnipeg Ballet School; Claire Baulieu, faculty member of the Paris Opera Ballet School; Peter Quanz, director of Q DANCE; Evan McKie, principal dancer, National Ballet of Canada; and Gennadi Saveliev, co-founder of YAGP, an educational non-profit organization with a mission to provide talented young dancers of all socio-economic backgrounds with educational and performance opportunities. The semi-finals serve as a selection round for the YAGP 2017 New York City Finals in April, when more than 1,200 finalists from 35 countries will compete for \$500,000 US in scholarships.



Gennadi Saveliev teaching at the Japan semi-finals in Osaka, 2016
Photo: Courtesy of YAGP

Online and Onstage



Deanna Peters builds a versatile career

by Hilary Maxwell

There aren't many dance artists who can say they know how to pour concrete. But, at age 17, when Deanna Peters' dad told her to learn a trade, she did just that, taking a job with her cousin's construction company. Her dad's advice taught Peters that having a transferable skillset beyond tendus and pliés would help support a life in dance. Now, at 36, the levelheaded artist has built a successful career by pairing artistic ambition with practical abilities.

Originally from Saskatoon, Saskatchewan, Peters has a grounded knowledge in dance, encompassing a diversity of training in ballet, contemporary, improvisation and theatre. Peters received formal dance education at Grant MacEwan College in Edmonton, followed by a year at Simon Fraser University in Vancouver, the city she now calls home. It was through her immersion in Vancouver's professional dance community, though, that Peters feels she gained her most valuable education. "I would skip school at SFU to take every class I could in the city," she says, training with some of British Columbia's foremost dance artists, forging artistic relationships that led to professional opportunities.

A versatile dancer, Peters is known for her bold and unabashed performances, especially with butoh-inspired Kokoro Dance, for whom she danced on and off for four seasons. In 2002, when Kokoro's co-artistic director Barbara Bourget met Peters, she was drawn to the young

artist's technical prowess and choreographic ambition. "Deanna's a quick study and opinionated on matters of dance aesthetics," says Bourget. "We had some push-pull situations in all of our working processes, but I love her fire." Last year, Peters showcased her musical theatre chops, singing, acting and dancing in Barbara Adler's *Klasika*, about cowboy culture in the Czech Republic.

Speaking about her own projects, Peters says she is "less interested in traditional modes of dance," and often involves improvisational elements and alternate venues such as art galleries, outdoor spaces and bars. One example is her impromptu series with drummer and composer Ben Brown, presented in small jazz clubs, where the duo riff off one another in an exchange of movement and sound. Another is 2015's *Dancers Playing Basketball*, a community engaged initiative that sprung from Peters' longtime interest in that sport and the relationship between dance and the physical expression inherent in the game. Led by a coach, Peters and 20 dancers met weekly for two hours at a court under a bridge in downtown Vancouver, practising standard drills like passing and layups. *Dancers Playing Basketball* will be presented in March as part of the Vancouver International Dance Festival's local programming.

Recently, Peters finished a Canadian indie tour with her work *New Raw*, a group piece with four performers, including Peters, that is a candid exhibition of improvised and structured movement, with fashion and music.

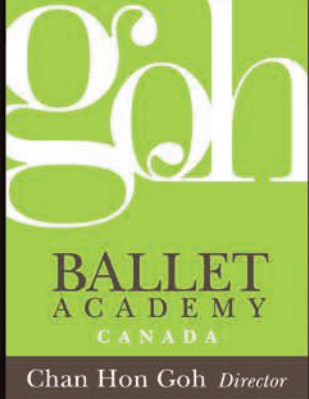
Peters was recognized with the Iris Garland Emerging Choreographer Award in

2015, which will go toward supporting the creation of a full-evening ensemble, premiering as part of the Vancouver Dance Centre's 2017-2018 season.

Under her "brand name" of Mutable Subject, Peters works as a web and graphic designer, social media manager and project coordinator. Though mostly self-taught, Peters has some training through Emily Carr University of Art and Design with a grant from the Dancer Transition Resource Centre. She's also a content creator for web and print, and develops branding, builds and maintains websites, and manages communications for many West Coast artists and organizations. Peters focuses on the values of each, and brings her interest in critical dialogue about dance and gender politics into her social media curation. Among her clients are the Training Society of Vancouver, Canadian Alliance of Dance Artists/West Chapter and, since 2014, *Dance International* magazine. *DI*



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A Place of Potential: MDTistanbul

Pioneering modern dance
in Turkey



Beyhan Murphy | Photo: Serkan Sedele

by Matt Hanson

A

At the age of 17, Beyhan Murphy left her home in Ankara, Turkey, to dance in London. Today, as the artistic director of MDTistanbul, she is the face and soul of modern dance back in her home country.

Reflecting on her secular upbringing in Ankara, in the heart of Anatolia, Murphy notes: “My father was a cultured man, educated in Switzerland before and during the Second World War. He established the habit of taking his daughters to the opera and ballet from a very early age. The first ballet I saw was *Swan Lake*, which mesmerized me at the age of seven. What enticed me was the sense of elevation and otherworldliness.”

Above left: MDTistanbul in Bedirhan Dehmen's *Ezel Bahar*
Photo: Murat Durum

Above right: Beril Senöz and Tugrul Savasci
in Beyhan Murphy's *Jungle Book*
Photo: Fatih Demirkol

In early 1960s Ankara, ballet was the only dance training available to Murphy. Coming of age inspired by the likes of David Bowie and Pink Floyd, she later began looking for modern training.

"I told my parents I simply had to go to London. This was 1975. I auditioned at the Place, which was not just a school, but more a concept that housed the London School of Contemporary Dance, the main anchor of modern dance in Europe at the time," says Murphy.

Her three years training at the Place, which was based on Graham technique, were followed by 14 years freelancing in London. Murphy danced, choreographed and taught in everything from contemporary projects, to music videos, to classic musicals. She also got married in England, gaining the surname Murphy.

In 1992, she accepted an invitation from the former general director of the Turkish State Opera and Ballet, conductor Rengim Gökmen, to establish Modern Dance Theatre Ankara (MDT Ankara), the predecessor and sister company to the company she later founded and now heads, Modern Dance Theatre Istanbul (MDTistanbul).

Murphy explains that MDTistanbul repertoire is ideally made up of 60 percent Turkish choreography and 40 percent foreign. The latter group has included Barak Marshall, Andonis Foniadakis, Annabelle Lopez Ochoa, Ihsan Rustem and Itzik Galili.

The 18 MDTistanbul company dancers rehearse half the week at Fulya Sanat theatre in the downtown district of Besiktas,



on the European side of the Bosphorus strait that divides Istanbul between two continents. For the other half of the week, they rehearse on the Asian side at Süreyya Opera House in the vibrant neighbourhood of Kadıköy.

MDTistanbul is the only state-funded modern dance company in Istanbul. "Things have not been so bright for the arts in general in Turkey for the last 10 years. There are no private dance companies except show companies that cater folklore to tourists. On the independent side, dance artists who put together mini-groups for individual projects are mostly underfunded and short term," says Murphy.

"In Turkey, many artists first learn dance from regional and local folkloric traditions," says Canberk Yıldız, a dancer with MDTistanbul, who was busy rehearsing the inaugural collaboration between

MDTistanbul and Istanbul State Opera in a revival of Goethe's *Faust*, choreographed by Murphy. "There are seven regions in Turkey. Variation in the climate and traditions of each has different effects on the way people move. People in the mountainous Aegean region dance zeybek, with slow and serious movements. In tea-growing regions, they dance cheerfully and fast."

From a Turkish family of Caucasian roots, Yıldız met a contemporary choreographer while learning folkloric dances at a local community centre. From there, he began to pursue a career in dance. In 2010, the year he graduated from a modern dance program at university in Istanbul, MDTistanbul was founded. Murphy approached him after a student performance and asked him to join the company.

Yıldız describes Murphy as "one of the few people creating modern dance in and for Turkey." In one week last winter, he played lead roles in *Sehir-Orman (The Jungle Book)*, Murphy's multidisciplinary adaptation of the Kipling novel, and in *Biz*, a performance art dance piece by Turkish choreographer Bedirhan Dehmen.

For Italian Melissa Ugolini, who began training in ballet in Florence before working as a modern dancer in London and now at MDTistanbul, the company is a place of potential.

"MDTistanbul could change how the Western world sees Turkey," says Ugolini enthusiastically. "Modern dance is not well established in the Turkish culture. MDTistanbul needs to attract attention — people need to discover us." *DI*

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Above: Gul Batirbaygil in Andonis Foniadakis' *Waves*
Photo: Orcun Ataman

Michael Crabb's Notebook

It's almost 40 years since the Herbert Ross movie, *The Turning Point*, put a dramatic focus on what was then broadly viewed as an either/or choice between being a ballerina or a mother. The film is a Hollywood-romanticized fictional account of the life of former ballerina Isabel Mirrow Brown and her friendship with legendary American ballerina Nora Kaye, Ross' wife and the film's co-producer. Kaye was also godmother to her friend's eldest daughter, Leslie, who, with an "e" appended to the Brown family name, became a successful ballerina and occasional film star.

Set in the era of its making, *The Turning Point* — double entendre intended — traces the contrasting and personally fraught paths pursued by Dedee (Shirley MacLaine) and Emma (Anne Bancroft). Former colleagues in the movie's thinly veiled version of American Ballet Theatre, Dedee has married fellow dancer Wayne, abandoned her career and moved to Oklahoma to raise a family. Emma portrays the single-minded, ambitious dancer who sacrifices any semblance of an emotionally rewarding personal life to become a prima ballerina — only to discover as her career wanes that her life's goal is evanescent, even shallow.

The drama swirls around aspiring ballerina Emilia (Leslie Browne in a life/fiction double act), Dedee and Wayne's eldest daughter and Emma's goddaughter. Conflict arises when Dedee feels that Emma, having taken Emilia under her professional wing, is also deliberately drawing the young dancer away from her mother. Skeletons tumble from closets. Old grudges surface. Then, in the movie's saccharine ending, Dedee and Emma slug it out in an epic catfight before bursting into uncontrollable laughter and resolving their differences. What remains unresolved is the underlying question: why did Dedee quit dancing to be a mother?

It's never explicitly stated in the movie, but, in 1977, when the film garnered 11 Academy Award nominations and won Golden Globes for Best Picture and Best Director, most ballet dancers would have known the answer. Dedee had little choice. There were exceptions, of course, but having a baby was considered professional suicide. You totally committed to dancing or, if you chose motherhood, assumed you'd lose your job. Aspiring ballerinas sometimes bought into this notion of self-sacrifice and were shocked — or at least unsettled — when a colleague opted for motherhood. It's worth remembering that less than 30 years before *The Turning Point*, Victoria Page (Moira Shearer) threw herself under a train in *The Red Shoes* when she could not reconcile the seemingly exclusive calls of being a wife and a ballerina. Thank-

fully, the situation has improved, although it still presents tough challenges.

North American company dancers fortunate enough to work under a robust collective agreement can exercise the right of maternity leave. Even so, a ballerina might justly worry that in such a competitive profession, taking time off to have a child could set her back. For a talented young dancer, the risk is being left behind. For an established dancer, it's the thought that rising talents might excel in your prized roles.

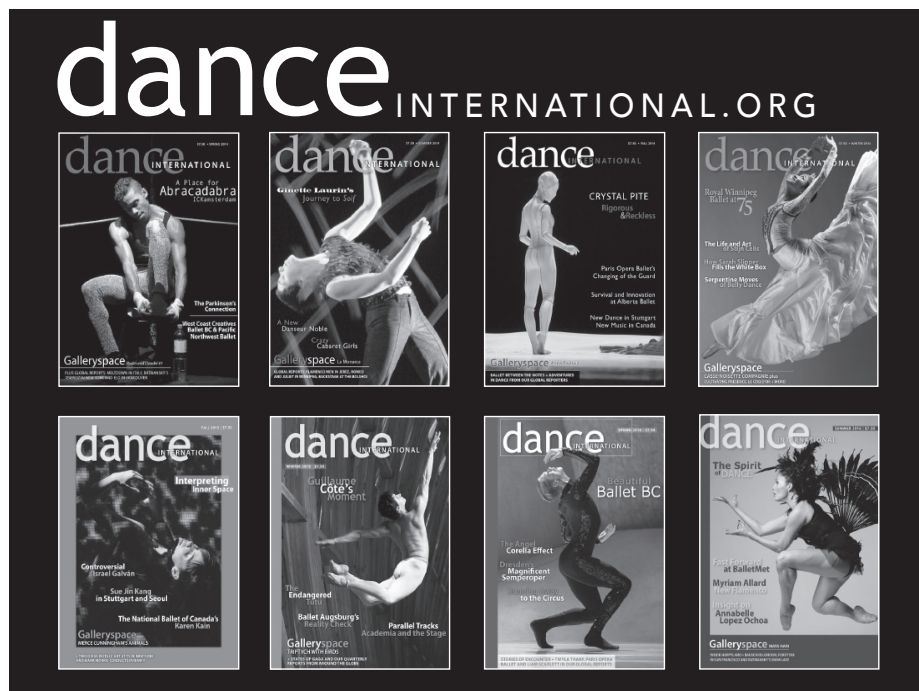
The mere act of conceiving is not always easy for women in such a stressful career as dance — and there's no such thing as pre-maternity leave for dancers! Also, the impact of early pregnancy is more acutely felt when your body is your working instrument. Then there are the practical considerations faced by all working mothers, amplified in a career as physically and emotionally demanding as dance with its unusual schedules and out-of-town tours.

A supportive life partner and family network can make a huge difference. The mellowing of gender stereotypes nowadays makes it more socially acceptable for willing dads to share the load. It also helps to have the co-operation of company management.

Artistic directors do not necessarily welcome the news that a leading dancer they've been carefully developing and counting on will be taking a maternity leave, but they probably also know by now that being a mother is no impediment to being a fine dancer.

Ask almost any ballerina-mother who's successfully returned to the stage if she has any regrets and the answer will be a resounding "No." On the contrary, despite the balancing act required, most find both their professional and personal lives enriched. From being intensely self-focused, their vision of life, of what to value, is broadened. You do not have to be a mother or a father to be emotionally well-grounded, but, in a professionally consuming career such as dance, parenthood can offer the promise of emotional balance.

By the end of *The Turning Point*, Dedee and Emma have come to terms with their particular disappointments — Dedee with missing out on the prized role that went to Emma; Emma with missing out on the rewards of motherhood. In their rekindled friendship, they look to Emilia and her burgeoning career as a shared consolation. But if Dedee and Emma were dancers today, they could have it all. D



Obituary Jan Murray 1941-2016



Jan Murray on the Yorkshire moors with friend Steven Burns, 1969
Photo: Courtesy of Steven Burns

Janet (Jan) Murray travelled the world to report on dance. Born and raised in Halifax, Nova Scotia, she died in London on July 1, 2016, where she had built a career as a critic. The first dance editor for London's *Time Out* magazine, she contributed reviews to the *Spectator*, the *Guardian* and BBC Radio. In 1979, her book, *Dance Now: A Closer Look at the Art of Movement*, was published by Kestrel Books. In the 1980s, as dance editor for *Cosmopolitan* magazine, Murray founded the Young Dancer of the Year award, which helped pay dance school fees for talented underprivileged youth. In later years, she taught dance history and arts journalism at the Place and Birkbeck University in London.

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MEET THREE NEW ARTISTIC DIRECTORS: IVAN CAVALLARI JULIE KENT GENNADI NEDVIGIN



Ivan Cavallari at Les Grands Ballets Canadiens de Montréal

by Victor Swoboda

The result of the search committee's deliberations was finally announced last April. Pankov's successor is Ivan Cavallari.

If the local dance community's collective reaction was a scratching of the head, it was no disrespect to Cavallari. (The nomination of Pankov, another European, had received much the same response.) In fact, at 52, Cavallari has done a great deal as a triple threat dancer, artistic director and choreographer working outside North America. Tall, affable, articulate in several languages, Cavallari quickly made an impression when introduced to an invited audience during the season launch in Montreal's Salle Wilfrid-Pelletier.

"I confess that sometimes I speak to myself in the third person," he began, instigating laughter. "I'll say, 'Cavallari, do you want a new challenge?'"

At the end, everyone had Cavallari's name on their lips. But pragmatists looked for clues in his background and career that might indicate in which direction he would take the company when he took over in fall 2017.

Born in Italy, Cavallari grew up in the picturesque northern city of Bolzano. "It's a lovely city in the middle of mountains," said Cavallari in an interview. "It was great to grow up there because it gave me the freedom to play outside, something kids nowadays don't always have."

The dance spirit entered Cavallari early. "My mom told me they were showing *Giselle* on TV with Fracci and Nureyev. I still had my pacifier and watched the whole ballet. That might have been a sign."

Later, a relative suggested dance lessons.

After a year studying in Bolzano, pre-adolescent Cavallari took classes in Perugia, Taormina, Sicily and Rome. At 14, he targeted La Scala's school and travelled by train with his mother to Milan for an audition. When he was accepted, he put his mom on the train home and stayed in Milan.

"I did not feel anxiety but nostalgia — it was hard. A year later, I was at the Bolshoi [school], even further away. Very soon I realized that in this job, you can't allow yourself to be too nostalgic."

Under La Scala's exchange program with the Bolshoi, Cavallari stayed for two years in Moscow, where he learned Russian, although today, he admits, he is out of practice. Beyond his classes "with excellent teachers" such as Asaf Messerer, he had passes to theatres where he saw the great stars of the day, Maya Plisetskaya, Ekaterina Maximova and his favourite, Vladimir Vasiliev.

Cavallari's big break came in 1986 when he joined Stuttgart Ballet under Marcia Haydée's direction. "It was a great moment to be in the company. Stuttgart Ballet had lots of money and we travelled the world with [John] Cranko's ballets, touring nine weeks sometimes. Marcia taught the roles. Richard Cragun was my mentor along with Egon Madsen and Birgit Keil." First as soloist, then as principal, Cavallari danced all the big Cranko roles. He also performed ballets by Mats Ek, John Neumeier, Hans van Manen and Jiri Kylián.

When Canadian Reid Anderson took over Stuttgart Ballet in 1996, Cavallari, by

— CONTINUED ON PAGE 31

When Gradimir Pankov, artistic director of Les Grands Ballets Canadiens, announced in 2015 that he would step down, speculation was abuzz in Montreal's dance community about who would succeed him. Since taking over the helm in 1999, Pankov had done much to build a repertoire of outstanding contemporary works, including a roster of new creations by stellar choreographers. Tours were arranged to prestigious theatres in Europe, China and the Middle East. At home, the company played to full houses, and fundraising efforts reached new heights. To cap Pankov's achievements, the company will move next year to splendid new studios in the heart of downtown Montreal, just steps away from its performing venue at Place des Arts.

Ivan Cavallari in front of the Wilder building in Montreal, where Espace Danse will open in 2017, the new home of Les Grands Ballets Canadiens and three other dance organizations
Photo: Sasha Onyshchenko

Julie Kent at Washington Ballet

by Toba Singer



Washington, D.C., modeled on Paris, forms a wheel, with its streets the spokes — a design meant to render it unapproachable by enemies. From where she sits as Washington Ballet's new artistic director, former American Ballet Theatre principal dancer Julie Kent is reaching out in all directions to find friends. In a city with so many cultural institutions, Kent wants to develop relationships with them all, and to bring together composers, design artists and choreographers.

In September, the 27-member company celebrated its 40th anniversary, but it can trace its origins back another 32 years, to Mary Day's Washington School of Ballet, founded in 1944. Over 72 years, many things have changed — and continue to under Kent's leadership. Kent, however, says "change" might not be the correct verb to capture the ambitious goals she has for the future, including greater financial investment in the company's development and expansion.

To Kent, it comes down to inspiring greater commitment to a company worthy of the stature of a world capital city. Washington Ballet was on that trajectory under its previous director, Septime Webre, Kent says. "My charge is to continue and inform the work Septime has done by drawing on my body of knowledge so we fully satisfy the educated expectations of an international audience."

Kent, who is not a choreographer, sees an advantage in the company's small size, which allows it to take more risks when commissioning works. She wants to open the door to emerging talent, giving developing choreographers a platform for honing skills. In the 2018 season, for instance, the 12-member Washington Ballet Studio Company will perform three workshop premieres by studio company dancers.

"I'll develop my eye and follow my instincts for what's needed with repertoire, here and with the main company, balanced with masterworks," she says. She will also invite choreographers who are well known in Europe, but not in the United States, such as Britain's Russell Maliphant.

A career-long muse to more than 15 choreographers, from Twyla Tharp to Jorma Elo to Lar Lubovitch, Kent has also acted, co-starring with Ethan Steifel in the 2000 film, *Center Stage*. Through such experiences, Kent says she has become a creative thinker and keen facilitator. She sees a chance to inspire choreographers in a different way now, in her role as artistic director. Says Kent, "With all of the ballets created on me, not able to predict whether or not a success was in the offing, it was the creative process itself that made everything better!"

Will Kent, having come from a ranked company, be at home with an unranked one? "As we grow, instituting ranks might help dancers who like to aspire to a next level, or take satisfaction in their role in the institution, whether as a soloist or a respected corps dancer," she says. Until then, "with no ranks, and our small size, dancers might find themselves dancing a principal role one night, but not the next."

Rolando Sarabia, from Cuba, and Eun Won Lee, a principal dancer from Korean National Ballet, both of reputed star quality, joined the company this season. Should they be listed on par with the others, or will the marketing department want to capitalize on their renown? "So much emphasis is on packaging," says Kent. She understands its importance for making a dancer's contribution clear.

"Any career has an arc," Kent says. "In building it, you raise the bar as you reach for your goals, setting it higher to reach higher."

She aims for multi-level investment on the part of the public, beginning with going to the grassroots in Washington, D.C., and then, like the city itself, moving outward in concentric circles, both culturally and geographically, to draw in artists and art lovers, the diplomatic and political milieu, and, finally, suburban communities outside the Capital Beltway. She wants potential audiences to care enough to learn and be part of the life of the ballet. The company will provide the repertoire and supplemental events to accelerate dance education. "We want to make the ballet experience much more than just a ticket for Friday night."

Kent is an ally of arts education, citing findings by Emily Coates, Yale's dance department chair. "The arts open brain-body synapses that help children learn. If asked as a taxpayer where the government should invest funds, I'd say, 'arts education.'"

Kent values presenting ballet in a context where a broad spectrum of art is flourishing. "We're a large nation, with many tastes and opinions. I understand my art, ballet, and look forward to support from our government for ballet companies. If a nation or a city wants art in its daily life, it must support it." With the rise of regional companies in U.S. cities such as Houston, Boston, San Francisco, Kansas City, Colorado and Richmond, Kent sees local communities stepping up more and more.

To Kent, ballet's central positioning of itself in the cultural offerings of the nation's capital assumes more importance than ever. She sees her new home as the ideal environment for giving legs to her conviction that "people from every walk of life are drawn to what is beautiful and moving, and ballet is both." *di*



Gennadi Nedvigin in rehearsal with dancers of Atlanta Ballet
Photo: Charlie McCullers

Gennadi Nedvigin at Atlanta Ballet

by Toba Singer

Gennadi Nedvigin, former 20-year San Francisco Ballet principal, recently left California for Atlanta, Georgia, where he settled in as artistic director of Atlanta Ballet on July 1. The post was previously held by John McFall, who retired in June 2016.

During the swirl of repertoire roles and gala goodbyes in the final months of his performing career at the end of the 2015-2016 season, Russian-born Nedvigin was already busy plotting Atlanta Ballet's future. His transition from virtuoso dancer to artistic director comes at a time when private funding is falling victim to a world economic crisis; it could be like stepping from behind the footlights into quicksand, but Nedvigin is determined to find a way to do

more than just survive. By drawing on his experience in international settings, including his training at the Bolshoi and a one-year stint dancing with Jeune Ballet de France, Nedvigin hopes to leverage Atlanta Ballet's prospects with a repertoire rooted in the classics, but open to invention.

Nedvigin's staging of Petipa's *Paquita* is one of the works on the first of the two mixed bills he programmed for the current season, aptly titled Gennadi's Choice. He calls the mixed bills "a chance to introduce my vision." The classical *Paquita* "reflects my Russian foundation and experience. It is elegant, has lots of women's variations and opportunities for the corps to perfect their technique."

A more risky choice is a world premiere by British-born American Ballet Theatre dancer and choreographer Gemma Bond, who is not widely known. However, Nedvigin sees "interesting links between classical, neoclassical and contemporary" vocabulary in Bond's pieces, which have been mounted in New York at Danspace at St. Mark's Church and the Youth America Grand Prix, as well as in Toronto at the Erik Bruhn Prize competition.

Thanks to Nedvigin's stellar career as a performer, his name is a notable one among recognized choreographers, whom he wants to attract to Atlanta Ballet. Their names will hopefully carry sufficient weight to increase the number of performances the company is able to

give annually. Britain's Liam Scarlett, a young but recognized dancemaker, will remount his *Vespertine* (2013), also for Gennadi's Choice. "I had a great time working with Liam when he set two pieces on San Francisco Ballet, and am thrilled to introduce Atlanta audiences to his sensuality, unusual onstage relationships and acute sense of the moment supported by fine technique."

George Balanchine's *Allegro Brillante* will head the second mixed bill. "It is one of Balanchine's purest, cleanest, most beautiful classical pieces," Nedvigin says of this choice, which will offer contrast to Jirí Kylián's contemporary European work, *Petite Mort*. And San Francisco Ballet colleague Yuri Possokhov will stage his *Firebird*. "Atlanta will get to see Yuri's genius in bringing fun and innovative technique to the stage," Nedvigin says.

Nedvigin sees advantages for the dancers to perform in this broad range of styles, which draw on different, though historically related, vocabularies. His goal is to allow dancers to remember where they come from, retain hard-won technique and remain versatile by reaching for different styles while dancing commissioned works by outstanding choreographers.

Atlanta Ballet does not rank its dancers. How does this sit with Nedvigin? "It's not completely new to me; there were no ranks at Jeune Ballet de France." He sees the benefit of the ranking system in the way it recognizes a top calibre dancer who can take a performance to the highest level. However, in contemporary works, in ranked companies, "there's a growing tendency to use young corps dancers in principal roles, erasing those boundaries. It will be my job to make casting fair, to judge dancers by their work."

Companies often rely on artistic directors to do double duty as house choreographers, but Nedvigin says he has never felt a desire to create steps, which he sees as a skill that is instinctual and a natural gift. "It's fascinating that choreographers sometimes report feeling blocked, but, at other times, steps flow unbidden from their bodies, fully shaped."

Nedvigin is happy directing rather than creating, and is working to expand Atlanta Ballet's reach. Last March, Ballet Silicon Valley closed its doors,

despite having been located in the wealthiest community in the United States. Asked how he thought it possible that a company with such a long history, surrounded by so much wealth, could close so suddenly, Nedvigin speculates that perhaps the community was not approached for financial support beyond a certain familiar circle of donors. Also, he says, "The surrounding community must see the company as indispensable."

"I look forward to working with the board individually and as a group," he continues, "so we are all on the same page, and can talk out any disagreements."

That plan, he says, is in part prompted by the memory of a folk tale he heard as a child in Russia: "Crawfish, Swan and Pike pull a loaded cart with all their might, but the cart refuses to budge, though the load doesn't seem excessive. Crawfish scrambles backward, Swan strains skyward and Pike pulls toward the sea. Who's guilty here and who is right is not for us to say, but, anyway, the cart's still there today."

Nedvigin is not inclined to follow established models for running a company. "Each offers something, so you choose the things you want." However, he cites as inspiration the changes at San Francisco Ballet that came with the company's growing confidence, which he witnessed over his two decades there. As the years went by, the dancers increasingly came out of their individual shells as they developed more of an esprit de corps, and tended to connect more as artists. Also, under management oversight, "they discussed different ways of approaching an audience, with a big focus on bringing younger generations to the theatre."

He is impressed with the way new generations use interactive social media to prompt and gauge audience response, reflected in dancer blogs or the streaming of presentations such as those celebrating International Dance Day. Nedvigin sees it all in the service of ballet casting a wider and wider net. ▯

— CAVALLARI CONTINUED FROM PAGE 28

then a company elder statesman, began to choreograph. "I remember dreaming about one day putting my own ballet together. I was very interested in dramaturgy and narrative. Whenever I heard music, I saw a story more than steps, which is probably the Cranko influence. My first work was a little story on Berlioz's *Symphonie fantastique*."

One day in 2007, a friend informed him that West Australian Ballet in Maylands, Australia, was seeking an artistic director. Four days after his interview, Cavallari was hired. "I felt Australia was so far away, isolated. But we did great things." He added new repertoire, expanded the troupe from 19 dancers to 32, introduced a young artist program and raised money for a new ballet centre.

"We did one season with contemporary works on an open-air stage — lovely. Other seasons had mixed programs including a *Peter Pan* to earn money for [contemporary] works."

In 2012, after several years in Australia, Cavallari yearned to return to Europe. The directorship of France's Ballet de l'Opéra national du Rhin, a 33-member company in Mulhouse, was the solution. "Mulhouse was on the French-German border just two hours from Stuttgart. The company was doing well with contemporary works, but struggling with neoclassical. I invited Heinz Spoerli and Stephan Thoss to stage works, looking for a special repertory that no other company had at the moment."

Cavallari also created works, including *Pinocchio* and *The Nutcracker*; his creations are in the repertoire of companies in Hannover, Mannheim, Stuttgart, Vienna and Lodz, Poland. Working in France, however, meant dealing with opera house bureaucrats who controlled virtually all planning. Cavallari felt like he was inside a cage.

"Here there is no cage," he says about Les Grands Ballets Canadiens. "I have a feeling similar to one I had in Australia that everything is possible."

In hiring dancers, Cavallari looks, of course, for a strong classical technique. Above all, though, he seeks personality and versatility, and assessed Les Grands' dancers by teaching two classes. "At first, at least, I plan works that suit their forces and qualities."

Cavallari will act as artistic adviser to Pankov for the 2016-2017 season. The following season will be his. ▯



EMBRACING THE HELP OF AUDIENCES AND TECHNOLOGY

BY JILLIAN GROENING

PETER QUANZ BUILDS INSTANT COMMUNITY



T“I must tell you, this will be pretty weird. It’s probably the weirdest thing I’ve ever done.” This is the last thing I expect to hear coming from Peter Quanz, the artistic director of Winnipeg-based Q DANCE and a choreographer of shimmering contemporary ballets and strong, modern-minded solos.

When we spoke in July 2016 at a studio in the Royal Winnipeg Ballet’s downtown headquarters (where, incidentally, Quanz studied as a young man), he was in his 16th working week of rehearsals for *Instant Community*, his first collaboration with Montréal Danse.

The creative process had begun in July 2014 in Montreal, and continued off and on in both cities since then. Now, fresh off the plane from Shanghai, where he

had been setting a traditional-styled ballet with pointe shoes, Quanz headed almost straight to the studio to work with the present project’s contemporary movers.

Instant Community marks a new frontier for Quanz, one where the only rule is that there are no rules. By giving up the reins of creative control and allowing his colleagues freedom to play, Quanz entered a new realm of collaboration. “At first, it was just playing around, trying to figure out what we are interested in, because I wanted to be part of a process that was unlike anything I had ever been part of before,” Quanz reflects after the din of rehearsal is over.

“I wanted to find a way for me to step back as a choreographer, as a director, and allow more space for everyone on our team to take risks and for all of us to have the

possibility to make significant choices within the piece,” Quanz explains. “I’m proud that’s one of the main principles that has remained.”

Quanz and his collaborators — Montréal Danse artistic director Kathy Casey, acting as artistic consultant and dramaturge; two dancers from her company, Sylvain Lafortune and Peter Trosztmer; and Montreal-based independents Bernard Martin and Brice Noeser — began the creative process by making lists of elements they wished to explore, such as certain movement qualities, and bringing filming and cellphones into the action. As their investigations began to highlight relations within the group, the point of interest for Quanz shifted from developing a large concept to investigating the group itself. The way individuals make choices in different improvisational situations became the most fascinating thing to observe and to watch grow. “We were enough,” Quanz says. “The process became about watching people, and watching people watch people. That’s how it bled into so much audience integration.”

This audience integration aspect was apparent the moment I entered the studio to attend a public in-process showing. As we stood outside waiting for the doors to open, Quanz and Casey approached groups of four to five audience members at a time. After introducing themselves, they wrote each of our names on a master list, next to a number that was then attached to the participant’s smartphone or tablet. We were allowed select entry, a few at a time, into the performance space, a tactic that produced excitement and a little anxiety.

In the studio, numbered iPhone in hand, I was struck by the casual environment. The charcoal-painted room was strewn with chairs, cords, speakers and projectors. Warm-up clothes littered the ballet barres and the grand piano, while a compact espresso machine hummed in the corner. A controlled madness swirled around the room. Sounds from various video recordings were thrown to several speakers, and movement was everywhere. A group of people huddled around a table, playing on touch screens; others were taking turns filming or being filmed while tossing feathers and reciting nursery rhymes. Another group was busy knocking over a pile of chairs.

It was not easy to tell performers from audience participants; the Montreal guests blended with local dance community

members, arts supporters, parents, students and friends. But, every so often, one of the performers was identified as they invited someone to engage in the activities, rather like hosts at a party encouraging guests to interact. Quanz drifted around the space lending a hand with filming or providing props. I found myself sharing my phone, which normally acts as a security blanket in public situations, with someone who didn't have any space on their own camera roll, handing it over in a moment of distraction.

As part of the fun, everyone was summoned to lay their devices on the ground and film themselves from a low angle. When the studio lights dimmed to black, the scattered phones and tablets were swept up by Casey with a push broom, and left glowing in the corner. Shadowed performers moved plastic chairs around, using them to build walls between audience members and corralling others into corners. Unsure of what to do or where to go, some people wandered, some sat down, some hunted through the luminescent pile for their phone, their comfort.

"We tried to make everything with the

intent of destabilizing people, of isolating them and of making them feel lonely," Quanz says when we talked later about this dark, alienating section. "We wanted to shatter the structure we had before and make it a more fluid unknown."

This inner discomfort is manifested in the piece in three light installations toward the end of the work-in-process. Stranded alone, pants at his ankles, Martin scanned his body with his phone, creating looming silhouettes on the wall. Across the studio, Noeser crouched under a table, face projected on a wall, peering into his webcam. Lafortune and Troszmer engaged in a duet at the far end of the space, illuminating each other with their cellphone flashlights.

Once you have experienced something, no matter how strange, it eventually becomes familiar. In order to keep the work on the periphery of the performers' comfort zone, Quanz found that focusing on a sense of fun and experimentation was pivotal. "We knew we were on the right track if we felt a sense of play, of joy being animated through our use of technology," Quanz explains.

Throughout the *Instant Community* experience, the lines between performer, participant and viewer were blurred to the point of anarchy, exposing a room full of people exploring and interacting together. This camaraderie closed the piece, when everyone gathered around a video of a live action campfire playing on a tablet on the floor in front of Casey, who was recording the video with a separate device, creating meta campfires. Her fellow performers joined her in filming the bonfire video on devices from the swept-up pile. Audience participants shuffled over, lulled by the warm artificial glow radiating on the floor.

The trickle-down effect of striving to create a work that destabilizes the creative team was disrupting expectations among the audience, who were challenged to actively participate throughout the evening. Their thoughts on the experience were shared in the circle as popcorn was passed round. The night I was there, some said they felt a connection with the interactive play in the beginning, feeling alone and isolated once the lights went out; others experienced the opposite, and were confused and uncomfortable in the beginning, then connected and at peace when left to wander in the dark and observe as they pleased.

After the showing, Quanz and I discuss how best to label the piece. "We all come to this with our collective experience of years of being involved in dance," Quanz says of the *Instant Community* cast. "That's the unspoken unifier. Even if there is very little physical vocabulary, it's still dance."

While labels can be necessary for promoting a show, they bring up expectations Quanz wishes to avoid. By putting the experience in the spectators' hands, by letting them explore freely, *Instant Community* functions as a tool for individuals to create their own script. In doing this, the work questions what it means to have a good show, what it means to entertain and even what it means to attend a dance performance. For the dancers who are involved as cast or audience participants, by thinking more openly about performance, the parameters of the form itself are expanded.

"It's always going to be something that is morphing," Quanz reflects on this unique piece. "We are always going to be chasing the tail of this work and I hope we never catch up." ^{DI}

Instant Community premieres January 29, 2017, at *Agora de la danse* in Montreal.

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ARGENTINA
By Carlos Saura
Documentary, 85 minutes
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Carlos Saura has got it right again: “it” being dance on film. The Spanish director’s instinct for timing, framing and staging have made him an extraordinary auteur of dancefilm, notably his famed flamenco trilogy *Blood Wedding* (1981), *Carmen* (1983) and *El amor brujo* (1986), featuring the great flamenco dancer Antonio Gades. His newest film, *Argentina* (2015), now on DVD, is a documentary, another in his line of equally exciting dance and music celebrations.

Argentina (originally *Zonda: Folclore Argentina*) brings together folk singers and dancers — young and old — in a performance staged in a warehouse in La Boca, a neighbourhood in Buenos Aires. Saura presents each number with a sure, poetic instinct for theatrical and cinematic effect, his own presence remaining unobtrusive.

The framing is minimal but evocative: we see the artists preparing or slowly filing into the mostly bare performance space. This dance, this music and these people, Saura seems to be saying, are enough. And he’s right. Take the lovely chacarera doble from Ballet Nuevo Arte Nativo de Koki and Pajarín Saavedra: the man is in shoes, the woman barefoot, both of them alternately floating and stamping alongside feisty singer Soledad Pastorutti. Or the moving homage to Mercedes Sosa. Archival footage of the singer (she died in 2009) is intercut with a group of children sitting at desks, their hands and bodies slowly picking up the rhythm of *Todo cambia*, a song about change, until by the end they are clapping and singing along with the popular Argentinean folk singer and political activist.

— **KAJJA PEPPER**



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Rudolf Nureyev’s production of *Don Quixote*, performed on this DVD by the ballet company and orchestra of La Scala, dates back some 40 years and has earned iconic status, thanks in part to the popular 1973 film made with the Australian Ballet. It features all the elements we have come to expect from *Don Q*: technical fireworks, tuneful music, colourful costumes and sets, and an intoxicating sense of exuberance and fun. Nureyev magnified the comedic elements, drawing on commedia dell’arte archetypes, even to the point of slapstick, which may be rather too much for some tastes. The weakest element here is the filming itself, by Italian state broadcaster RAI, which inexplicably cuts to odd camera angles and overhead shots at unhelpful moments.

However, the great draw for ballet fans will most likely be the lead couple, Natalia Osipova and Leonid Sarafanov. Kitri is one of Osipova’s signature roles: her famously explosive technique and wonderful soaring jumps are a delight to watch, and she is completely at home in the character — smart, cheeky and alluring. Sarafanov, as Basilio, is if anything an even greater treat. Boyishly clean-cut and handsome, he dashes off Nureyev’s notoriously tricky choreography with insouciant flair, while miraculously maintaining a beautiful classical line in this, the flashiest of ballets.

— **HEATHER BRAY**



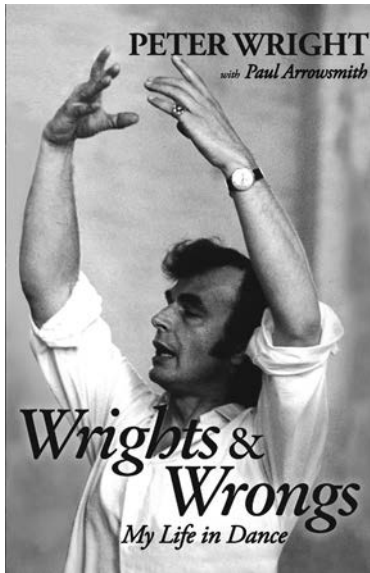
PAS DE DIEUX AND SOIR DE FÊTE
Ballet Nice Méditerranée
69 minutes (ballets)
+ 12 minutes (bonus)
www.belairclassiques.com

This DVD features Ballet Nice Méditerranée in a pair of curious and rarely seen 20th-century works, created originally for Paris Opera Ballet. Gene Kelly, who was keen to work with a French company after the success of his 1951 Hollywood musical *An American in Paris*, created *Pas de Dieux* in 1960 with Claude Bessy in the lead role; it is Bessy who has staged this revival.

The story is a light-hearted tale of what happens when a bored Aphrodite flies down to earth, with husband Zeus in hot pursuit, and their interactions with the mortals. Set to music by George Gershwin, the choreography is a brash mix of classical ballet and musical comedy, and the bright designs instantly evoke the era in which it was made. In a delightful bonus interview, Bessy fondly remembers working with Kelly, and what a refreshing change the ballet provided for the dancers.

Soir de Fête, created by Léo Staats — a teacher, ballet master and choreographer for Paris Opera Ballet — premiered in 1925. The ballet is a plotless suite of solos, pas de deux and ensembles designed to highlight the technical precision and elegance of the French style. With its romantic pastel-coloured costumes and music by Léo Delibes, it seems completely insulated from the surging currents of innovation that were igniting ballet elsewhere, and may perhaps have been a reaction against them.

— **HEATHER BRAY**



WRIGHTS & WRONGS: MY LIFE IN DANCE
 By Peter Wright, with Paul Arrowsmith
www.oberonbooks.com

Sir Peter Wright, the internationally renowned director and choreographer, was fêted with at least three 90th-birthday celebrations in November. There was, of course, a private family celebration with children and grandchildren, but also two very public gala performances in his honour by each of Britain's two Royal Ballet companies: the Royal Ballet at the Royal Opera House Covent Garden in London and the Birmingham Royal Ballet at the Hippodrome in Birmingham. Both troupes performed his ever-popular production of *The Nutcracker*, known to ballet fans worldwide through live HD video cinema simulcast and on DVD.

The year 2016 also marks another major Wright anniversary, the 50th of his now much admired and ubiquitous production of *Giselle*. Although each is slightly different, adapted to local circumstances, Wright's dramatically compelling and choreographically eloquent *Giselle* has been staged and in most instances retained in the repertoires of 15 companies worldwide. It has served the National Ballet of Canada well since first presented by the company in 1970. Twelve years later, at the Royal Winnipeg Ballet, Wright's *Giselle* provided prima ballerina Evelyn Hart with a career-defining role.

In 1966, in Stuttgart, *Giselle* was the first of five Wright productions of the great 19th-century classics — the three Tchaikovsky ballets and *Coppélia*, a Wright favourite, complete the list — that along with his

resounding success as a ballet director have made his name one of the most eminent in dance.

In a career spanning so many decades there is much to tell and a detailed, personal account of that extraordinarily wide-ranging career is now available in a substantial memoir cleverly titled *Wrights & Wrongs: My Life in Dance*, written with British dance critic Paul Arrowsmith and published by London's Oberon Books.

"It's quite chatty and outspoken," says Wright during a break from rehearsing the National Ballet's latest *Giselle* revival this past spring.

"Chatty" is something of an understatement in Wright's thematically arranged account of his professional life; "outspoken" is not. The memoir's title is more than double-edged. While Wright, without being immodest, is properly willing to celebrate his many achievements, the wrongs are not just his, freely admitted, but also those inflicted on him. It's not exactly a settling of old scores, but Wright does not hold back in describing instances where he felt misused.

Clearly, Wright's ability to roll up his sleeves and "just get on with it" — to coin the words of his great mentor, Royal Ballet founder Ninette de Valois — meant he was sometimes taken advantage of.

As John Cranko's right-hand man in Stuttgart for six years, he helped the South African-born choreographer overcome local resistance and refashion the German troupe into one of the world's most creative and admired. But, when Wright chose to return permanently to London in 1967 to be with his late wife, dancer Sonya Hana, and their young son and daughter, an offended Cranko effectively ended their cordial relationship.

As Sir Kenneth MacMillan's highly competent associate director during the famously neurotic British choreographer's rocky term

as director of the Royal Ballet from 1970 to 1977, Wright was expected to do most of the dirty work while also running the company's touring wing. It almost broke him.

Summarily passed over by the Royal Opera House as MacMillan's successor in favour of an outsider, Norman Morrice, Wright then tirelessly devoted himself to building up its touring troupe, Sadler's Wells Royal Ballet. In the late 1980s, the culturally ambitious burghers of the City of Birmingham courted Wright's thriving troupe to become resident in the West Midlands city, Britain's second largest, and renamed Birmingham Royal Ballet.

Along the way, Wright had to fight to establish the smaller company's identity and for its fair share of Royal Opera House resources, all the while countering the misperception that his company at Sadler's Well Theatre was somehow second best, little more than a farm team for the more famous troupe at Covent Garden.

The move to Birmingham along with its promise of independence was successfully accomplished in 1990 but, four years later, when Wright was just beginning to feel the company was putting down firm roots, he contracted a debilitating, life-threatening neurological disorder that forced his premature retirement as director of Birmingham Royal Ballet in 1995. It took seven years before Wright achieved a more or less clean bill of health. Even today he has special lenses that help correct double vision.

Wright succumbed to dance in his teens when his mother took him to a performance of Mona Inglesby's International Ballet. It was *Les Sylphides* that blew him away.

"I was immensely impressed by it and told my mother afterward, 'that's for me,'" recalls Wright. "From that moment I just wanted to dance."

In many ways, Wright had a charmed childhood. The only son among three children of a prosperous middle-class family — holidays in Switzerland, horse riding, private education — Wright was sent to Bedales, an idyllically liberal and expensive co-educational boarding school in the lush, rolling countryside of Southern England. There he excelled at swimming and tennis, and might well have followed his accountant father into a conventionally respectable

profession. His father was raised a Quaker, devout and strict, and opposed Wright's desire to become a dancer. Wright, in protest, ran away from school and home, but only briefly. He'd made his point. Wright's father begrudgingly acquiesced, but denied him any financial support.

Touchingly, at age 80, after attending a performance of his son's *Giselle* at Covent Garden, Wright's father's eyes welled up in amazement and pride.

"He was generally not good at showing emotion," Wright confides.

Through a contact at Bedales, Wright was introduced to Kurt Jooss, the trailblazing German choreographer who fled his homeland for Britain in 1933 after refusing a Nazi order to dismiss the Jews in his company. Wright auditioned in his school gym kit and plimsolls and was hired as a Jooss company apprentice, making his professional debut in *The Green Table* in 1943.

As a late starter, Wright had much catching up to do. He danced with a succession of smaller companies, finally managed to enter de Valois' Sadler's Wells school, studied ballet with the great Vera Volkova, among others, and earned his keep any way he could dancing in reviews, musicals and on television. His handsome looks even landed him some modelling jobs.

In 1955, de Valois, always acute to where others' talents lay, assigned Wright to direct a small troupe to perform in opera productions. Though successful in this, Wright's ambitions ranged widely. Early on, he saw the huge potential of television as a popularizing force and worked closely with the pioneering producer of ballet on TV, Margaret Dale. Wright was about to accept a producer's contract with the BBC when, in 1961, John Cranko, having been hired as ballet director in Stuttgart, appealed to Wright to become his ballet master. It was in Stuttgart that Wright produced some of his best ballets, including in 1963 *The Mirror Walkers*. When, seven years later, Wright staged it for the National Ballet of Canada, then directed by his former Sadler's Wells colleague Celia Franca, he cast Karen Kain in her first featured role.

Wright is candid about his lack of driving ambition to pursue choreography. It was Cranko who opened the door to an alternative when he more or less bullied a reluctant Wright into staging a new production of *Giselle*.

Wright had never much liked the iconic Romantic-era ballet, but the research he invested in that first *Giselle* convinced him that what he'd previously regarded as boring old classics could be reinvigorated by cutting away the fat and paying close attention to dramatic focus and plausibility and overall theatricality. He credits his wide experience in commercial theatre, film and television for his success in this process of resuscitation.

The huge success of Wright's Stuttgart *Giselle* paved the way for what became a major career and provided him with a creative balance to his work as a company director. Even in advanced old age, it keeps him happily busy travelling here and there to tend his various productions.

Wrights & Wrongs, rambling and over-detailed as it occasionally is, offers anyone interested in what really goes on behind the scenes tantalizing peeks into a world of grand ambitions, political manoeuvring, super-sized egos, sexual goings-on and, occasionally, magnificent artistic achievements.

Wright's unsparing assessments, positive and negative, of the various dance luminaries he worked with, from Frederick Ashton to Pina Bausch, make for juicy reading. Perhaps most importantly, Wright's discussion and analysis of the classics he has reproduced is invaluable for audiences who cherish them and for those who will become their future custodians. His sage observations about what it takes to be a good director should be required reading for anyone aspiring to that position.

Some famous British critic — even Wright cannot remember who — once described him as "the best director the Royal Ballet never had." Happily, that description has proved inaccurate because now there are two Royal Ballet companies and while the London one may be older, there are many who would argue that the Birmingham troupe, of which Wright is director laureate, is artistically the more vibrant.

Not many people get to build such a legacy.

— MICHAEL CRABB

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I live in Saskatchewan, a Canadian province that is fully recognized by Aboriginal treaties and acknowledges a rapidly growing indigenous population. According to Statistics Canada, Aboriginal youth far outnumber adults, resulting in a strong call for educational opportunities to be both relevant and culturally sensitive. As a result, Saskatchewan now features a post-secondary curriculum that includes Treaty Education Outcomes and Indicators. Several thousand Aboriginal students are enrolled at the University of Regina, where I teach, and at First Nations University of Canada, which also has a campus in Regina.

My university has embraced the fact that we are all sharing Treaty 4 territory, where we live, learn and create together. The University of Regina's 2015-2020 Strategic Plan, entitled *peyak aski kikaninaw* — Cree for "We are one with Mother Earth" — is emblematic of the dedication to honour the holistic worldviews of indigenous people. This plan identifies indigenization as a focus that now weaves throughout the values and philosophies of the university.

In the faculty of education, we are not only committed to embracing this call to action, we are also learning to model this clearly for our student teachers or teacher interns, who will in turn embed this value into the sites of their teaching. The power of this potential impact sends shivers up my spine. I am deeply aware of the possibility of slipping into appropriation or token acknowledgements of indigenous ways and so I ask, how do I embrace this responsibility with authenticity and integrity within my own knowledge base and practice in dance?

Here are some of the ways ...

In the hallway, I warmly greet the university's emerging elder-in-residence Joseph Naytowhow, who is coming to my dance curriculum class in a few days. I ask if there is a protocol to

INSIDE ED

Smudging Takes Place Here

by Kathryn Ricketts

welcome him to the group. He tells me it would be nice if I offered him tobacco. This humble response resulted in several hours of preparation that included consultations with many indigenous scholars in our faculty. I learned what kind of tobacco, how to package it, what to say, and with which hand I should present it; I was told "from the heart." In class, I confessed to my students that I was excited and nervous to perform this ceremonial offering, and wanted to model it correctly.

On the day, when the offering and introduction were complete, I asked Joseph if I had missed anything and the elder replied with a smile, "You could have thrown in a Cree word." We were all eager to learn the appropriate word, which he told me later was *kisewatotatowin*, which means "respect and love for all living things."

Joseph started his teaching by stating that he had prepared for this class with his mother, as "she is the dancer." His stories were slow, quiet and circuitous, and at first my students' agitation was visible as they were lured off their linear, sequenced path of familiar pedagogy. Then slowly I saw their breath deepen and their muscles relax. They met Joseph's quiet, centred spirit and began to lean into it. Nearing the end of class, I wondered if they would ask the questions they had prepared for him as their homework. They did not, lingering instead in the silent, centred state he had created. Joseph embodied another kind of curriculum based on indigenous pedagogy, and, on my part, it felt counter-intuitive to collect the assigned homework.

When I move down the hall in the faculty of education, I often enjoy the pungent smell of burnt sweet grass that lingers after an in-office smudging. The scent is a reminder that healing took place behind one of the many office and classroom doors where a sign states "smudging takes place here."

As my appreciation for these processes of indigenization grows, I want to continue, with humility, to understand new ways within a shared circle. *or*

Kathryn Ricketts, PhD, is an assistant professor in arts education and chair of dance in the University of Regina.

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**Above right: Elder-in-residence Joseph Naytowhow
Photo: Patrick Lewis**



by Kaija Pepper

How many ideas, or how much emotion, do we need dance to hold? At their extremes, intellectually devised choreography can be dry as dust, the emotionally driven kind so passionate you fear the dancer might explode. Two shows at the 28th Dancing on the Edge festival of contemporary dance — *Thus Spoke...* and *Kaleido* — managed to chart their own course somewhere in between these two poles.

First, Frédéric Gravel and Étienne Lepage's *Thus Spoke...*, a sprawling 70-minute four-hander (Gravel, Frédéric Lavallée, Marilyn Perreault, Anne Thériault) from Montreal. This dance-theatre creation had ideas, about politics and aesthetics, but was also sexy and funny, even badly behaved at times, as in the mindless strutting and pelvic action — restricted only by the tight pants worn by all four, the women in heels — to booming rock guitar. Throughout, movement (by Gravel) is used to frame numerous monologues (text is by Lepage), such as Gravel's laidback confession about how people keep calling him an asshole, followed by a dance in which he looks like a crazy guy lost in music at some disco or bar.

Gravel's opening monologue about our many privileges — to waste time, to become "elevated" (the piece was translated from the original French for these performances), to throw our money out the window in pursuit of beauty — set an ironic tone. Later, another monologue, delivered by Lavallée, went too far for me, with "punch

lines" about killing the Prime Minister and the threat that "shooting people in the theatre is bad taste, but it could be done." "Anything goes," as heard in the recording of the Cole Porter song that followed, wasn't enough payoff, not given the reality of mass shootings we face today. I felt like a sitting duck, captive in the theatre.

Mostly, though, I loved *Thus Spoke...* It was fun to be in the Firehall Arts Centre theatre with this quartet of talented performers, who were reaching out to us with this piece, hoping to make their comedy-drama-dance carry as much political and social commentary as possible. It was like they cared about the world, like aesthetics were a tool, not the be-all they sometimes are.

Kaleido, which opened Edge 2, one of the festival's seven mixed bills, was much smaller, neater and focused on the movement. Choreographed by Tentacle Tribe's Emmanuelle Lê Phan and Elon Höglund (a duo from Montreal) for OURO Collective (a Vancouver quintet), its 23 minutes were richly textured with sound and movement built on urban street forms. The athletic musicality of hip-hop and its sister styles has been quickly integrated into contemporary theatrical dance, and it's been a good influence overall, with edgy shapes and rhythmic energy that provide a restorative to the romantic self-expression of so much dance.

There was welcome tension in the way the dancers held back before releasing briefly into full body waves or small muscular explosions, the choreography

building on a musical awareness that carried its own sub-text. These dancers were cool, disciplined, artistic bodies, yet the restless bodyscapes they formed together carried emotional resonance. *Kaleido*, with a mixed soundtrack that included a repetitive lament by piano and strings, and some sampled Billie Holiday under crashing cymbals, had a formal intelligence that enlarged the emotion. Cristina Bucci, Maiko Miyuchi, Rina Pellerin, Dean Placzek and Antonio Somera took the form they were given and brought life to it.

In September, the 25th Vancouver International Flamenco Festival brought another of its lively, crowd-pleasing headliners to the Playhouse: Mercedes Amaya, known as La Winy. Mexican-born, Amaya's roots in flamenco are deep: her mother and flamenco-singer father emigrated from Spain, and her aunt, Carmen Amaya, known as Queen of the Gypsies, was a star flamenco dancer.

La Winy, in performance, is a firecracker dying to go off, hunkering down into the music. She squirms and jitters through her musical trajectory, more than once falling into a dishevelled crouch on the floor, exploding when the emotion can no longer be contained within the fascinating rhythms provided by her excellent singer (Jose "Cachito" Diaz) and guitarist (Santiago Enciso). Another dancer, Nacho Blanco, took his own solo turns onstage, a compact force whose fast and furious footwork was executed with astonishing precision and musicality.

Festival directors Rosario Ancer and Victor Kolstee included a studio showing in their programming, a flamenco/performance art solo by Calgary's Rosanna Terracciano, *We All Need to Say GOODBYE/ADIOS*. The piece is intimate, full of quiet sorrow, somewhat dominated by props: several white fans that she stabs into the waistband of her skirt and mobiles made of white hair combs that hang a little awkwardly from her black dress. When Terracciano is supported by the props rather than serving them — hanging stage left, the mobiles make evocative set dressing — the clear curves and rhythms of her flamenco body communicate sorrow directly and viscerally, in the way that only dance can. ▯



Winnipeg

by Holly Harris

One of the most striking dance shows in recent memory took place during the dog days of summer: Victoria, B.C.-born artist Sarah Murphy-Dyson, 42, performed *A Band and a Ballerina* at the West End Cultural Centre on August 15, inspired by themes of “transcendence and transformation.” The one-night-only show marked the former Royal Winnipeg Ballet first soloist’s first appearance on a local stage since leaving the company 10 years ago to pursue other creative opportunities, including performing in the Mirvish production of *Dirty Dancing* with her then husband, former RWB soloist Johnny Wright. In 2010, she premiered her autobiographical, one-woman show *The Naked Ballerina* at the Toronto Fringe Festival and lifted the veil on her own stark past insecurities, including an eating disorder.

The 45-minute *A Band and a Ballerina* featured the now Toronto-based artist performing six structured improvisations accompanied by Calgary singer/songwriter/guitarist Evan Freeman with four bandmates. The most powerful work of the night proved to be *Luna*, in which the barefoot Murphy-Dyson’s moving performance paid homage to her former life as a ballerina while acknowledging her own personal healing journey, her graceful port de bras suddenly cracking into spasms before returning to melting lyricism.

Clad in a diaphanous white top and flowing skirt, the soloist incorporated a leitmotif of ballet — the pointe shoe — donning a single shoe while lying on her back during the more angst-ridden *Science Fiction*. As she stretched her arms out into the darkness, she seemed to be reaching for brave new worlds. Other potent images included Murphy-Dyson’s body suggesting a tree trunk with her limbs reaching up to heaven during the show’s opener *Eden*, or her dirty dancing-styled pelvic thrusts that suddenly morphed into pirouettes in *Here with You*.

This fascinating show excelled at creating evocative stage pictures, and would have been even stronger had there been a greater narrative arc; the finale *Halo* felt oddly anticlimactic as it simply petered out at the end.

The Royal Winnipeg Ballet recently celebrated the prestigious silver medal win by two of its youngest company members: Saeka Shirai and Yue Shi at the 2016 Varna International Ballet Competition held in July. The two apprentices were awarded the coveted prize out of 104 competitors in the senior category, and were the only Canadians who made the finals. Shirai and Shi performed excerpts from *La Fille Mal Gardée* and *Diana and Acteon*, as well as Peter Quanz’s neoclassical confection *Blushing* and RWB soloist Yosuke Mino’s *Numa*.

Local contemporary dance artists Janelle Hacault and Hilary Crist launched

Winnipeg’s newest dance troupe .6 Ricochet, with *Essentia*, September 9-11 at the Rachel Browne Theatre. The 60-minute double bill explored existential themes of “struggle,” choreographed and performed by the two creators.

Crist’s *The Hopeless Dream of Being*, inspired by Ingmar Bergman’s haunting classic film *Persona*, is visually arresting in its sculptural imagery. Hacault first appears with her head swaddled with pink tulle, her arms and legs undulating as Crist, costumed in a graphic, insect-like bodysuit, becomes her foil. The 20-minute duet quickly grows in physicality as the two women spar, fall, tumble, roll and finally wrap their heads in yards of tulle that disguises — and objectifies — their individual identities. Structured primarily as two overlapping solos, some sections felt underdeveloped, but the work still resonated as a compelling dichotomy about personality and persona.

In Hacault’s moving *Imprimatur*, which arose out of her grief and obsession with the afterlife after losing her mother to breast cancer, Crist first appears upstage garbed in white trousers and shirt, suggesting a fallen angel as her arms beat and flail. Hacault likewise is lying downstage, inert in billowing fog that creates an ominous juxtaposition of heaven and earth. The two dancers’ movement becomes increasingly combative; the 20-minute duet’s most chilling moment comes when the pair finally confront each other as a fateful act of recognition, underscored with sounds of thundering freight trains. Hacault’s final solo, accompanied by a recording of her evocative poetry, is filled with bittersweet resignation as she prepares to leave her earthly world.

Finally, Winnipeg-based dance artist Stephanie Ballard marked the canonization of Saint Teresa of Calcutta with a performance of *Landscape Dancing*, featuring 12 contemporary dancers who braved late summer rain showers to perform at the historic ruins of the St. Boniface Cathedral on September 4. In 1982, Ballard choreographed a liturgical dance for Mother Teresa’s Winnipeg visit to accept the St. Boniface Hospital Foundation International Award, performed for 20,000 viewers at the Winnipeg Stadium. This time, Ballard’s ensemble included several second-generation daughters of dance artists who performed for the world’s newest saint 35 years ago. ▀

Guillaume Côté likes his dance intense, a characteristic that was evident in his programming choices as artistic director of the annual Festival des Arts de Saint-Sauveur near Montreal.

Bryan Arias' *A Rather Lovely Thing*, which premiered at Jacob's Pillow a month earlier, had lovely intricate things for him and his strong Arias Company cast, Jermaine Spivey, Spenser Theberge and Ana Maria Lucaciu. A folding step-ladder served as a prop for a witty ensemble sequence. Spivey and Lucaciu deftly executed a complicated duet to a pleasant waltz (music ranged from Chopin to Nina Simone), and all four performed the kind of spaghetti interlacing of arms and legs that's almost starting to look conventional on contemporary dance programs. Most memorable was Theberge in a highly physical solo of stops and starts and changes of pace that seemed impressively spontaneous. The ending had Arias lying on his back under a glowing light, a kite fluttering overhead. The "death" was just a tad too pretty.

Israelis Sharon Eyal and Gai Behar favour ear-splitting soundscapes, and *OCD Love* for their L-E-V Dance Company was no exception. The strict bass beat became progressively louder, though thankfully composer Ori Lichtik kept the volume inside the festival tent to tolerable levels. The music's tension, unfortunately, was not reflected in the choreography.

Ostensibly a work about bad timing in affairs of the heart, the piece began with a long-limbed female dancer in an alluring tight-fitting black bodysuit circling the stage until a male dancer entered and circled, too, oblivious of her. Eventually, two males carried her off like sexually starved cavemen. A duet with two women pleasantly tantalized with tiny hip sways. It was followed by a contrasting male duet with strongly gripped arms. A long sextet revealed a panoply of styles — straight-back classical, hip-swaying folk, voguing — that reflected Eyal's and Behar's backgrounds in both contemporary dance and night clubs. The work ended with the group leaving a man and woman separated and

alone. Ultimately, everyone ended up lonely.

Hard-edged works from Arias and L-E-V were Côté's test cases for the traditionally older-generation Saint-Sauveur crowd. Both received solid applause from audiences with a noticeably larger number of young people. Côté, a splendid National Ballet of Canada principal, also programmed two separate all-star shows mainly featuring his home company, the Royal Ballet and American Ballet Theatre.

A Night with the Stars offered the Canadian debut of Misty Copeland, whose appointment as ABT's first African-American principal last year drew immense media attention. Forget the hype. Dancing a duet from MacMillan's first-act *Romeo and Juliet* with ABT colleague Blaine Hoven (recently promoted to first soloist), Copeland gave a thrills-and-shivers interpretation. From the instant the pair's eyes met, there was a magnetic flow that coursed through their lifts, clinches and a kiss that looked truly passionate. Watching Copeland from several metres away in a small tent theatre brought a unique intimacy, and the naturalness of her dance-acting had a palpable authenticity. Was her onstage joy enhanced by her marriage a few weeks earlier?

The same program was notable for Naoya Ebe's wonderfully zero-gravity jumps and velvet landings in Bournonville's *Flower Festival in Genzano*. His National Ballet of Canada colleague, Seleno Guerrero-Trujillo, gamely sought to match his buoyancy.

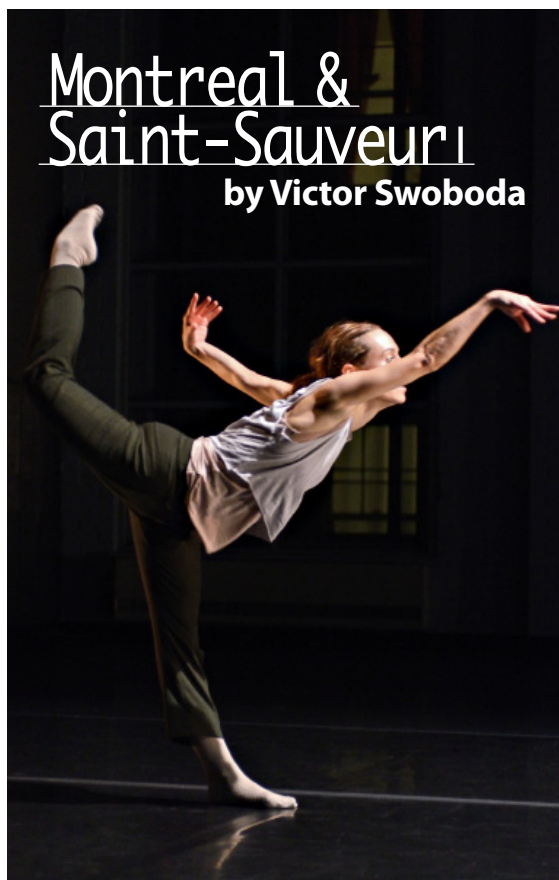
The Bournonville was about lightness whereas the following piece, Victor Quijada's *10 Years in 7 Minutes*, was thoroughly grounded. Anne Plamondon started slowly, walking, stopping, then twisting her body across the floor in the urban dance mode Quijada has adapted into a fascinatingly expressive style.

Later, in the evening's most innovative number, Plamondon danced her own *Les mêmes yeux que toi*, an exploration of mental disturbance. Subtle positional shifts of hands, feet and limbs constantly changed her body's silhouette. Indeed, the wealth of detail was somewhat overwhelming. But the masterly control of one of Canada's premier female artists totally gripped the eye. Kudos to Côté for programming a work whose pauses, silences and darkness challenged the audience.

In Montreal, the eighth annual Zone Homa festival presented more than 200 local artists and performers in 44 creations of all stripes. The 10 dance shows held in neighbourhood culture centres featured

both emerging young performers and established names including choreographers Jean-Sébastien Lourdais and Manon Oigny, plus Dave St. Pierre, who danced in two shows, *Stanford* by Natacha Filiatrault, and *Hyphy*, a collective show of enthusiastic but largely undistinguished dance and song directed by Alex Huot.

St. Pierre, a choreographer of notoriously flamboyant nude contemporary dance, appeared first in a jerky solo wearing a tight-fitting black suit with flashing fluorescent outlines. In a second solo, he wore a loose tunic, nude below the waist. His movements were slow and close to the body; he ended flat on his back in a death pose. Each solo suggested someone looking to get out of a situation or to remove something alien or overburdening. Indeed, no other performer seems so desperately to crave escape from either himself or from society's constraints. Hence perhaps his bare-all approach. *DI*



Anne Plamondon in her *Les mêmes yeux que toi*
Photo: Michael Slobodian

San Francisco



by Allan Ulrich

The arrival of any professional chamber ballet company is welcome; the official debut of SFDanceworks June 23 at ODC theatre was greeted with full houses and major press attention. Why not? Founding artistic director James Sofranko has danced with San Francisco Ballet for 16 years, 10 of them as a soloist. He has connections with dancers internationally and is hailed both for his artistry and his charitable ventures.

But running a successful dance company requires an aesthetic agenda, and that prerequisite did not materialize during this inaugural, grab-bag program; one searched for that virtue in the splendid performances of the six dancers. Sofranko seems desirous of expanding the ballet base and aerating the classical conventions without diluting them, much like Hubbard Street Dance Chicago, from which he borrowed the most engaging work on the program, Alejandro Cerrudo's raffish 2006 *Lickety Split*. Set to Devendra Banhart's engaging score, this series of fractured romances starts with dancers' bodies poised in silhouette, in defiance of classical rigour, then coming forth to establish transitory partnerships. The partnerings are eccentric, and Cerrudo wallows in the antic quality, which all adds up to a satisfying pop ballet.

The company was comprised of Dana Genshaft, Anne Zivolich-Adams, Amber

Neumann, Garrett Anderson, Ben Needham-Wood and Tobin Del Cuore. The latter joined with Anderson in the male bonding intimacy of the middle movement of Lar Lubovitch's *Concerto Six Twenty-Two*, ripe for revival during Pride Week.

It was the opening part of the program, consisting of new dances, which made me wonder if Sofranko has, as yet, aligned his artistic priorities for SFDanceworks. In *Joe & Ida*, a co-premiere with Grand Rapids Ballet, choreographer Penny Saunders segues from a German folk song to a collage score that includes bits of Michael Nyman, Thomas Adès and standard pop stuff. Unisons develop into emotional tugs of war, but an air of cuteness prevails.

Cuteness also marked Sofranko's *Z*, a love letter to Zivolich-Adams' deftness in bourréeing across the stage and tapping in place. Genshaft's *Portrait*, a solo theatre piece that cast Neumann as 19th-century literary icon George Sand offered some promise, but the floor projections didn't add up. One hopes that SFDanceworks' second season will offer more substantial fare.

The summer's most alluring dance concert was the sixth iteration of Amy Seiwert's Sketch project with her Imagery chamber ballet company. Seiwert devotes each season to a particular problem confronted, at some point, by professional choreographers who find it valuable to explore an issue in what are

conceived as chamber performances, thus a little out of the limelight. The results have been intriguing, even stirring.

The most recent results, unveiled July 8 at the Cowell Theater, adhered to the tradition. Use Your Words dealt with the complications that arise when a dancemaker is motivated by text, whether it serves as inspiration or is deployed in the fabric of the dance. This season's colleagues, choreographers Val Caniparoli and Nicole Haskins (who delivered an academic exercise devoid of inspiration), boast varying levels of experience.

It was the premiere of Seiwert's own *Instructions* that left the most winning impression. In *Instructions*, she made it hard on herself. She started with Neil Gaiman's eerily witty poem of the same title (recited and "acted" very well by an ambulatory Scott Marlowe). Then, she layered his reading with Benjamin Britten's *Cello Suite No. 1* performed on-stage, finally unleashing the seven dancers, most of whom were dancing for Seiwert for the first time.

It all meshed in a wonderfully quirky manner that sustained a dream-like flow. The movement captured the brooding lushness of the cello line as well as its rhythmic urgency. The dancers seem like pieces in a board game, sometimes lining up like bowling pins, at other moments hoisted and rearranged by games master Marlowe. The barelegged duets — weighty and inelegant — resemble no earlier dance by Seiwert. *Instructions* does a superb job of integrating recalcitrant elements, and is much too good to vanish after a single weekend.

The same goes for veteran choreographer Caniparoli's *4 in the Morning (An Entertainment)*. Earlier artists have set portions of Edith Sitwell's *Façade* poems set to William Walton's antic accompaniments, but Caniparoli deserved his own shot at this eccentric verse. The choreography does a terrific job of finding the kinetic equivalent to Sitwell's word, in some cases reflecting the content of the verse. Susan Roemer has clothed the women in silky slips and the men in shorts, socks and garters. Like the music, Caniparoli's work strikes one as terribly naughty and thoroughly pansexual in a 1920s' manner. His inebriated conga lines performed by sweet young things are not to be missed. *DI*

Back in the day, which for me was the late 1960s through the 1970s, when ballet-going in and around New York City included eagerly attended seasons of Britain's Royal Ballet, seeing ballets by Frederick Ashton was a matter of course. These works by a founding visionary of English ballet were toured hereabouts by generations of English dancers in good variety. Those days, however, were more short-lived than many at the time might have expected.

The appearance, therefore, this summer of a weeklong run offering a six-part all-Ashton bill was a rare occurrence. That such a presentation was being given by a small-scale American ballet troupe from Sarasota, Florida, and that the venue was the intimate, 472-seat Joyce Theater, added to the pleasantly unexpected nature of the event.

Sarasota Ballet, founded in 1987 and directed since 2007 by Iain Webb, has been steadily building a repertoire of Ashton's works under Webb's direction. With assistance from Margaret Barbieri (Webb's wife), his Ashton stagings, many of which the couple know firsthand from their Royal Ballet days, have accumulated over the years. Nowadays, they number 23 works with two additions on the immediate horizon.

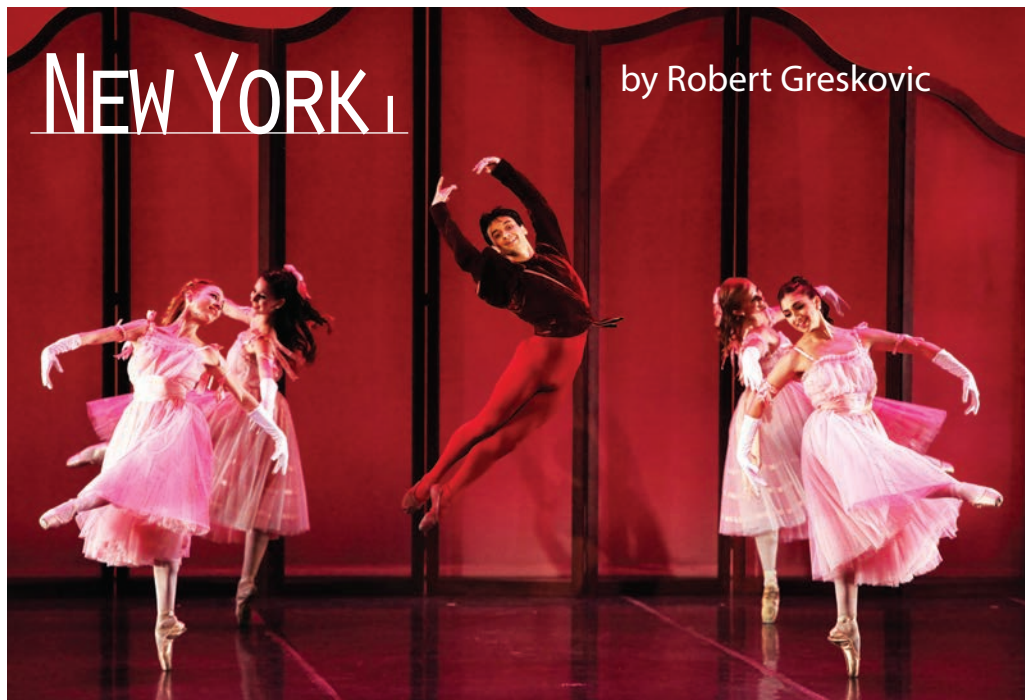
While other American troupes have staged Ashton ballets over the years, Sarasota's selections have the added dimension of showing us not just infrequent samplings of this choreographer's work but, in fact, rare ones. Until Webb and Barbieri's staging of Ashton's 1947 *Valses nobles et sentimentales*, first given by the Sarasota company at home in 2012, the one-act ballet to Ravel's music of the same name was utterly unknown in the United States. By way of anecdote, during my years of knowing the late Clive Barnes, whose prominent career as ballet critic began in England during Ashton's heyday, I heard him speak lovingly of *Valses* as one of the long lost works he most regretted not still having in repertoire.

All I knew of this "lost" ballet came from a few compelling photos and from the history books. In Sarasota's current staging, I know more and more each time I see this evocative "valentine" to ballet's art and artists, which, in Ashton's canon, began life as a 1935 ballet entitled *Valentine's Eve* to this same Ravel music for Ballet Rambert.

For the reworked *Valses* of 1947 for Sadler's Wells Ballet, Ashton again collaborated with his great visual design colleague Sophie Fedorovitch. Too bad the Joyce's limited stage size meant the company had to stint in presenting its remake of Fedorovitch's simple, roseate setting with translucent screens by omitting the related, arched wing pieces meant to frame the stage with further rosy translucence. The designer's costuming, which puts five gloved women in full-skirted pink dresses lovingly varied from one to the other with beribboned details, and five men in lushly fashioned burgundy velvet tunics with tights, was fully shown.

between him and a secondary man, who slips away from the male ensemble to show attention to the singular heroine.

Ravel's music, sonorous and potently perfumed by decided emotions, earlier came into being in its orchestrated version as accompaniment for *Adelaide, or the Language of the Flowers*, a 1912 creation for Mlle. Trouhanova's Ballet. Ashton's ballet balances the aristocratic artistry of ballet's basic moves with the air of romantic encounters and individual showings of poetic strength. His unnamed female protagonist, who suggests something of Dumas' femme fatale Marguerite, stands, often unaided, precisely on pointe as her



The fact the ballets had to be performed with their music on tape was another downside to the run, but, given the lack of a pit and funding for live music at the Joyce, it had to be taken as a minor wrinkle.

The women, more or less de rigueur for Ashton, are on pointe. The central one (either the confident Danielle Brown or the more yielding Victoria Hulland) is loose of hair and somewhat differently dressed from her companions; she occupies a central place in the ballet's action. Her impassioned escort (either dashing Ricardo Graziano or eager Ricardo Rhodes) finds himself attending his lady love who delicately bides her time

partners change positions to leave her momentarily, commandingly, on her own. Finally, she's seen as an enchantress who all but floats in wide arcing lifts from one man to another without choosing either.


In the case of another rarity on the program, *The Walk to the Paradise Garden* (1972, to Frederick Delius), the intimate stage size was a plus. When this duet-plus-one was first shown at NYC's Metropolitan Opera House in the 1970s, it looked lost on the vast stage. Here, one could more clearly follow Ashton's presentation of two romantically coupled lovers, and their sometimes reclining and other times soaring moments of partnered moves, with building interest. When the

third character, a Death figure, enters the picture, his cape-draped person achieves a dramatic presence around whom the doomed lovers become lost to each other and to life; both eventually fall into lifeless swoons at the hands of impassive Death.

Barbieri's staging of the second movement of Ashton's rarely seen *Sinfonietta* (1967, to Malcolm Williamson) offered welcome opportunities to study and admire the interconnections and group arrangements of a solitary woman and five men, one of whom acts more prominently than the others, in an evocation suggesting a lunar landscape. Unfortunately, in this instance, the intimate Joyce auditorium put the intricate display in a proximity that emphasized the choreography's tricky arrangements more as hard work than as seamless image-making.

The other portions of this mixed bill revealed to varying degrees further aspects of Ashton's artistry. Let's hope such presentations keep the momentum building toward correcting the U.S. absence of extended exposure to the fine art of Frederick Ashton. *DI*

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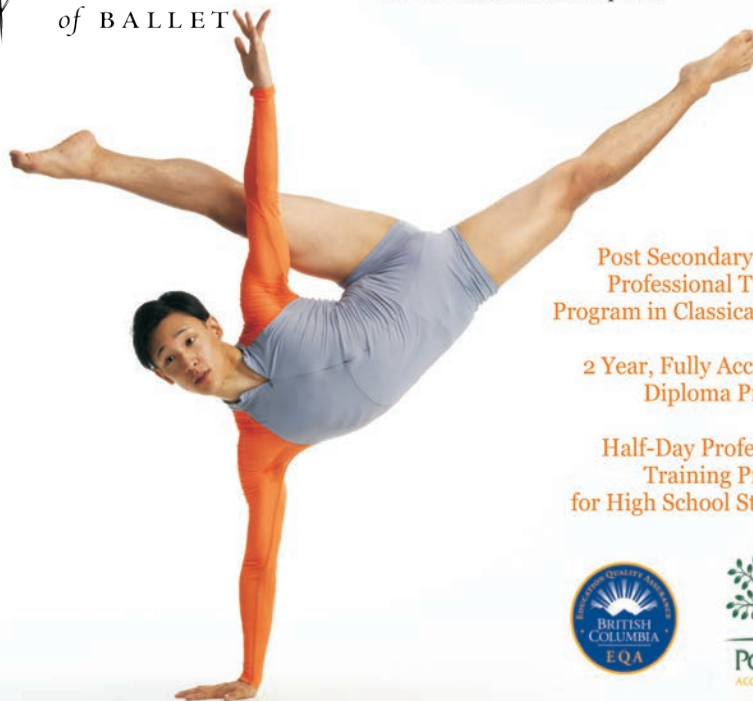
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by Malcolm Tay

Singapore



Among the world premieres at this year's Singapore International Festival of Arts, an unlikely hit was born. Tickets for *The Last Bull: A Life in Flamenco* — a play about and starring a Singapore-based dancer — were sold out before its three-night run at the School of the Arts Drama Theatre. But Antonio Vargas is not just any dancer; the 75-year-old flamenco master's life provided fertile material for playwright Huzir Sulaiman and director Claire Wong, the husband-and-wife team behind local group Checkpoint Theatre. Through Vargas' story, they explored what it means to be an artist.

Born Aimé Honoré Azulay to a family of French-speaking Spanish Jews in Morocco, Vargas moved to London with his family at age 11 and first learned flamenco from the noted teacher Elsa Brunelleschi. She arranged for him to audition for the eminent Spanish dancer Pilar López, and, at 16, he joined López's company in Madrid. His colleagues included Antonio Gades, Mario Maya and other big names whom he has since outlived.

Vargas set up his own troupe six years later, and secured a seven-year contract with the English producer Harold Fielding to tour Britain and Europe. This led to stints in New Zealand and Australia, where he received a part in the 1992 romantic comedy film *Strictly Ballroom*. In 2008, he settled in Singapore and, today, runs the company Flamenco Sin Fronteras with doctor-dancer Daphne Huang,

In *The Last Bull*, Vargas was featured alongside eight youngish actors who, under his training, managed to mimic to some degree the proud posture, serpentine arms and stamping feet of flamenco dancers. This ensemble of four women and four men offered a shifting counterpoint to the script and widened its theatrical scope in ways that a one-person show would not have been able to achieve, particularly for a tale spanning several seven decades and four continents.

The play began with Vargas guiding the actors in a classroom exercise, segueing into pithy, engaging recreations of the past as they took turns portraying him at different ages. Mainly he just watched, but sometimes he felt compelled to comment on the action, speaking with an Antipodean lilt. Interrupting a re-enactment of his scene from *Strictly Ballroom*, he shared his chagrin at having to do a "fake paso doble with faruca steps" for the movie, even though it did make him famous to a larger audience.

Vargas' professional opportunities seemed to come at the cost of three marriages and other relationships, prompting the actors to question his apparent unwillingness to strike a balance between art and love. And the departures of wives or partners, often with their children, marked key emotional points in the play where dancing took over the stage, with guitarist Sergio Muñoz and singer Antonio Soria accompanying Vargas in expressive passages,

most of which blended seamlessly with the narrative.

Vargas might lack the vigour of a younger man, but he remains a confident performer, filling the space even when still and displaying precise footwork with the heel and toe, especially in the extended solo that concluded the production. But *The Last Bull* also belonged to the actors and musicians, their soliloquies of doubt and fear about pursuing the arts threading through the play. Oliver Pang revealed how a motorcycle accident had ended his budding career in West End musical theatre; Amanda Tee confessed to worrying about never earning enough to buy property. Their stories mirrored Vargas' own, reflecting how one artist's search for fulfillment can be meaningful to others.

Another premiere, American choreographer Bill T. Jones' *A Letter/Singapore* at the Singapore Airlines Theatre, suggested an altogether different sort of journey. In collaboration with 22 dance majors of the LASALLE College of the Arts, Jones had revised this piece from a 2015 work that was addressed to his nephew, Lance Briggs, a former dancer now bedridden by illness; it had its first performance in Paris not long before the mass shooting at the Bataclan theatre. In *A Letter/Singapore*, burning cars, marching protesters and other images of unrest were projected on white cardboard screens as members of the Bill T. Jones/Arnie Zane Dance Company brawled with one another and mixed hip-hop and voguing with space-covering steps and tender duets. Jones' message to Briggs scrolled across the screens, but it felt lost in the collage of movement, text and other media that broached many topics while trying to make sense of the turmoil in the world today.

Visions of conflict were also found in *Black Sun*, a festival commission from Indonesian painter, choreographer and filmmaker Sardono W. Kusumo. Presented at the revamped rice warehouse known as 72-13, it started strongly with the performers crawling under giant woks like beetles, inspired as it were by the plight of refugees from Southeast Asia and the Middle East stranded in boats at sea. But the mayhem that followed — men yelling and rushing about as another waved a toy gun with flashing lights — was a mystery. *DI*

Modern dance may have emerged in opposition to ballet, but the conflict between classical and contemporary dance has often been declared over. Yet, as the London summer season revealed, faultlines clearly remain.

Natalia Osipova is not the first ballet star to have commissioned contemporary choreographers, but unlike most others she is doing so not toward the end of her classical career, but in its prime. In 2014, she toured a triple bill of contemporary choreography with Ivan Vasiliev (her former off-stage partner); this year she invited two choreographers back — Sidi Larbi Cherkaoui and Arthur Pita — who together with Russell Maliphant created an evening of new work for her and Sergei Polunin (her current off-stage partner) for Sadler's Wells. The results are interesting, but miss their mark.

The mismatch is clearest in Cherkaoui's trio *Qutb*, a mystical and somewhat mystifying evocation of cosmic powers and winding energies. A desert sun burns on the backdrop, Sufi melodies saturate the stage. The piece is a series of intertwining, Osipova and her bare-chested companions James O'Hara and Jason Kittelberger snaking together in twos and threes, from which a solo sometimes slithers out.

There's no doubting Osipova's amazing ability as a dancer, but her style sticks out. O'Hara and Kittelberger are already versed in the breathy dynamics, weighted

carriage and fluid interplay the choreography demands, but Osipova still holds herself high and controls rather than releases her movements. O'Hara, in particular, has a wonderful quality of float and fall; beside him, Osipova seems to strain for effect.

Maliphant's *Silent Echo* is far more physically poised in style and so better suited to its dancers, Osipova and Polunin, but it is less ambitious as choreography. Maliphant has a real gift for building sustained compositions from small motifs, but here he has reined himself in. An enthralling section of flywheel spins, for example, promises much, but is abandoned before its potential is realized. Still, Osipova seems in her element, even if Polunin only looks really comfortable when he does some big, beaten ballet jumps that are as impressive as they are out of context.

Pita's *Run, Mary, Run* — the most successful piece of the evening — relies as much on acting and staging as on dancing. Its soundtrack comes from the "splatter platter" songs of teenage heartbreak by '60s girl-groups the Shangri-Las and the Crystals, and Pita wallows gleefully in their dark side. Osipova rises from the grave to recall the fatal romance with a no-good guy she once loved. In beehive wig and lime-green miniskirt, she clearly relishes the opportunity to play both retro and lusty, although Polunin inhabits the outfit (shades, T-shirt, roll-up jeans) more fully than he does the role. Yet it's a mordantly effective piece, mainly let down by

its length: every episode runs out of juice before its music finishes. Perhaps Pita just needed more time.

The Ballet National de Marseille paid a fleeting visit to London with *Body.Dance.Nation.City* by experimental choreographic duo Emio Greco and Pieter Scholten, longstanding collaborators who took over as the company's artistic directors in 2014. Riffing on the words in its original title, *Le Corps du Ballet National de Marseille*, the work is a scattershot series of scenes variously referencing classical style, group action (the corps de ballet), the notion of nation (the Marseillaise is played repeatedly) and the multiplicity of the modern city (the anthem is given diverse musical treatments, from rock to reggae to rap). Fragments of *Giselle* or *Swan Lake* are set against jarring soundtracks or splintered in space. Dancers might substitute each other mid-duet; a traditional pas de deux is refracted through the entire corps. Classical steps are undercut with off-the-cuff gestures, decorum with smoking and shouting. The dancers are excellent, but it's impossible to focus on anything in the headlong juxtapositions of ideas, actions, gestures, sounds, styles and sarcasms. This is ballet deconstructed, dissected and ironized — to death.

Whatever their shortcomings, these were thoughtful works — which is more than could be said of St Petersburg Ballet Theatre's *Her Name Was Carmen*. A star vehicle for principal dancer Irina Kolesnikova, the piece proposes to give contemporary relevance to classical ballet by locating the action in a Syrian refugee camp. At no point do choreographer (Olga Kostel) and librettist (Roman Smirnov) seem to have followed that thought through, for they end up simply transposing the worst Orientalist clichés of 19th-century ballet into the 21st-century Middle Eastern migrant crisis.

The refugees, with their harem pants and scarf dances, serve as little more than local colour and conscience-salve for the distended personal dramas of visiting rich girl Kolesnikova, a dastardly human trafficker and a bland camp guard. Kolesnikova is a strong dancer, but the piece is worse than weak; it's wince-inducing. Classical-contemporary crossovers may not always be successful, but they can be productive and stimulating. So, yes, give me Osipova, give me *Body.Dance.Nation.City* — but please, turn this one back at the border. *oi*

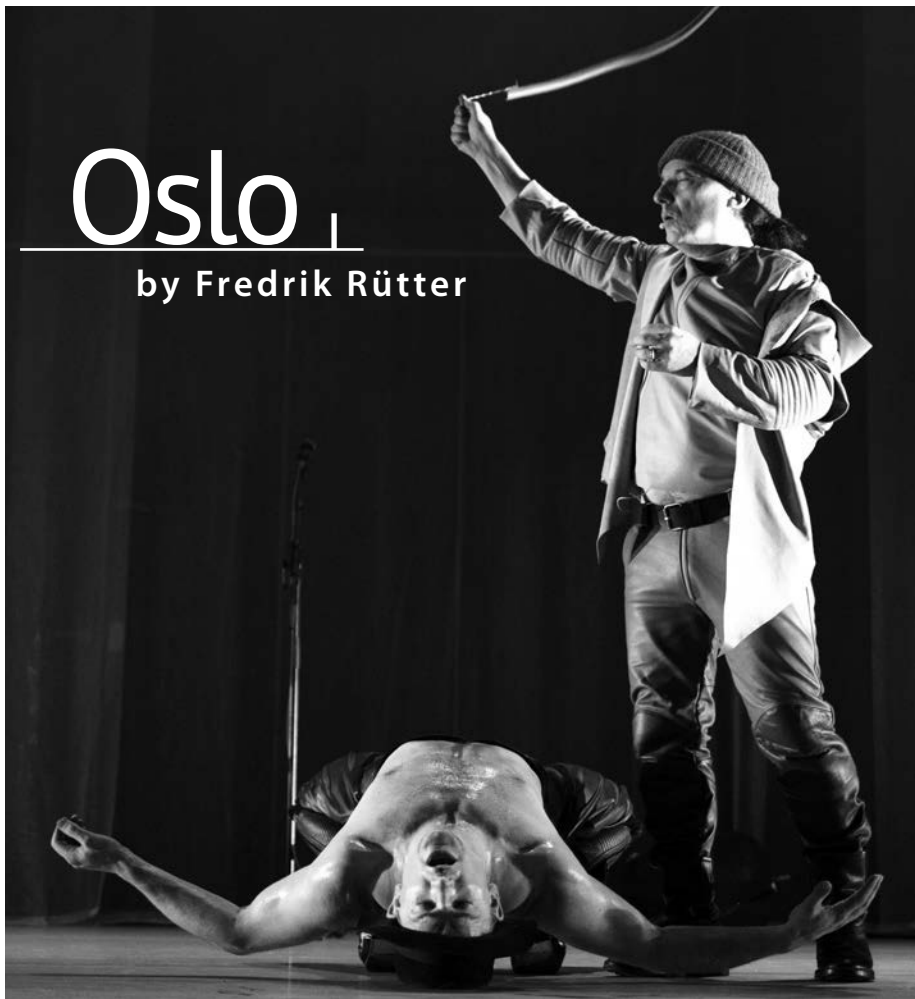


London

by Sanjoy Roy

Oslo

by Fredrik Rütter



In folk dancer Hallgrim Hansegård's latest show, *Leahkit* (which means being present in the moment in the language of the northern Sami people), he and one of the very best yoikers (a traditional Sami singer) in Norway, Torgeir Vassvik, enthralled Oslo audiences with their strong stage presence. It's fascinating to follow Hansegård's slow and tenacious movement, which never stops. He challenges his balance beyond what one thinks is possible, and picks up the rhythm given by his partner.

Vassvik uses his body as percussion while his voice creates the yoiker sounds, which are unique to every yoiker; none vocalize exactly the same way. There is a lot of subtext in this performance and Hansegård combines techniques from folk dance, breakdance and hip-hop. He has a long section with falling techniques and is extremely good at doing head spins, yet the whole time the two artists focus on each other, filling in whenever needed. The end is a more than 10-minute-long whirling section, like a Dervish dancer, making us wonder: how long is Hansegård able to go on?

As far back as 1999, a group of young boys got together in Bergen and started to breakdance together. That was the beginning of the Absence Crew. The group has had great success over the years doing hip-hop and breakdancing, and are known all over Europe. Some years ago, they decided to do more with their dancing, and created a stage show based on an old fairy tale character, Askeladden, the poor boy who manages to win the princess and live happily ever after. More recently, they decided to use Norse history as a basis for a new show.

Absence Crew is now touring the country with a fast-moving performance called *Norr – When the Gods were Breaking*. They successfully manage through dance battles and with a little help from text to tell the rather complicated story of Odin and his two sons Balder and Thor, and their fights with the dangerous Midgard Worm. The set design together with creative use of videos helps out, and the six dancers are outstanding, individually and as an ensemble.

It is not too often that a new company pops up. Such has happened in Oslo,

where a group of sponsors and public funders got together to support a group of 10 dancers for a trial period of three years. Connected with the Norwegian National Opera and Ballet, the group is called Nasjonalballetten Ung (a.k.a. Norwegian National Ballet II), and is directed by Kaloyan Boyadjiev, who has been with the main company for a long time both as a dancer and as a choreographer. The dancers are aged 17 to 23, and it is not mandatory that they be of Norwegian origin. The only criterion is quality. The first 10 are from Australia, Holland, Sweden, Italy, Cuba, France and four from Norway. The idea is to develop and help young dancers make what can be a tough transition from student to professional. They perform with the main company if needed, but also have their own performances. Some will be offered contracts with the main company; already this season four have the possibility to sign up, which means they will be replaced by four new young dancers.

Their first evening as a group was highly successful. Four ballets were on the program, all in very different styles, with three made for the occasion on the dancers. Garrett Smith opened with his *Departures*, a travel through life. He gives the dancers high-speed movements as they change from solos to duets and ensemble dances. His choreographic language is clear, but his use of arms is rather stereotypical. A young Norwegian choreographer, Hege Haagenrud, contributed *We are Special*, inspired by a novel by Marina Keegan, *Song for the Special*. The duet itself was indeed truly special and the two dancers, Klara Mårtensson and Luca Curreli, managed to get the most out of the choreography.

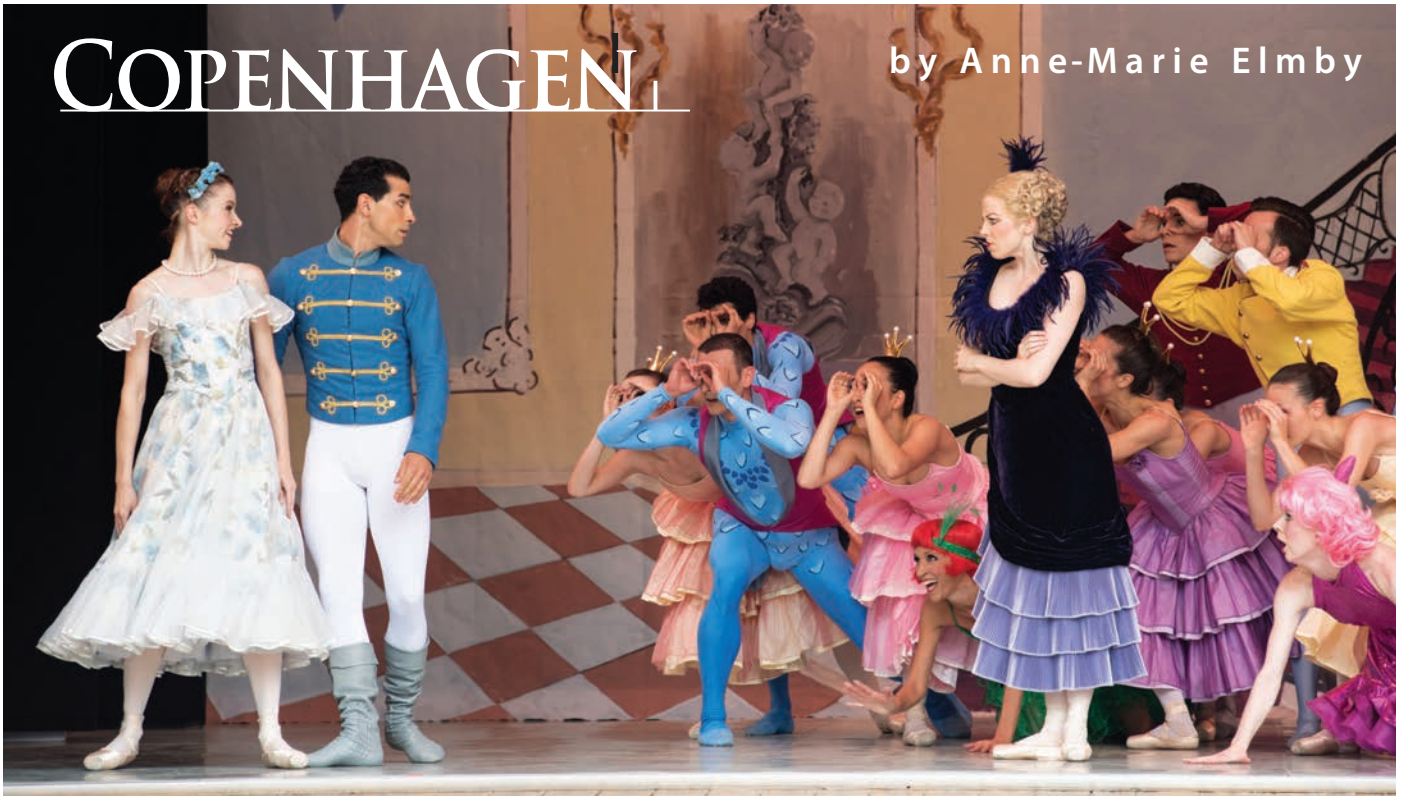
Boyadjiev himself contributed *Picture Perfect*, definitely the strongest of the new ballets. Boyadjiev works within the classical language through solos, intricate pas de deux and trios, and his movements float like the sea.

The highlight of the evening was once again a piece by the master, Jirí Kylián. *Evening Songs* is a beautiful piece from 1987 filled with serenity. It has a simplicity that the other ballets of the evening lacked; there is not one step too much, and the young dancers had the necessary inner peace needed to do this work.

The hope, of course, is that this trial shall survive the testing period of three years, because it is evident already that this youth company is important to emerging dancers and audiences alike. *DI*

COPENHAGEN

by Anne-Marie Elmby



The Peacock Theatre in the Tivoli Gardens presented Tivoli Ballet Theatre's new *Cinderella* over the summer season. The charm of the theatre with its slanting floor, trapdoors and pantomime tradition was perfect for this witty and modern fairy tale choreographed by Yuri Possokhov. Copenhagen is well known to Possokhov, since he came from the Bolshoi Ballet to dance as a principal with the Royal Danish Ballet from 1992 to 1994, before moving to San Francisco Ballet. In 2012, he created *Narcisum* for the Royal Danish Ballet; also of note is that, last May, he received the prestigious Prix de Benois de la Danse for choreography for his Bolshoi Ballet work, *A Hero of Our Time*.

Having previously created a full-length *Cinderella* to Prokofiev's score, Possokhov had a fresh starting point with newly composed music by Nanna Øland Fabricius, also known as the Danish, electro-pop singer Oh Land. For the seventh time, our colour-loving Queen Margrethe II created costumes and scenography for a Tivoli ballet. With Possokhov based in San Francisco, Oh Land in New York and the Danish queen in Copenhagen, the collaboration started on Skype.

Oh Land recorded and edited real birdsong that accompanied the funny, rhythmic head movements of three men in light blue unitards. They flew around and carried the simply dressed Cinderella, who disappeared down a trap door only to reappear in a fine dress to enter the ball, flying from a swing into the prince's arms. Elsewhere, the music underlined waggling hips in the corps and the pas de deux with daring lifts between Cinderella and the prince. The prince even had some hip-hop moves.

Highlights included the two evil sisters posing like cut-out dolls as they chose screaming green and pink dresses for the prince's ball. When they later tried to fit into Cinderella's shoe, oversized cardboard scissors were brought on.

The annual visit by Verdensballetten (World Ballet) in July increased to five locations around Denmark, including for the first time the island Sylt on the German side of the Danish-German border. Again artistic director Steven McRae brought star colleagues from London's Royal Ballet: Roberta Marquez, Lauren Cuthbertson, Marcelino Sambé and Federico Bonelli as well as Xander Parish from the Mariinsky

Ballet. For the first time the married couple Iana Salenko and Marian Walter from Berlin State Ballet joined the group. To allow the dancers time to catch their breath, musical interludes were organized by opera tenor Jens-Christian Wandt.

The dancers delighted audiences with classical pas de deux from *Sleeping Beauty*, *La Bayadère*, *La Péri* and *Don Quixote*, and two excerpts from Wayne McGregor's contemporary *Chroma*. Marquez and Sambé acted out Nancy Sinatra's *Bang Bang* in Kristen McNally's new duet, *One Said to the Other*, with a Latin temperament (she is Brazilian, he is Portuguese). Walter danced a varied solo, *Berlin*, made for him by Ludovic Ondiviela, and McRae openly enjoyed performing his virtuoso tap solo to a special version of Gershwin's *I Got Rhythm*.

The ninth Copenhagen International Choreography Competition took place August 5 in Dansehallerne (the Dance Halls). First prize and the audience award went to British choreographer Botis Seva for *60 Sec*, a fiery work for six dancers with a taste of hip-hop that visualized Ezio Bosso's music *Thunders and Lightnings*.

Tivoli Ballet Theatre's Fenella Cook (*Cinderella*), Robert Thomsen (*Prince*), Nadia Dahl (*Stepmother*) and corps de ballet in Yuri Possokhov's *Cinderella*
Photo: Annett Ahrends

Jury member Caroline Finn, the artistic director of National Dance Company Wales, bestowed her Production Award for the 2017-2018 season to Spanish choreographer and dancer Mario Bermudez Gil, who also won second prize for his duet *Buscando* to Sephardic music.

French choreographer Mathieu Geffré received third prize for his emotional duet *What songs may do* to Nina Simone's captivating voice. The prize for outstanding performer of the evening went to Chinese Li Xing in his co-created duet with Xie Xin, *Touch*, which had a feeling of moving through water. Last year's winner, Taiwanese Po-Cheng Tsai, premiered *Innermost*, featuring an impressive male duo with mutual responsiveness around a red pole.

Jury member and artistic director of Danish Dance Theatre, Tim Rushton, invited Tsai to reprise *Innermost* at the annual Copenhagen Summer Dance in the round police headquarters yard. Under a beautiful evening sky, recorder virtuoso Michala Petri accompanied Rushton's *Kindred Spirits*, a new duet for two men from his company. In Rushton's *DRUMS*, the dancers were inflamed by Chilean Paulo Vargas' inciting rhythms.

A former dancer with the company, Wubkje Kuindersma, created a fine trio, *Mahl3*, for members of John Neumeier's BundesJugendBallett to a dramatically played Mahler piano quartet. Stefanos Bizas danced his sensitive love duet, *A Naked Feeling*, with Alba Nadal, and the evening closed with Alessandro Sousa Pereira's *KRASH*, a fireworks piece for Royal Danish Ballet dancers. More crossover collaboration may be expected, as Danish Dance Theatre is taking over the smaller Takkelloftet stage at the Royal Danish Opera House.

Choreographer Birgitte Bauer-Nilsen's company, Yggdrasil Dance, borrows its name from the world tree, or tree of life, in Nordic mythology, whose roots symbolize the different cultures that meet in the tree trunk and branch off influenced by one another. In *Siku Aappog* (*The Ice is Melting*), the small stage in Dansehallerne became an arctic landscape, where a huge piece of organza was turned into a shimmering and breathing iceberg as the Greenlandic dancer Alexander Montgomery-Andersen stood hidden under it, while Norwegian Thomas Johansen lay resting below.

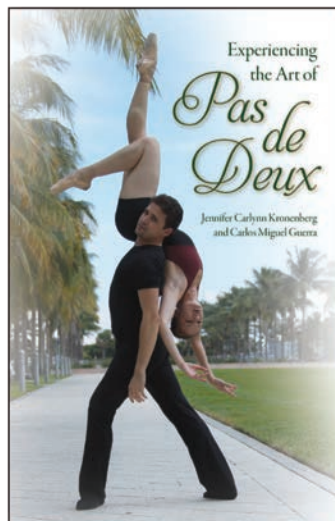
Aviaja Lumholt's initial whispering in Greenlandic seemed to caution against stirring up nature, while Carsten Dahl's evocative soundscape included sounds of cracking ice. Jesper Kongshaug's lighting design captured the northern colours of clear, green-blue water and the glowing red light of an Arctic sun, as the organza ice "melted." The dancers embodied the changes in nature and man with both serenity and heated reaction. This important environmental statement was rendered in a convincing artistic form.

The opening scene of Danish-Spanish choreographer and flamenco dancer Selene Muñoz's *Presence* revealed her in a Spanish dress with glittering bodice and a long, frilled train that moved like a spiky snake; it split into two pieces to reveal her fellow performers underneath, ballet dancer Teele Ude and modern dancer Jonas Örknér. On the black, glossy floor, each one brought their particular talent into play, sometimes in interesting duets or passages where

the dancers performed the same movements. They would also dance to the same music in their personal style.

Three sets of vertical, silvery screens, wheeled around the stage, reflected the spotlights. In front of each one, the dancers focused on their bodily appearance. Ude, small in stature, put on pointe shoes with lengthened pointes that made her walk as if on stilts; Muñoz put on extra hips and Örknér, large shoulder pads.

Flamenco guitar and song satiated with duende ignited Muñoz's Spanish heritage and cast her into cascades of intricate stamping rhythms, while her expressive arms coiled in the air. Halfway through, percussionist Stephan Jarl entered to conjure fascinating sounds out of instruments of all kinds of material and even joined the dancers in exploring body percussion. *Presence* was full of magnificent images; in the final serene moments, all four united in drumming, echoing the heartbeat of life with the added sound of life-giving water. ²¹



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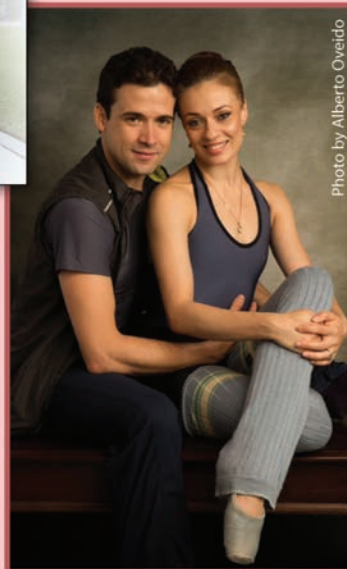
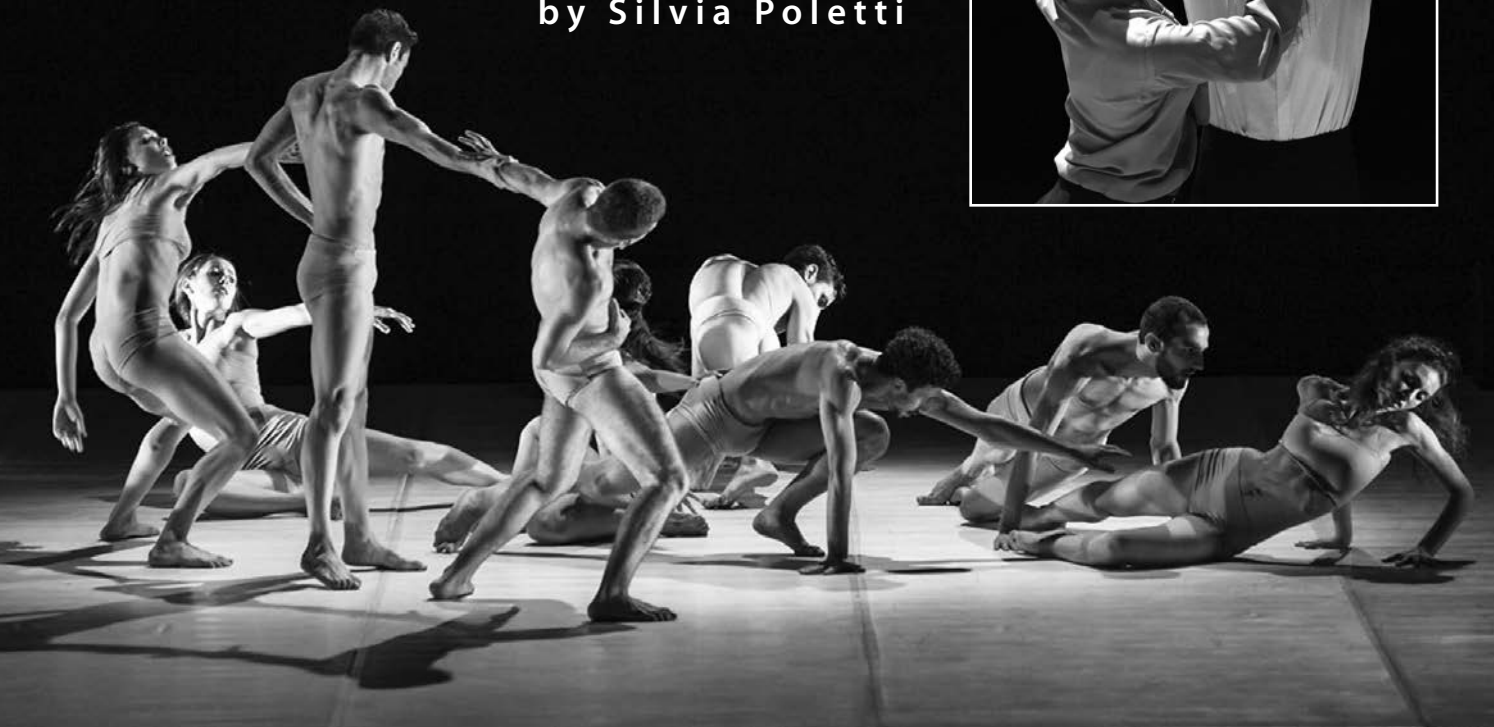


Photo by Alberto Oveido

CIVITANOVA MARCHE & BOLZANO

by Silvia Poletti



Italian balletgoers had many interesting things to see over the summer, including Alexei Ratmansky's *Swan Lake*, performed by La Scala Ballet, a new *Giselle* and a new biodance, *Nijinski*. These last two were the main features of the Civitanova Danza and Bolzano Danza festivals.

In its 23 years of life, Civitanova Danza, set in the municipality of Civitanova Marche, has radically changed its artistic goals, from being a gathering of the most popular ballet stars and shows, to a festival with a more contemporary identity, with carefully chosen works that embrace the different aspects of contemporary dance and research. The festival schedule includes two very concentrated Saturdays, each one with three programs — a short

piece usually by a choreographer of the latest generation at the small Cecchetti Theatre; a larger production at Rossini Theatre; and one, late at night, for riskier fare, in the lovely old Annibal Caro theatre in the old town. One of the two shows in the Caro theatre this year was the very successful, still untitled premiere by Cristiana Morganti, with two wonderful ex-Pina Bausch dancers.

The central event of the first Saturday of this year's program was *Giselle* by Balletto di Roma. Italy's oldest independent dance company, founded in 1960 by Walter Zappolini and Franca Bartolomei, has ambitiously evolved in the last few years to find its own place in the Italian and European landscape. Its artistic identity has slowly shifted away from a neoclassical vocabulary

and popular productions performed by Italian dance stars and now, the recently appointed artistic director Roberto Casarotto has introduced a radical turn with conceptual research, postmodern experiments and deconstructivist visions of dance.

Balletto di Roma's new *Giselle* reflected his vision: a commission for two contemporary dancemakers to create a new two-act version — former Batsheva dancer Itamar Serussi Sahar, an Israeli who is currently artist in residence at Scapino Ballet Rotterdam, and Austrian dancemaker Chris Haring, former collaborator of DV8 Physical Theatre. Neither had ever seen the classic ballet and only had a limited idea about its meaning and place in dance history. This could have been an interesting starting

point to have a fresh perspective on the classic masterpiece, but, unfortunately, that was not the case. Nothing they did made us rethink the classic, neither in choreography, nor in emotions. And there was no substantial difference between the first, reality act (by Serussi) and the second, dreamy act (by Haring); they both used a very physical, grounded body language, muscular and extreme.

Serussi chose to create a group choreography that explodes and implodes. The group itself opens up and closes in, sometimes revealing a collapsed dancer (a reflection of the original Giselle's fall?). The movements are wild and fleshy: dancers crawl, slam, bend backward, twirl, but all that takes us nowhere, surely not to Giselle's world. It begs the question whether the choreographer has really tried to analyze the old classic or has chosen instead to simply maintain his own conceptual vision of dance, just quoting the ancient ballet through fragments of music in the electronic score.

Haring makes a bigger effort to be in touch with the original *Giselle*, although he still maintains his own style, imbued by theatrical effects. There may be a point to the dialogues from American soap operas that the dancers declaim, crossing up and down the stage, but it's not clear what that is. When they walk, their torsos frantically waggle — a symptom of the deep sorrow that is the core of the story? This is indeed the only choreographic idea in Haring's version, so grounded and so far from the usual second, white act's atmosphere. I overheard someone say, if only it was not called *Giselle*. Why accept the challenge if you do not attempt to engage with the original in some fashion?

With a solid knowledge of the subject, you can find your own way to tell a familiar story. German choreographer Marco Goecke did just that with his own full evening *Nijinsky* for Gauthier Dance Company, a bold and lively group led by Canadian Eric Gauthier based in Stuttgart Theaterhaus, which I saw at the Italian premiere at Bolzano Danza Festival.

Goecke has a peculiar vocabulary. His arm movements are energetic, somehow frantic, steely and bold, and his upper body is always involved in twirls and dazzling contractions: they

are the leitmotifs of his style, which is otherwise dry and minimalistic. In *Nijinsky*, he creates choreographic epigrams about Nijinsky's life. The ballet is not conceived as an anecdotal story; rather it summarizes the essence of major facets of Nijinsky's life: his loneliness, inner despair and intimate conflicts about sexuality and love, and art and life.

The characters become symbolic, appearing gradually from a turmoil of gestures. Black, red, grey are the colours of the images, found in simple touches in costumes or in makeup that recall the characters, but just for a while.

The whirling cadence of the dance — mostly developed upon Chopin's *Concertos No. 1 and 2* for piano and orchestra — is almost speedy and neurotic; then suddenly its tempo slows down, a

gesture becomes more descriptive, the relationship between the dancers closer and the characters recognizable. The rhythm and the repetitiveness of the dance is at first puzzling, then intriguing, as the emotional wave of Goecke's pure dance builds. By the end, I was completely absorbed by Nijinsky's emotions, pains and delirium.

Goecke's *Nijinsky* also reveals the overwhelming dramatic intensity of the Italian dancer in the title role, Rosario Guerra, whose emotional power and theatrical personality are so moving, and pivotal for the show's success. *DI*

**Left, main photo: Balletto di Roma's *Giselle* by Itamar Serussi Sahar and Chris Haring
Photo: M. Carratoni**

**Left, insert photo: Alessandra La Bella and Rosario Guerra of Gauthier Dance in Marco Goecke's *Nijinsky*
Photo: Regina Brocke**

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The Paris dance season ended in July and started again in September in almost all-American mode. In July, we saw works by George Balanchine and Justin Peck at the Bastille, and a Forsythe evening at the Garnier, followed by New York City Ballet at Les étés de la danse festival housed at Théâtre du Châtelet. Then, in September, the Paris Opera Ballet season resumed with American Ballet Theatre in Alexei Ratmansky's *Sleeping Beauty*.

The end of last season at the Paris Opera also marked the definite departure of Benjamin Millepied, the most American Frenchman, from his position as the company's artistic director. And, as it so happened, also the departure of William Forsythe as resident choreographer (appointed by Millepied). Forsythe, the most European of American choreographers, had kept a totally low profile throughout the season until that evening in July, which was made up of three of his works, including an enigmatic duo with a prophetically obscure title *Of Any If And*, created in 1995, and *Approximate Sonata* from 1996.

The highlight of the evening was the premiere of *Blake Works* to music by James Blake, created mostly for the younger dancers of the company. This is Forsythe going back to his roots as a creator of dance that takes both gall and glee to perform, and gives as much

in return. Some of those young dancers showed particular brilliance, turning this invigorating piece into a radiant sign of what the future holds for the company; François Alu, Léonore Baulac and the very young Pablo Legasa (to name but three) were at the top of their art.

The Balanchine/Peck program running simultaneously at the Bastille struck a less convincing chord. Balanchine's *Brahms-Schönberg Quartet* is an odd medley of styles, and Peck's *Entre Chien et Loup* (literally, between dog and wolf, meaning dusk in French) demonstrates some of his savvy symmetries, but did not quite equal his *In Creases* shown previously. Peck is no doubt an artful maker of dance, but his pieces remain tamely playful and lack a decisive soul.

By most accounts, New York City Ballet conquered all, though I was not so taken by the one program I caught, which left many others that evening disappointed as well. Robert Fairchild, for all his sex appeal, lacked the distinction of a Greek god in Balanchine's *Apollo*. And the dancers that night in his *Four Temperaments* did not deliver the lustre expected in a company specializing in Mr. B. An exception was the sculptural Chase Finlay in *Duo Concertant*: she is a compelling dancer and able to transcend the somewhat artificial pattern of the ballet.

The most-hyped event in September was the return of American Ballet Theatre to the Garnier after some 20 years. It is a pity they only came with Ratmansky's minute reconstruction of *Sleeping Beauty* in 19th-century style, which proved technically restrictive as far the prince's role is concerned. And even for the women. Ballerinas back then wore demure tutus onstage and never raised a leg higher than the hip. No six o'clock arabesques, as are par for the course in ballet today; instead, much emphasis is laid on petite batterie and speed of execution, which led to some less than pointed feet.

Sets and costumes were true to the fashion of the times, and were on the quaint and kitschy side, with some fetching costumes here and there. The general mood was of a dark and at times ominous fairy tale.

One of the highlights of the evening was seeing Daniil Simkin — though he is a regular performer at galas here — and Misty Copeland, who everyone had heard about but many hadn't had a chance to see onstage until now. The pair triumphed in the Blue Bird variations, to which were added variations by Cinderella and Little Red Riding Hood, making the fairy tale cast of characters complete, though neither boasted much choreographic allure.

As Aurora, soloist Cassandra Trenary delivered quicksilver petite batterie with exquisite style and a perennial smile. Her prince, principal James Whiteside, does look the part, but merely mimed his way through in what now appears an antiquated fashion with no redeeming bravura at the end, save a diagonal of petite batterie; this may be a technical feat, yet lacks the excitement of high jumps. But then there was a fight back then yet to be won for men to be given as much pride of place on a ballet stage as the women.

As reconstructions go, Ratmansky's *Sleeping Beauty* is certainly a fine and meticulous affair. Created in 2014, he strived indeed to recreate the original ballet from Stepanov notation, a choreographic score from the early 20th century. As a piece of ballet entertainment today, it looks a bit sentimental and tame. A pity we were not given the chance to see American Ballet Theatre dancers in some pithier stuff. *oi*

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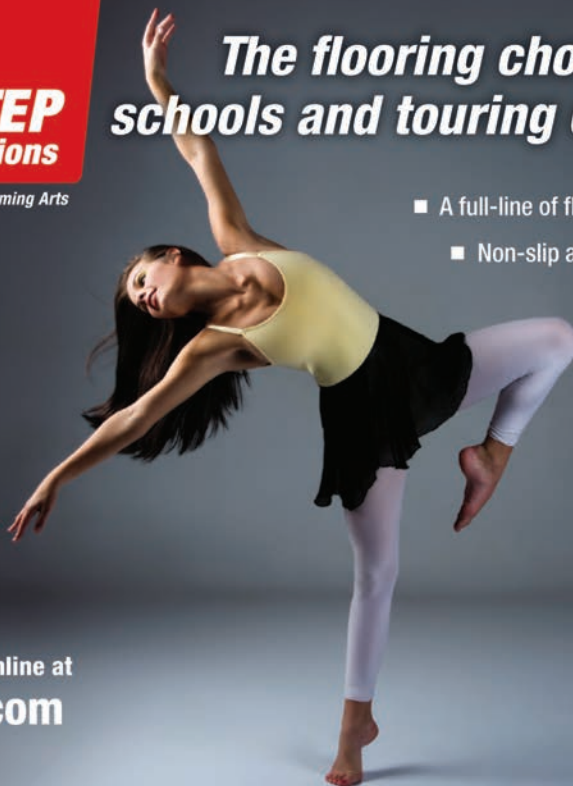
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member. He also called on young, up-and-coming colleagues at dance companies across Europe.

The result was the inaugural gala in 2014, with two performances at Medina Theatre in Newport on the Isle of Wight. The show made £5,000 for the hospice and introduced some spectacular works and dancers to island folks.

Fast forward three years to the third gala, which is now titled BalletWorks. It did 80 percent business over two nights at Chisenhale Dance Space in East London, followed by another two nights at Medina Theatre where it did even slightly more box office. In all, since that first gala, Robinson has raised more than £15,000 for the hospice.

"I wanted to give something back to the island where I was born," he said in an interview. "I wanted to bring young dancers and exciting new choreography to people who really only thought of ballet as something classical. You know, tutus and tights. And I wanted to pay back the hospice that cared for my grandfather five years ago."

Robinson, 24, now a soloist with Stuttgart Ballet, opened the 2016 gala, which I saw in Newport, on a high note. In Marco Goecke's solo, *Mopey*, to a Bach cello concerto, Robinson embodied perfectly the physical angst of the choreographer's familiar, quirky style, finding every cranny of anger, reflection, disturbance and rage in the sharp, sometimes angular movement. Bathed in white light with just black pants for a costume, he created images of youth, manhood and the turmoil of self-discovery.

A pristine Bournonville pas de deux from *Flower Festival in Genzano* followed, with Angelina Zuccarini and Alexander McGowan from Stuttgart Ballet portraying an idyll of romantic love. Zuccarini held glorious balances and her perfect footwork was lovely to watch as she found the sweetness of this piece. McGowan, looking comfortable in classical attire, managed light and elegant leaps into space, quick turns and an appealing port de bras. However, on both nights I saw it, the tempo of the recorded music was too slow to allow the dance to build physically and emotionally. Also, though each dancer related well to the music and choreography as individuals, a more flirtatious spirit between them was needed.

Theophilus Veselý, formerly of Ballet Augsburg and about to take up residence with Gauthier Dance in Stuttgart, is a small, compact dancer with a warmth and spirit that radiates instantly. In *Zweisamkeit (Togetherness)*, a playful duet with McGowan, the two young men both had an easy stage presence. The work, choreographed by Veselý and McGowan, suggested friendship, maybe even love, yet never became overtly sexual. Danced to the Beatles song *From Me to You*, in a version by Norwegian singer Ane Brun, this was a moment of glorious, pure dance.

British choreographer Richard Chapell's *Haven*, created for Louis Stiens, Robinson and Agnes Su, had an unfinished feel to it. This premiere looked like something from the 1970s, with tormented looks and lots of running. It never really came to much. At the end, the dancers stood for what seemed ages, looking off stage right and pointing at who knows what.

Hamburg Ballet dancers Caroline Bird and Eliot Worrell had more success with Edvin Revazov's *Zamia* to orchestral music by Keaton Henson. This piece had a 1960s' Alwin Nikolais feel, with the dancers clad in diaphanous bloomers used to both reveal and hide feelings, and was blessed with dancing that was better than the choreographic material.

Stiens' new ballet *Pine* showed the imaginative attack this young German choreographer always has. The piece, set to music by American jazz vocalist Bobby McFerrin, was muscular, intense and aggressive. It looked unfinished, however, and was stronger the second night when the dancers (Su, McGowan, Zuccarini and Robinson) had better attack and more emotional connection.

Robinson struggled with *Le Corsaire Pas de Deux*, the second classical piece on the program. His large frame doesn't suit classical work and his partnering skills aren't strong. Su, on the other hand, looked spectacular tossing off perfect fouettés and suggesting the attitude necessary to make this party piece work.

All in all, it was a great night for Robinson and company, including a pleasant surprise in the form of a tap solo in freestyle by local island lad, 15-year-old Spencer Darlaston-Jones.

— GARY SMITH

Robert Robinson in Marco Goecke's *Mopey*
Photo: Debbie Allan

Gala / Mixed Bill

When Robert Robinson decided to create a dance gala to raise funds for Earl Mountbatten Hospice on the Isle of Wight, some people smiled. Where was the lad from Shanklin going to find dancers of any stature willing to work for nothing on a small British island that didn't have much dance culture? The answer was easy. Robinson called on friends and acquaintances from Stuttgart Ballet, where he was then a corps

Van Dantzig, van Manen, van Schayk / Mixed Bill

When someone mentions “Dutch Masters,” the golden age of Dutch painting with 17th-century artists like Rembrandt, Vermeer and Frans Hals springs to mind. Less well-known, but retaining a unique position in the history of dance, are a trio who epitomize the “Holland School” of the 1970s to 1980s. Known affectionately as “the three Vans,” Rudi van Dantzig, Hans van Manen and Toer van Schayk are the Dutch masters to whom the Dutch National Ballet paid tribute this September.

Although it was the company’s founder, the redoubtable Sonia Gaskell (with whom these men took their first dance lessons), who first paved the way for serious ballet in Holland, it was the three Vans’ unique approach to dance that attracted worldwide interest, drawing stars like Rudolf Nureyev to their door. Classical ballet was their preferred language, but it was their usage of a crossover culture, a combination of modern and classical dance, which first put each of them on the map.

This is not to say that the three Vans followed the same creative path; on the contrary, the subtle geometry of van Manen differed widely from van Schayk’s plasticity and from van Dantzig’s sombre emotional offerings. The four works that made up the program (two from van Schayk, who turned 80 this month) were typical examples of each choreographer’s oeuvre; they slotted together well to give a picture of the emergence of European neoclassical dance.

Toer van Schayk has been called a Renaissance man, a man of many talents: choreographer, costume designer, painter, sculptor, musician, lighting designer. His premiere, *Episodes of Fragments*, set to music by 19th-century Belgian violinist Eugène-Auguste Ysaÿe, opened the program. It was an 11-minute piece for two couples — two dancers (Qian Liu and Young Gyu Choi, dressed in pink and grey) and a violinist and pianist, all invisibly bound by the music. Van Schayk is known to choreograph by first sketching in detail each step, notating movement from pose to pose; his musical sense and sculptor’s eye transformed these static drawings into flowing dance. The dancers’ arms traced huge arcs away and around the body and an arabesque stretched to form a continuous line with a deep lunge.

If *Episodes* was a distillation of the music, the program’s finale, *Requiem* (1990), set to Mozart’s sublime death mass, was a monumental cry from the heart. Van Schayk painted his ballet in broad, vivid strokes. The décor was a giant black grid onto which were projected videos, fragments portraying the horrors of war, devastation of the planet and destruction of animal life. The focus of the choreography was not merely on steps, but rather on the manner in which the 40-odd dancers (dressed in sombre grey leotards) were manipulated in swathes in and out of complex formations: women lifted in positions of crucifixion; men’s aggressive behaviour; the solitude of individuals; and the suffering of the chained. It was confrontational and totally unforgettable.

The exquisite centrepiece of the evening was Hans van Manen’s 1970s’ masterpiece *Adagio Hammerklavier*. To fully illustrate the beauty of adagio movement, he chose a version by pianist Christoph Eschenbach, played four minutes slower than is customary. The abstract theme marked the ebb and flow of a single relationship, with van Manen’s hand very evident in the minimal, pared-down style.

Lights went up on a static group (three women in light blue dresses, three bare-torsoed men in white tights) backed by a wind-blown curtain. They separated into pairs — there was an uneasy tension to the first duet (Anna Ol and Artur Shesterikov) and movement was grounded: even when

Ol repeated her high leg extension, she released each time into a deep backbend, supported by her partner.

In the second duet (Anna Tsygankova and Daniel Camargo), the emphasis was on high lifts and big free lines, allowing emotions free rein. Harmony returned in the third (Igone de Jongh and Jozef Varga) and there was a glorious moment when all three women were lifted, knees bent, feet angled before they slowly bent back and extended their legs into arabesque en l’air.

Although Rudi van Dantzig’s *Four Last Songs*, which followed *Episodes*, is considered a seminal work, it came over the least well. Set to the eponymous score by Richard Strauss and based on texts by German poets, the cycle describes death as natural and unavoidable.

Four duets, eight couples — one pair setting the mood for each section (Spring, Autumn, Dusk and Evening), while a soloist linked all together. The Angel of Death (tall Vito Mazzeo) at times separated, at times bound the couples and finally accompanied them as if to their final rest. Mazzeo’s feline jumps, long line and sinuous quality were outstanding, but the rest of the choreography was unremarkable and overshadowed by the haunting music. Although the ballet was groundbreaking in the 1970s, today it was distinguished mainly by that fact and by the heartfelt portrayal from the fine Dutch dancers.

— JUDITH DELMÉ



Dutch National Ballet



Hernandez, Campbell and Diaz, Edson / Mixed Bill

A year ago, Whim W'him's dancers were given the responsibility of choosing three choreographers to open the company's fall 2016 season. The selection process for what became the Choreographic Shindig triple bill included viewing hundreds of videotapes and proposals.

Artistic director Olivier Wevers believes that giving dancers the opportunity to curate introduces a necessary element of choice to those most affected — the performers. Wevers, however, does participate in and moderate the lively debates around choreographer's proposals, ideas and skills. The challenge is to create a balanced program, in terms of themes, diversity, gender and more, while curating as a team. During the September run at Seattle's Erickson Theatre Off Broadway, it was evident the dancers chose well.

First up was *Saro*, a tale of loneliness and betrayal by dancer-choreographer Joseph Hernandez of Semperoper Ballett in Dresden. *Saro* opened with a dancer (Jim Kent) interviewing and recording another (Tory Peil, the dance's protagonist). The recording and playback of questions and answers becomes one of the soundtracks for *Saro*, unique to each performance.

Hernandez's movement has a cult sense of belonging, of joining a group, of being absorbed by society. The dancers keenly

observed each other, almost voyeuristically, as they moved in a circle. Justin Reiter and Patrick Kilbane were given some of the more physical movement in a riveting duet. Newcomer Liane Aung offered the most sensual movement, and Mia Montebaro, the most frenzied. Reiter was resolute in meeting the stringent proprioceptive challenge he was given — to maintain balance, no matter what. His movements were unpredictable and would — especially as he tossed his head in many directions, almost pushing himself off balance.

The garb the dancers wore was as much psychological as physical. To resolve their loneliness, they paired up in unusual ways. At one point, they danced individually, then duets emerged for a few counts, all separated again, they did a few steps together, and then broke out into their own movement. Aung seemed to be the conductor orchestrating the formations, with beautiful undulating, mime-like motions. Peil's final soliloquy, danced wearing a mask, ended *Saro* with an assertion of self.

Swan Song, by Jonathan Campbell and Austin Diaz of New York-based MAD-BOOTS DANCE opened with dancers, dressed white and black, leaping or turning onto centre stage from the sidelines. The highly disjointed movement conveyed a sense of letting go — and the movements were as fragmented as the soundtrack was raucous. The dance was inspired by a Charles Bukowski poem, *My Garden*, about beauty, pain and growth.

Swan Song uses solos and duets to query ideas about classic beauty, masculine beauty, queer beauty, lost beauty. Peil danced with fluttering swan-like movements, inviting Kent to a painstakingly slow duet. New company dancer Karl Watson was a standout performing articulate and lengthy batterie. (I counted more than 60 entrechats). Contemporary movement got the most play here, as with elongated twists of the upper torso, Kilban's character and striking physicality stood out as a modern-day David to dance sculptors Campbell and Diaz. Little here is easy to watch as the choreographers have privileged rough over connected moves and phrases. The movement was disturbing for its intimate display of raw emotions.

The final piece, *From Under the Cork Tree*, by freelance choreographer (and former Trey McIntyre muse) Lauren Edson, brought a lighter feel to the program. The message, nevertheless, was profound. Edson's inspiration for the piece was American children's author Munro Leaf's beloved tale, *The Story of Ferdinand*, Kilbane played the title character, the little bull from Leaf's story that took a pacifist stance rather than enter a bullfight ring. This morality story placed him centre stage, and to great effect. Sometimes he dance in his ballet box, perfectly squared, sometimes he did contemporary triplets across the floor.

From Under the Cork Tree opened with the dancers hunched over and shuffling (a motif in the piece), as if they were robots moving through a thick space. The music was gain a medley (Judy Collins and Maurice Ravel in the eclectic mix rhythmic sounds, narrative speaking and Simple Simon Says commands).

Edson offered unison movement (even of the smallest gesture) in V formation, floor dives that morphed into graceful turns, relentlessly reversé and pulsating upper body movements. From small shifts of weight to large gestures of arms and legs, she created tension with dozens of different moments that changed on each beat of the score.

Although isolation and loneliness (*Saro*, *Swan song*) were themes that didn't let go until the program's closing piece (*From Under the Cork Tree*) this "choreographic shindig" was moving and inspiring.

— GIGI BERARDI

Festival Roundup

The third Festival of Dance Annapolis Royal (FODAR) took place in the historic seaport of Annapolis Royal, Nova Scotia, August 25-28. This year's programming featured one mixed bill of Canadian artists and one full-length show from Europe.

The mixed bill opened with *Live from the Flash Pan*, Nova Scotia choreographer Cory Bowles' 2010 portrait of a rock star, performed by Rhonda Baker of Halifax's Mocean Dance. Baker dominated the stage with raw desperation, swaggering and strutting, her long limbs stabbing and chopping. Without warning, she created moments of precarious balance — life on a tight wire where a misstep leads to a long fall. Other moments of stillness became painterly images; the singer crucified on her mike stand, or pierced by it à la Frida Kahlo.

A work from the archives, Danny Grossman's *Curious Schools of Theatrical Dancing: Part 1* — the Toronto-based dancer/choreographer's comic, athletic signature piece from 1977 — was cancelled after the opening show (which I missed) due to a shoulder injury by the dancer. It was replaced with a solo by James Kudelka, taken from his 2014 suite of dances, *AllOneWord*. Kudelka has been resident choreographer for Montreal's Coleman Lemieux & Compagnie since 2008; it was danced by that company's co-artistic director Laurence Lemieux.

In *AllOneWord*, set to Heinrich Ignaz Franz von Biber's *Guardian Angel* sonata, Lemieux became an angel driven by care, circling the stage, her gestures of need and solace shaped by the waves of despair and resignation in Biber's music. The absence of the blindfolded violinist who usually plays centre stage only served to heighten the angel's pain caused by her inability to touch and heal.

Lemieux happened to be at FODAR as rehearsal director for her company's performance of Kudelka's *The Man in Black*. Created in 2010 for BalletMet Columbus, Johnny Cash's rough distinctive voice gives life to a working class world in six songs. The hard living and hard loving in his songs were captured by the quartet's precise gestures, clever groupings, and surprising shapes and lifts.

The festival's most balletic work, *Being and Nothingness – Part 1*, was choreographed by Guillaume Côté, principal dancer and choreographic associate with the National Ballet of Canada, and performed by his colleague Greta Hodgkinson, also a principal dancer. The title comes from Jean-Paul Sartre's *Being and Nothingness*, a dark, post-Second World War exploration of the human condition.

In this 2015 solo, Côté uses traditional ballet vocabulary, its crystalline forms and purity of line, to suggest that discipline, a sense of spaciousness and strenuous grace are antidotes for anguish and despair. Hodgkinson's expressive hands framed her face, her limbs twisted and wrapped around her body either for comfort or to contain emotions that threatened to explode. Alternately, she extended her limbs toward infinity and traced large arcs and lines in space that left nearly visible trace forms. The piece ended without resolution, suggesting perhaps an interior monologue, "I can't go on. I'll go on."

The full-evening piece was *LEO*, a 75-minute cabaret clown solo created by Belgian circus artist Tobias Wegner and performed by William Bonnet, a French multidisciplinary circus artist. The sight gags were clever and the contents of Leo's small suitcase provided many surprises. The animation sequence was folk art that flipped into nightmare. And Bonnet's exit, a classic plant and pay off gag, was pure magic — a nod to Buster Keaton's escape in *Sherlock Jr.*

The performance, however, was less about the man than the set, which features two rooms. Leo's room, stage left, is tilted on its side; one wall is the floor while the floor is a wall. Bonnet is filmed and his movements rotated so he appears upright on a large screen in the adjoining second room. In this parallel world, sight gags abound; water in a bottle poured sideways, a hat and tie defied gravity, Leo crawled up and down the walls like an insect.



Festival of Dance Annapolis Royal

LEO's staging updates Fred Astaire's famous ceiling dance in the 1951 film, *Royal Wedding*, where the room in which he was dancing actually rotated. This cinematic effect, the machinery hidden from the viewer, allowed Astaire his full range as a dancer. Onstage, Bonnet had to work against gravity and, unfortunately, couldn't use a full range of motion or dynamics. Although scenes evolved from clown play to nightmare, Bonnet rarely escaped the limited movement palette imposed on him by gravity, technology and the set.

When asked about the unifying thread of this year's festival — the individual in isolation — artistic director Randy Glynn said that although many of the pieces examine isolation, dance, as a collaborative process, is its opposite. And the performances connect artists and audience, who together become part of a larger community, one that continues to grow at FODAR.

— DON RIEDER



Gala / Onegin / Skizzen

When Stuttgart Ballet gives a party, it's a big one. Celebrating Vancouver-born Reid Anderson's 20 seasons as artistic director involved a week of international guest artists joining stars of Stuttgart Ballet and students of the German company's affiliated John Cranko School, along with more sparkle dust and cascading balloons than you could imagine.

At the final gala night, besides a packed Stuttgart Opera House, there were several thousand people watching on a huge outdoor screen in the Schlossgarten. At the end of the evening, a banner celebrating Anderson's tenure descended onstage. Hundreds of balloons and silver streamers fell. Pieces of gold paper swirled in the air like a blizzard of doubloons. Flowers rained down from the upper side boxes of the theatre.

All this happened after a surprise finale that had the Stuttgart dancers strutting in silver costumes, raising top hats, singing and dancing *One* from *A Chorus Line*. "It was hard to keep the finale a secret," Tamas Detrich, Anderson's second-in-command and successor in two years says. "We had to hide everything every time Reid wandered into the theatre." Rewritten with words that celebrated Anderson's large-scale effect on the company since taking over the directorship in 1996, the Broadway-styled number brought the house down.

Anderson, looking trim and handsome at 67, has had an amazing career as both a Stuttgart dancer and head of the company.

In the early years, his performances in the title role of John Cranko's *Onegin*, as well as in many other important ballets, sealed his reputation as a rare dramatic dancer. But it is his leadership, offering tough love and inspiration to his dancers, that has made him special.

There was a feeling of family in the theatre that July night, with the company's dancers, guest artists and audience radiating affection. The program, fashioned by Detrich, was superbly balanced with contemporary and classical pieces; five hours of eye-popping dance, opening with students of the Cranko School dancing *Études*, in a lovely adaptation of the Harald Lander ballet. The piece built as the older students flew across the stage in elegant jetés and then paused in traditional ballet poses. This gave way to a Grand Défilé, choreographed by Detrich, which celebrated the strength and beauty of this classical company.

Detrich's staging of the gala often paired guest artists with Stuttgart stars. For instance, Semyon Chudin from the Bolshoi Ballet partnered Stuttgart's Anna Osadcenko in a thrilling *Sleeping Beauty* pas de deux. Chudin's elegant leaps and soft-as-down landings matched Osadcenko's feathery turns and rapid-fire fouettés. And Mathieu Ganio from Paris Opera Ballet created just the kind of dance drama expected from John Neumeier's *Die Kame-liendame*, matching Stuttgart Ballet's exquisite Alicia Amatriain heartbeat for heartbeat.

Stuttgart Ballet's Friedemann Vogel, one of the most passionate and elegant male

dancers on the international scene, thrilled in *Tchaikovsky Pas de Deux*, partnering Elisa Badenes, rising Stuttgart star, in this Balanchine bonanza of dance demanding technical precision, speed and musicality. Badenes also dazzled in the Black Swan pas de deux from *Swan Lake*, partnered by new talent Constantine Allen.

There was a surprise return to the stage by former Stuttgart dancer, and present-day costume designer, Thomas Lempertz in Marco Goecke's contemporary *Greyhounds*. Lempertz was a revelation, displaying all the requisite technique and passion necessary to make this quirky solo work.

Other highlights were John Neumeier's lush and romantic choreography for *Lilium*, featuring Hélène Bouchet and Carsten Jung of Hamburg Ballet, and Elisa Carrillo Cabrera and Mikhail Kaniskin from Berlin Ballet dancing Nacho Duato's inventive *Forms of Silence and Emptiness* to music by Bach.

Of course, there were the inevitable speeches by politicians, but these were kept mercifully short. One surprise announcement was that Detrich and Anderson had been made official German citizens. Detrich, born in the United States, and Anderson, in Canada, will also retain their original citizenships.

"I don't know how they ever managed it, as you are not allowed to become a German and retain dual citizenship. Wheels within wheels, I guess," Anderson said at intermission.

Earlier in the week, farewells were also said to Sue Jin Kang, who danced her final Stuttgart performance, giving an emotionally devastating account of Tatiana in Cranko's *Onegin*, partnered by an attentive Jason Reilly. Kang, who now heads Korean National Ballet, proved the strength of her impeccable dance technique and the enduring heart of her response to passionate characterization.

Another highlight of the special Stuttgart season was an evening titled *Skizzen* (Scenes), which paid tribute to the many ballets created during Anderson's tenure with the company. Excerpts from works such as Marco Goecke's *Orlando*, danced by Vogel, and Christian Spuck's *Lulu*, with Amatriain, reminded us of the richness of the Stuttgart repertoire, enhanced superbly since Anderson took over as intendent.

What a tribute. What a week of dance.

— GARY SMITH



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Flicker

Dancers of Damelahamid

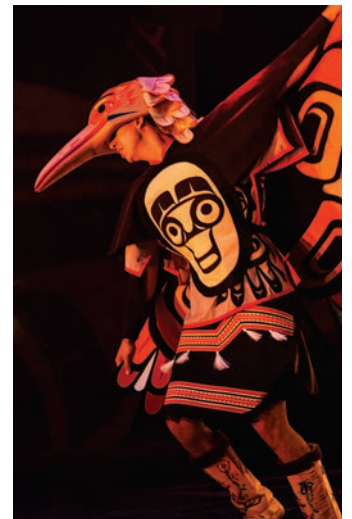


A flicker is a woodpecker from the Northwest Coast that carries cultural significance in coastal art forms. Its tail feather forms a split “u,” a shape that is the secondary element in much Northwest Coast design. This two-sided tail feather symbolizes the duality in all of us — it is through integrating our physical self and our spiritual self that we are able to reach our full potential. Also, light flickers and can easily go out, a reminder that our connection to ancestral lineage needs to be nourished in order to be maintained.

Our recent piece, *Flicker*, bridges the artistic practices of different forms, including coastal, pow-wow and contemporary Indigenous dance, reflecting the complexity of today’s Indigenous identities. The main character crosses space and time, and accesses the spirit world, by putting on a cloak representing the flicker. This journey becomes a learning process by which ancestral gifts are acquired and the capacity to create change is strengthened.

Dancers of Damelahamid, based in West Vancouver, British Columbia, is founded upon five decades of work in revitalizing our Aboriginal art form. Our current directive is to honour this history by redefining and characterizing our practice, ensuring the dances continue to be tangible and accessible for future generations.

— **MARGARET GRENIER, CHOREOGRAPHER, *FLICKER***
ARTISTIC DIRECTOR, DANCERS OF DAMELAHAMID



Top left: Raven Grenier
Photo: Chris Randle

Top right: Raven Grenier
Right: Nigel Grenier
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