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INTERNATIONAL

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DANCE IN CANADA AND ABROAD

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In a contemporary dance class I recently watched, there was a startling moment when a dancer stumbled and almost fell. It was a jolt to expectations, for her and me. On my part, it provided a lens to see inside the usually hidden effort it takes to move with energy and precision, to make beautiful or dramatic or extravagant moves that go beyond our usual shuffling around.

That moment stood out for me as a metaphor in this era of #MeToo, when so many men in positions of power are being accused of having stumbled badly in their leadership. Part of the problem is their lack of support for what continues to be a key issue — gender equality. It remains a thorny issue in the ballet world, what with the dearth of female choreographers.

I remember when Balanchine's old chestnut — "Ballet is woman" — sounded romantically appealing to many. Not so much today. Most people understand now that what Balanchine meant was "woman on a pedestal," looked at and admired. And we know now what is on the other side of that coin: Ballet is man, the active creator.

So, it isn't surprising that Les Grands Ballets Canadiens de Montréal received backlash when it announced its 2019 triple bill, *Femmes*, "an ode to Woman," with commissions going to three European men. The tired idea of women as muse and men as creators caused an international stir. I first heard about it in an email from a *Dance International* reader in Montreal, who described her dismay over the dated, sexist tone of the concept and marketing material.

In March, a petition (now closed) calling for the company to add female creators to the bill soon gathered almost 3,000 signatures. The public outcry resulted in a meeting between Kathleen Rea, the former ballet dancer behind the petition, and Les Grands Ballets staff, including artistic director Ivan Cavallari.

Rea's update on change.org reports a fruitful and respectful exchange, although the idea of three male choreographers was not abandoned. (See our Montreal report on page 46 for more.)

As for that young dance student, her solution to stumbling was to quickly and gracefully move forward with renewed passion. She committed fully to the future that was unfolding through her dance.

KAIJA PEPPER

editor@danceinternational.org

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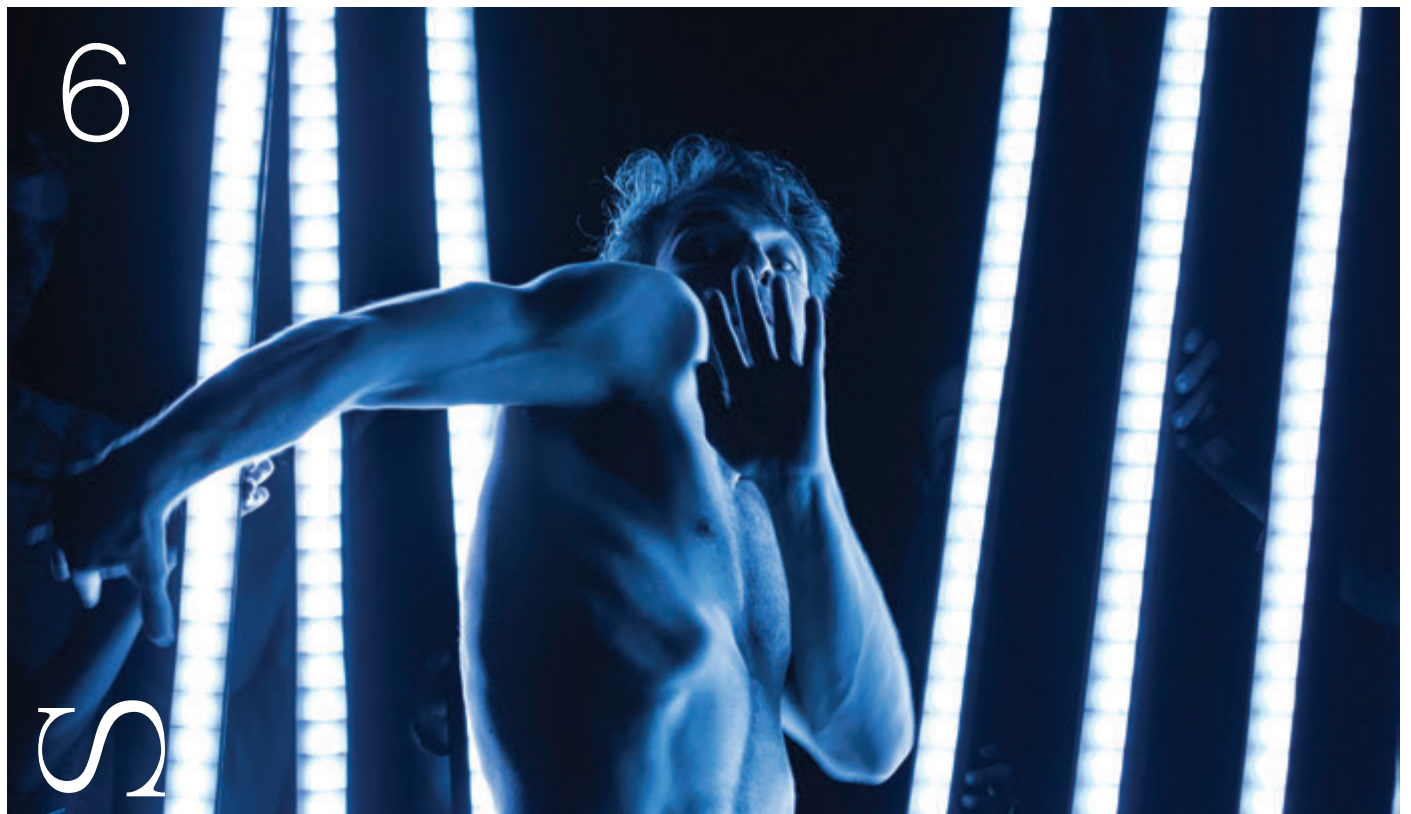


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Dylan Tedaldi in rehearsal for the National Ballet of Canada's *Frame by Frame*
Photo: Elias Djemil-Matassov

CONTENTS

FEATURES

FRAME BY FRAME, STEP BY STEP

Guillaume Côté discusses working with Robert Lepage to stage filmmaker Norman McLaren's life and work

BY JENN EDWARDS

6

THE EVOLVING STORY OF DANCE ON FILM

An overview of new forms then and now

BY KATHLEEN SMITH

10

MAKING SCREENS DANCE

Freya Björg Olafson at York University

BY KATHLEEN SMITH

18

BEING LOUISE LECAVALIER

At home with the iconic daredevil dancer

BY LINDE HOWE-BECK

20

INTRODUCING ...

Four new artistic directors share visions for their ballet companies
Tamas Detrich by Gary Smith, *Septime Webre* by Joy Wang Xin Yuan,
Nicolas Le Riche by Anne-Marie Elmby and *Filip Barankiewicz* by Victor Swoboda

24

DEPARTMENTS

DANCE NOTES
28

OBITUARIES
Martine Époque, Edward Hillyer, Nini
Theilade and Anne-Marie Gaston (Anjali)
BY KAIJA PEPPER

29

NOTEBOOK
BY MICHAEL CRABB
30

DIRECTORY
38

INSIDE ED
Promoting safe creativity in hip hop
BY NEFELI TSIOUTI
40

MEDIAWATCH

AUTHOR INSIGHT
From Mexico to the World Stage
The mission of Amalia Hernández
BY DUNCAN TONATIUH

31

BOOK REVIEW
David Hallberg's *A Body of Work*
BY VICTOR SWOBODA

35

QUOTABLE
Excerpt from *Pina Bausch: The Biography*
BY MARION MEYER

52

CLOSEUPS

PRIZED SOLO
Feminist work *Pour* yields rewards
for choreographer Daina Ashbee
and dancer Paige Culley
BY TESSA PERKINS DENEALD

32

THOUGHTS ON IDENTITY
Cloud Gate Theatre's Lin Hwai-min
BY PIA LO

33

LIZT ALFONSO
DANCE CUBA
At the crossroads of a culture in
interesting times
BY TOBA SINGER
36

GLOBAL REPORTS

VANCOUVER
BY KAIJA PEPPER
41

WINNIPEG
BY HOLLY HARRIS
43

TORONTO
BY MICHAEL CRABB
44

MONTREAL
BY VICTOR SWOBODA
46

SAN FRANCISCO
BY ALLAN ULRICH
47

NEW YORK
BY ROBERT GRESKOVIC
48

MILAN
BY SILVIA POLETTI
49

LONDON
BY SANJOY ROY

50

COPENHAGEN
BY ANNE-MARIE ELMBY
51

JEREZ
BY JUSTINE BAYOD ESPOZ
53

OSLO AND GOTHENBERG
BY FREDRIK RÜTTER
54

MELBOURNE
BY JORDAN BETH VINCENT
55

FRANÇOIS FARGUE'S SUMMER 2018
PARIS REPORT
is online at www.danceinternational.org

SINGAPORE RETURNS NEXT ISSUE

GALLERYSPACE
Hoop Dancer ALEX WELLS



COVER STORY
Louise Lecavalier
in her work *So Blue*
Photo: André
Cornellier

REVIEWS

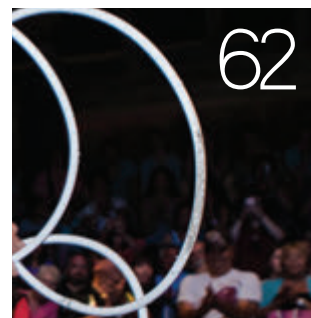
BALLET HISPÁNICO
Lopez Ochoa / *Línea Recta*
Manzanales / *Con Brazos Abiertos*
Pérez-Salas / *3. Catorce Dieciséis*
BY ROBIN J. MILLER
56

BALLET OF FLANDERS
Clug, Foniadakis, Lock, Nijinsky /
Mixed Bill
BY JUDITH DELMÉ
57

GÄRTNERPLATZ THEATRE
BALLET
Karl Alfred Schreiner / *Jean*
Michael Keegan-Dolan / *Antonín*
BY JEANNETTE ANDERSEN
58

ATLANTA BALLET
Petipa / *Swan Lake Act III*
Craig Davidson /
Remembrance/Hereafter
BY CYNTHIA BOND PERRY
59

TORONTO DANCE THEATRE
Christopher House / Mixed Bill
BY KATE STASHKO
60





Dylan Tedaldi and artists of the National Ballet of Canada in rehearsal for *Frame by Frame*
Photo: Elias Djemil-Matassov

FRAME BY FRAME STEP BY STEP

Guillaume Côté
discusses working with
Robert Lepage to stage
filmmaker Norman
McLaren's life and work

In a bright, spacious studio in downtown Toronto, choreographer Guillaume Côté leads a cast of 12 in a pragmatic rehearsal at the National Ballet of Canada headquarters. Huddled around a laptop, the dancers refresh their memories with footage of themselves from several months ago. It is January and they are stepping away from *The Nutcracker* back into something they've been working on in installments for about three years.

Today's section of movement is about stop-motion technology. Using the space like a two-dimensional screen, one dancer snaps into position. The next dancer runs past him into a slightly more extended version of his shape. Then a third and a fourth extend their lines even further, like a human flip book.

Throughout this rehearsal, the dancers discuss musical timing, and the precise angles and incremental shifts of their shapes. Classical ballet steps are juxtaposed with pedestrian walking and athletic right-angled bodies. Their movements fall in and out of unison, phrases split off and converge with ease, and canons form and dissolve, all contained within a fast, mechanical sounding musical score by Antoine Bédard. There's a momentum within the choreography that feels like a running filmstrip. The dance is both technical and technological.

BY JENN EDWARDS

Guillaume Côté and Robert Lepage
in rehearsal for *Frame by Frame*
Photo: Elias Djemil-Matassov



The show illuminates McLaren's body of work, the mediums he worked in and some aspects of his personal life.

This is a glimpse into the creation of *Frame by Frame*, a collaboration between the National Ballet of Canada's Côté (a principal dancer and, since 2013, a choreographic associate) and Quebec theatre director Robert Lepage. The full-length piece, which premieres in June, is inspired by the life and work of Canadian filmmaking legend Norman McLaren, who broke ground in the 1950s and 1960s with his work in animation and stop motion.

After the rehearsal, Côté explains that he first reached out to Lepage to collaborate about eight years ago, having been a self-proclaimed fan of his work from a young age. Intricate set design, lighting and projections are signatures of Lepage's original plays, many of which he acts in himself. He has also brought his unique eye to the restaging of operas, and the work he wrote and directed for Cirque du Soleil, *Kà*, uses one of the most complex and expensive stage designs in the world.

"I wrote him a very nice email, and said I'd love to meet him," says Côté. Eventually, the two did meet and, over several years, started brainstorming potential ways they could collaborate. Lepage came up with the idea of an homage to McLaren, and Côté jumped on board.

It seems that Côté has found a dream collaborator: "Robert is trying to see what I see and get into my brain as much as I'm trying to get into his."

Research for *Frame by Frame* occurred over several years. Lepage always works in short installments, with breaks allowing for the rumination of ideas. Recounting the atmosphere of these workshops, Côté remarks, "Everything is exploration.

And exploration is difficult for people like us." He is referring to the fact that, typically, National Ballet of Canada dancers are busy learning and rehearsing a multitude of pieces at the same time, all of which require a high level of precision. Ballet dancers tend to live in a performance mindset, and there is a stigma in the classical world around the long creative processes more common to contemporary dance and theatre, which can look indulgent from the outside.

In fact, Côté describes the workshops with Lepage as "incredibly structured," with "no wasting of time." Bringing the cast from Toronto to Lepage's workspace in Quebec City helped to calm nerves and open up the dancers to creative possibilities. "When we went there, suddenly everyone was more open to trying things. I think people surprised themselves."

The show is intended to illuminate McLaren's body of work, the mediums he worked in and some aspects of his personal life. Known as a quiet, somewhat introverted man, he created about 50 films and received more than 200 awards throughout his career. While he spent many years advancing the world of animation, he also made live action films such as the politically charged *Neighbours* (1952), for which he won an Academy Award. A critique on human attempts to solve problems with violence, it uses stop motion to depict two men brutally fighting over a flower growing on the property line between their perfectly manicured front yards.

One of the biographical scenes re-enacts the day McLaren met his partner of 50 years, Guy Glover (a National Film Board of Canada producer), at a ballet performance in Covent Garden. Other sections, focused on the work, are lifted directly from his films with the help of elaborate sets, lighting and costumes. Technical specialists from within Ex Machina, Lepage's company, use digital technologies to recreate McLaren's signature visual effects for the live stage.

Such interdisciplinary collaboration, says Côté, "creates boundaries. Some people believe that art should be as free as possible, but in order for an artist to really understand their craft, sometimes it's a good thing to have limitations and borderlines."

While choreographing, Côté has had to constantly consider external elements, including the complexities of the music, lighting and set pieces that will surround the dancers during performance, and, of course, the narrative Lepage is putting forward.

The choreography itself is also interdisciplinary, venturing at times into contemporary and jazz movements. This is in reference to the decades of cultural shifts McLaren lived through, and his vast musical knowledge that came through so strongly in animated films such as *Begone Dull Care* (1951), an abstract visual representation of jazz improvisations by Oscar Peterson.

McLaren's work often draws entrancing connections between visual and auditory stimulation. This is due to a condition he had called synesthesia; listening to music caused him to see moving colours and shapes in his mind, which he often transposed to film by painting, drawing or carving directly on filmstrip. At 24 frames per second, this is meticulous and painstaking work, but McLaren enjoyed the process. He once said, "I try to preserve in my relationship to the film the same closeness and intimacy that exists between a painter and his canvas." The resulting textures in his films are exquisite.

Côté also draws inspiration from some of McLaren's more geometric work that came out of 1960s minimalism. "He was fascinated with simple lines and simple movement. Sometimes minimalist movements are really great; we don't have to over-choreograph the show."

Côté describes Lepage as an editor within the choreographic process, pushing certain scenes to become either more classical or more contemporary, and helping to clarify choreographic choices and "let go of things that are off track." Lepage's precise directorial style is well suited to ballet dancers. "He expects perfection, which is perfect for the National Ballet. Every dancer wants to know exactly which way they're facing. He loves it."

While individual scenes from *Frame by Frame* have been workshoped extensively, the arc of the show will be finalized close to its premiere. This is due both to the company's packed touring schedule and because many scenes rely on interactive projections and lighting that can only be ironed out in the performance space, Toronto's Four Seasons Centre for the Performing Arts. Côté explains, "We have a lot of documentation of how the show is going to go, and a lot of choreography in chunks. We have 27 scenes that we know will make it in, we just don't know how they will be linked."

While flawless lines and timing are important, his main goal is to have audiences relate closely to the characters, which has always been a core component of Lepage's compelling theatre. Artists from all disciplines may find inspiration in the filmmaker's lifelong dedication to advancements in his field. But his love of many different art forms, including dance, is what makes the filmmaker's life and body of work so special, and so relevant to the interdisciplinary way artists work today.

In his early years, McLaren was inspired by poetry, modern art and surrealist films. Later in life, he became fascinated by classical ballet. His dreamy 1967 film *Pas de deux* enhances choreography by Ludmilla Chiriaeff, using slow-motion capture and a kind of stroboscopic effect to leave trails of movement behind the dancers. In the 1990 documentary, *Creative Process: Norman McLaren*, he states that if he had been exposed to ballet as a child, he might have become a choreographer. As Côté observes, "McLaren's work is very choreographic. Animation is choreography without the limitations of physical bodies." ^{DI}



THE EVOLVING DANCE ON FILM

A photograph of a building facade at night. The building has classical architectural features like columns and a pediment. A large projection of a person in an orange jumpsuit is visible on the right side of the facade. The word 'VANCOUVER' is visible on the building's facade. The scene is lit with warm orange and yellow lights, with some green and blue light projections on the left side.

An overview of new forms then and now

STORY OF



BY KATHLEEN SMITH

Vanessa Goodman in Evann Siebens' *Orange Magpies*,
projected on the exterior of the Vancouver Art Gallery
Photo: Courtesy of Evann Siebens



Dance on film as a standalone genre still felt new in the 1990s, when a kind of mini-Golden Era of activity occurred.

Hybridity was a newish concept, and cultural institutions were anxious to appear progressive by embracing it. In Canada, dance and media collisions found regular support from the CBC, Bravo!FACT Foundation and various arts councils. Broadcasters such as BBC and Channel 4 in Britain, and NPS in the Netherlands — as well as many other cultural institutions in Europe, Australia and the Americas — were also funding and shaping the evolution of this kind of wordless storytelling.

Though it was definitely a niche scene, dance on screen seemed to be on a sturdy trajectory of engaged and growing audiences. Dedicated festivals popped up all over, and performing arts festivals expanded their mandates to include cinematic explorations of movement and choreography. When Marc Glassman and I founded the Moving Pictures Festival of Dance on Film and Video in 1992, presented annually in Toronto and with a national touring program, we were part of a small, but fairly well-funded international circuit devoted to exploring the intersections of dance for the camera.

By the mid 2000s, the bubble had burst. A period of intense disruption had led to great change on many levels. Funding and broadcast opportunities for dance on film dried up, and distribution systems and platforms transformed completely. Experimentation found a new home within the visual arts milieu. At the same time, the digital revolution was impacting everything to do with film and video making. New technologies such as virtual reality (VR), augmented reality (AR), mobile internet and social media appeared seemingly overnight. The terminology and discourse surrounding the body and media arts also became more investigative, with thinking about performance, dance, interactivity and the screen evolving and expanding across and between disciplines.

In the years since, the means of making and disseminating media work has become accessible to almost everyone in possession of a mobile phone. In the process, changing ideas about what art is, who makes it and how we experience it are broadening the scope of the creative process. The divide between arts institutions and the milieux they serve has widened, as innovation occurs daily, and funding bodies and cultural distributors struggle to keep up. Work with dance and the camera now also finds expression in museums and galleries as interactive screenings and installations. You can also find it on YouTube, Facebook and other social media platforms, on web channels, and at media, performance and film festivals of all kinds.

But more doesn't necessarily mean better. According to Marlene Millar, a Montreal-based filmmaker and former dancer, there is lots of "dodgy" work out there. "I often see films at a dancefilm festival that wouldn't make it into a regular film festival," she says, suggesting that "there are a lot of people who are just documenting their dance and then putting it out there ... I think dancers are feeling the lack of audiences [in theatres] and with the easier access to technology want to capture their work on video to reach a much broader audience."

Certainly volume can dilute the quality pool. And it's true that dance artists are now familiar with video technology as an everyday choreographic tool in the studio, and also for self-promotion, presenting videos on their Facebook and Instagram feeds or company websites. Making and posting videos is standard procedure for independent artists of all stripes — no specialized training in filmmaking needed. There are bound to be a few clunkers in the mix.

But it's also true that, in recent years, ideas about what is "good" in art have changed. In spite of a general persistent

emphasis on production values, a slick, big-budget cultural product is only one type of outcome when it comes to artistic expression. The kind of work that a DIY aesthetic can hatch may be informal, upending viewer expectations over production values — and indeed this is now an attractive methodology both for experienced artists and a new generation of artistic creators who treasure rough edges and authenticity.

Filmmaker Laura Taler, whose award-winning dancefilms such as *The Village Trilogy* and *Heartland* heralded the beginning of the Canadian dancefilm boom, appreciates how artists with no formal filmmaking training are taking risks and making work that defies convention. "Sometimes not knowing what you're doing is the best thing for making art."

Taler finds that changes in the dance for camera landscape have been mostly liberating. "It's a different playing field, people have smaller budgets now. That's opened up



opportunities for artists to ask "What am I really making?" "How am I making it?" she says.

"For 20 years, I made films for television essentially, which was great and I learned a lot. Now I'm not constrained by a 24-minute or a 43-minute time frame or needing to have a beginning, middle and end. Everything I've made since I stopped making films for TV has been on a loop. Even the idea of how I want to think about time has changed."

Vancouver-based filmmaker Evann Siebens, an ex-dancer and accomplished cameraperson, also rode the dancefilm wave in the '90s. Her current practice situates her closer to the visual arts world than to dance. Most recently, *Orange Magpies*, featuring dancers James Gnam



and Vanessa Goodman, was projected on the façade of the Vancouver Art Gallery over several evenings. But Siebens' dance experience continues to colour her ideas about filmmaking.

"In the filmmaking world, if you don't storyboard, if you don't have an entire film pre-visualized and drawn out, you're seen as a 'bad' filmmaker," she says. "In the contemporary dance world, if you come in with your dance completely written and storyboarded, then you're seen as a 'bad' choreographer. It's an interesting dilemma. I now have the experience and confidence to create a scenario and situation or environment, and then let the dancers and movers improvise and create. The performers who work this way love it, as it's different from most film sets they've been on and is more in line with their dance practice."

Film artists with a dance background, with their spatial intelligence and deep knowledge of body language, have much to contribute to new modes of cinema and media. In fact, they may be essential for the success of technology like VR, which tries to replicate sensory existence in an artificial environment.

The recent appointment of Winnipeg-based dance and media artist Freya Olafson to York University's dance

department as a professor in the area of screendance is another indication that, despite recent upheavals, using media and new technologies to explore ideas about the moving body is more important than ever for dance culture. Olafson's pioneering practice includes live performance, video projections, VR and other digital art forms. (See more on Olafson on page 18.)

Still, most of the filmmakers I spoke with expressed wariness about technology, a skepticism that is at odds with funders' current enthusiasms. Anne Troake, an artist and filmmaker based in St. John's, Newfoundland, says, "I often see work made in service of showing what some innovative technology can do. When we're so focused on figuring out a creation to fit the technology, it doesn't serve the art. I try to be vigilant about the fetishization of technology, to keep the tools as tools."

Ironically, Troake's last project was the 3D dancefilm *OutSideIn*, a 40-minute work featuring Carol Prieur and Bill Coleman. The team started working on the film at a time when 3D dancefilm seemed poised to be the next big thing (in part due to the mainstream success of Wim Wenders' 3D documentary *Pina*, about choreographer Pina Bausch). But 3D distribution systems never reached

critical mass and it seems unlikely to happen now that VR and AR have captured everyone's attention.

Montreal-based filmmaker and presenter Priscilla Guy worries that new technologies are seducing both the institutions that provide funding and the artists who feel they have to follow the money. "I find it problematic in many ways," she says, "because how these programs evolved was not through a reconsideration of what we value."

Rather, Guy believes arts councils eagerly prioritize the latest digital technologies without truly understanding them. For her, this is not a neutral position; it's political. "And it takes art-making even further away from real experimental research — which is what a lot of artists are actually doing."

Guy admits she herself has misguidedly applied for funding for big technology projects. "It was such a relief when I didn't get it, because I didn't really want to do the project anyway." It's a laughably familiar scenario for many artists.

So what's the real source of this continuing fascination for dance and movement expressed through media? It's a relationship that began with 19th-century cultural pioneers such as the Lumière brothers, Georges Méliès, Thomas Edison and Eadweard Muybridge. Their early explorations of movement, photography and cinema set the tone for a century of experimentation. In the opening years of the 20th century, hand-painted films of dancer Loie Fuller demonstrated that light, movement and colour could be combined to create substantial choreographic impact.

These early experiments were popular with the public, who loved watching movement on screen.

So were the later iterations of dance on screen in the '30s, '40s and '50s — in musical numbers featuring Gene Kelly, Fred Astaire and Ginger Rogers, and the Nicholas Brothers, as well as films by Busby Berkeley. The mainstream appeal remains to this day with reality and competition television shows like *So You Think You Can Dance*, and feature films showcasing the world of dance, such as *Black Swan* and the *Step Up* franchise.

Strip away the gloss of sexy new technologies and the feel-good populism and we discover the unchanging heart of the matter is still choreography, still the moving body, ever a universally relatable concept.

According to Guy, "When I approach film from a choreographic perspective, it changes my focus, it changes what I'm looking at and how I'm looking at it. There are so many political, but also poetic, things that we can transmit through film if we're able to shift our perspective from the narrative to the kinesthetic or from the narrative to the rhythmic — choreography helps us with that."

Siebens gives dancefilm credit for expanding the cinematic experience. "I'm interested in breaking the frame," she says, "in moving beyond the traditional two-dimensional space of film, in questioning the status quo. The visual transgressions of dance media, that on the surface seem so simple and pleasing, are an entry point for feminists and activists to have their say, an allowance for a

Strip away the gloss of sexy new technologies and the feel-good populism and we discover the unchanging heart of the matter is still choreography, still the moving body, ever a universally relatable concept.



Hélène Lemay, Sandy Silva, Kimberly Robin and Bobby Thompson in Marlene Millar's *Pilgrimage*
Photo: Taken on set by Jules de Niverville

A FEW FESTIVALS OF NOTE

CASCADIA DANCE AND CINEMA FESTIVAL

First produced in Vancouver by dance artist and filmmaker Jen Ray in 2016 (Ray also produces Capital Dance and Cinema in Washington, D.C., in September), Cascadia will have its 2018 edition in June. www.cascadiadcfestival.com

CINÉDANSE

After previous iterations in Montreal and Quebec City, Cinédanse moves to Arts Court in Ottawa in September 2018. cinedanse.ca

CONTACT DANCE INTERNATIONAL FILM FESTIVAL

Dedicated to films featuring momentum-based dance, Contact takes place every June in Toronto. www.contactdancefilmfest.com

CHOREOSCOPE

Held annually in March, this five-year-old international festival in Barcelona (and its extensive touring program) attracts enthusiastic crowds with experimental work and dancefilm classics. www.choreoscope.com

CINEDANS

Committed to new technology and to adding documentary and performance with media to the programming mix, Cinedans has been animating Amsterdam in March (and beyond with its touring program) since 2003. www.cinedans.nl

LIGHT MOVES FESTIVAL OF SCREENDANCE

Based in Limerick, Ireland, this annual November event offers a well-rounded program of installations, labs, short film programs, features and forums for scholarly and artistic exchange. www.lightmoves.ie

LOIKKA DANCEFILM FESTIVAL

Based in Helsinki, Finland, this event celebrated 10 years in April 2018 with a focus on VR and the future of dance and the screen. www.loikka.fi

complexity of politics, enabled by the moving body through time and space.”

Like-minded filmmakers and presenters around the world are clearly still interested. Despite what he sees as a lack of coherence in much of the dance media work in which new technologies feature, Philip Szporer thinks that “people are attempting to figure out how to present this work — as installations, projections, interactive displays, single-channel exhibits or works for the web. Partly that’s because older delivery systems like broadcasting just aren’t feasible anymore.”

Marlene Millar, who travels constantly to teach and support screenings of her films, says, “I even feel that there’s an explosion of new dancefilm festivals. I don’t know how they are managing, and a lot of them are quite small. But there are also events like Choreoscope in Barcelona, held in a really popular cinema in a great part of town, every night packed; it’s the best-attended dancefilm festival I’ve been to.”

Happily, almost two centuries on, the relationship between the moving body and the camera remains as vital as ever. It has spiraled in complexity, luring more artists, not just dance artists, into deep explorations of what it means to move and have a body, in more and different ways than would have seemed possible back in 1992.

“Work doesn’t have to be cutting edge,” says Laura Taler, “it just has to allow for things opening up — a dance/media work can be a five-minute screening in a theatre, but it can also be an installation on a loop, or something interactive. What’s interesting is the relationship between all those things.” ▯

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BY KATHLEEN SMITH

MAKING SCREENS DANCE

Freya Björg Olafson at York University

In July 2017, the dance department at York University in Toronto announced the arrival of a new member to the faculty — Winnipeg-based dance artist Freya Björg Olafson, who began the fall term as a newly minted professor “in the area of Screendance.”

The curiously worded title suggests that dance on film might be but one aspect of the job. In fact, that’s inevitable due to the depth and diversity of Olafson’s interdisciplinary practice.

Trained in the professional programs of both the Royal Winnipeg Ballet and the School of Contemporary Dancers, Olafson has also studied painting and video. As a young dance student, she borrowed gear from her art teacher father, and editing software and a computer from her high school math teacher, to make small movement studies on video, long before it became de rigueur in the dance community. She holds a master’s degree in new media from the Transart Institute in co-operation with the Danube University Krems in Austria. She’s also a competitive cross-country skier. This is a woman who has no problem defying boundaries to get things done.

Known for smart and wry solo performances that often incorporate video, Olafson’s newer works — such as

HYPER_ from 2015, and *CPA (Consistent Partial Attention)* from 2016 — explore human interactions with screens, digital devices and the web. These works formally engage with technology to yield a potent blend of live and virtual presence.

For example, *HYPER_* constantly moves between 2D (flat, as on a screen) and 3D (dimensional, as in real life or stereoscopic imagery) representations of the human body. “I’m playing with spectacle while also questioning perception,” explains Olafson. “Using tools like black light and 3D imagery and glasses, I’m hoping to encourage thinking about the application of these tools and how it shifts perspective and how we see.”

In *CPA*, Olafson worked with the vast store of imagery that can be accessed online. Here, Olafson, Lise McMillan and James Phillips embody online dances posted from the privacy of personal spaces (such as the ubiquitous YouTube living room dance selfie), which they can see on onstage screens not visible to the audience. Sometimes the screens are laptops propped on tables, or handheld tablets and phones. Only occasionally is the source material (heavily manipulated to obscure identity) projected as a large video backdrop. The work poses questions about the transmission of

Freya Björg Olafson in her work *ME – Motion Aftereffect*
Photo: Robbie Sweeny

"Using tools like black light and 3D imagery and glasses, I'm hoping to encourage thinking about the application of these tools and how it shifts perspective and how we see."



movement information, the brain's ability to pay attention and the meaning of bodily presence in different environments, both real and virtual.

ME – Motion Aftereffect is a work-in-process that explores the idea of slippage, what gets lost or destabilized in the body's journey through the altered physical states achieved while live gaming, or when people become immersed in web or VR environments. Olafson says, "*ME* right now is piggybacking a bit off my previous works. I'm again working with web content — with open source and readily available motion capture libraries — looking at what kind of movement vocabularies are available to apply to ready-made 3D bodies. That means I find categories such as 'charming female gestures' and put them onto an avatar. There's something quite 'off' in the resulting movement language. I'm bringing these efforts at replicating human movement back to the body and the stage space in order to compare them."

Though the works can sound tech-heavy on paper, Olafson has achieved remarkable balance in the often challenging virtual to corporeal equation. Dance never goes missing in her work, as it can sometimes do in dance/tech performance. Rather, Olafson uses it to explore the intersections of popular culture, social interaction and technology in a way that feels immediate, relatable and authentic. In her works, the body in performance holds its own, buffeted by media inputs, but with physical integrity and fleshly power intact.

"Often, I use very simple applications of big tech tools," says Olafson. "A new media artist looking at and assessing my work might think it's not very sophisticated in terms of what's happening technologically. I'm looking for a feedback loop in order to understand what the presence of technology has to do with mediating and transforming the body. And also how that technology transforms my understanding of my own motivation to move."

In 2018, at York University, Olafson is teaching straight-up choreography to undergraduate and graduate students, as well as a seminar on the intersections of dance and visual arts for grads, introducing concepts of technology in both as a matter of course. She is eager to bring her extensive skillset to a faculty that is already fascinated with the technologized body.

"One of the things that excited me about York was the cross department activity — computational design students working with dance students and professors working together," says Olafson "Interdisciplinarity is a tenet that is important to York and it's visible in practice."

As for her own work, Olafson will continue with her personal artistic practice, and is for the time being hanging on to her Winnipeg studio. She will continue working on *ME*. Understanding the lightning speed with which technology is evolving, she is also thinking about the possible implications of what lies ahead.

"VR could go far beyond just using dancers for motion capture and developing vocabularies to animate characters. Think about user interface and what happens if you embody another figure in the space. Or even the potential of something like Microsoft's HoloLens."

Currently in limited release to developers, HoloLens is a type of mixed reality platform that uses a headset and holographic imagery to augment real environments with virtual objects. It's a departure from more conventional VR devices in a number of ways, most notably a sleeker headset and more instinctive user interface.

"There's a gesture for click," notes Olafson. "You just hold your hand out and tap your index finger. Then to open a program you open your hand up like a flower. Programs like this use very simple physical gestures to communicate and/or to control the software. I'm curious about how those languages will be defined and how they'll be built and learned as well. What happens when you get into software that isn't about holding a gadget or pushing a button, but rather recognizes physical gesture?"

In the brave new world of altered realities, Olafson brings a dancer's understanding of the body in space to a tech nerd's passion for processes. Even as the tech landscape buckles, morphs and advances in strange new directions, even when she's referencing old school mediums like painting and wielding video as a brush, her practice is deeply interrogative.

"I've been striving to get to a place in the work where the disciplines that are involved are asking questions of each other," Olafson says. "When they do, I feel I'm moving in the right direction." ⁰¹

BEING LOUISE LECAVALIER

At home with the iconic daredevil dancer

BY LINDE HOWE-BECK



Louise Lecavalier in
Lecavalier's Battleground
(2016)
Photo: Katja Illner



Top: Louise Lecavalier and Michael Dolan in *2* (1995)

Bottom: Louise Lecavalier and Marc Béland in *Human Sex* (1985)

Both works choreographed by Édouard Lock for his company La La La Human Steps

Photos: Édouard Lock

For decades, Louise Lecavalier's unorthodox hyper-energetic, daredevil dancing has left audiences gasping. She has partnered with rock superstars, danced and acted onstage and in films, been lauded by world critics and honoured by institutions for her trailblazing. But what is she like when she's not tossing bodies around?

The queen of cool sits at a bare table, the only furniture on the main floor of her just-renovated Montreal home. She quickly fills two big mugs with tea and, hostess duties fulfilled, settles back with a look of intense concentration.

Suddenly, without preamble, Lecavalier says, "I'm not a real woman." She offers a wry, slightly apologetic smile — and pauses as if waiting for the other shoe to drop. "I can't multi-task."

With that self-deprecating comment, this complex icon of international contemporary dance, this much-decorated history-maker who has been reaping kudos since she created those world-famous, gravity-defying horizontal pirouettes for *La La La Human Steps*, turns her fierce focus to explaining herself. She speaks in spitting bursts punctuated by silences as she carefully searches within herself, treating words as precisely as movement. In these moments, time waits as she ponders. There is no sense of pressure, no chance of diversion.



It's a cold day in the coldest month — January 2018 — in her little house in the city's trendy Plateau district, and more than 40 years since the first time I saw Lecavalier as a teenager in a Montreal dance studio. I have followed her career since. This is our first-ever interview, although her grace and courtesy make it feel more like a conversation between friends.

"Who am I?" she asks. "I may say one thing and the next minute say another. I could say I am sensitive and a fighter ..." For sure, she declares, "I'm moving always. I am a dancer." Obligated to sit still now, she hunches into her thoughts, a hand draped over blue eyes screening out interference. She is 100 percent in the moment, concentrating with the same powerful intensity she brings to the stage.

Lecavalier is a small woman with transparent, sun-hungry skin. The cruel winter light etches tiny laugh lines on her face. Her tousled hair is short, its swoop above her forehead the only concession to style. She has boyishly broad shoulders and narrow hips covered with a rumpled T-shirt, loose jeans with ornamental zippers, socks and heavy sandals. Her disregard for fashion is emphasized later when she shrugs into a well-worn cardigan with a split seam. The outfit could be an idiosyncratic costume for Fou Glorieux (Glorious Fool), her whimsically named company founded in 2006.

Certainly, this delicate woman couldn't look less like that other Lecavalier, the body-slinging Amazon in black bustier (or not) and shorts who blazed across world stages, blonde dreadlocks flying, during her years as the star of La La La Human Steps, and artistic director and choreographer Édouard Lock's muse (from 1981 to 1999).

If she opts for more clothing these days, the intervening years have not changed her purpose. She uses risk-taking to serve her wholehearted quest for truth, still searches "to release the power of dance in me," driven through profoundly thoughtful research and improvisation to push new boundaries.

"I still need a lot from my body, not only to sit and think, but also to dance life, to fight against gravity and death," she says. Then as now, "my job as an artist is to be totally invested. To question. If not, I wouldn't go onstage."

As the eldest of three children born to a family in Montreal, Lecavalier dreamed of becoming an astronaut. She was a good student and liked learning, but, at 18, the dance bug bit and she dropped out of university to join dance groups Poin-tépiénu and Le Groupe Nouvelle Aire.

Fellow dancer France Bruyère's first memory of Lecavalier was her unusually expressive torso. Bruyère, who today is a longtime friend and company rehearsal director, advised Lecavalier of the best teachers in New York, where she took dozens of classes in a variety of styles, favouring Limón technique.

Throughout her career, Lecavalier has trained diversely in order to extend her range and prevent injury. In her 20s and 30s, she took classes in ballet, contemporary dance and jazz. In her 40s and 50s, she included boxing and weight training to maintain endurance, strength, force and flexibility. Now on the cusp of 60, she finds yoga best for her body, taking classes each morning, saving afternoons for creating in her studio.

In the bliss of her early days with La La La, she identified her ongoing need to find how to "be" the dance. "I wanted no separation," she says. Having choreographed one solo for herself, *Non, non, non je ne suis pas Mary Poppins* (1983), she expected to quest alone, but was surprised to find a soul mate in Lock. Overwhelmed by his talent, she suspended her own choreographic ambitions.

There was no hierarchy or schedule at La La La in the early days. Dancers would arrive at the studio at odd hours and "play" or improvise together. Lecavalier, whose modus operandi has always been improvisation, enjoyed these "beautiful games."

She adds, "My pleasure was to make pure form that flowed, but kept its essential roughness."

Those heart-thumping, breath-seizing off-axis horizontal rolls came about through that play. While choreographing *Businessman in the Process of Becoming an Angel* (1983), Lock watched her practise with fellow dancer Claude Godin and "asked me to do a crooked tour en l'air — a little bit off," she remembers. Two years later, Lecavalier became the first Canadian dancer to win a New York Bessie Award for her sensational achievements in *Businessman*. The barrel roll — that crooked tour en l'air — became her signature and was featured in five subsequent Lock works, including *Human Sex* and *New Demons*.

Speed was also — and continues to be — another trademark. Big or small, her chiseled movements arrive like flashes, almost too quick to perceive. This ability to perform lengthy phrases at high velocity is evident in her own recent choreographies like *So Blue* (2012) and *Mille batailles (Battleground)*, 2016) for Fou Glorieux, and will likely feature in her new work to premiere in 2019. These hallmarks have also been incorporated into works she has commissioned from guest choreographers Tedd Robinson, Benoît Lachambre and Crystal Pite.

Louise Lecavalier and Patrick Lamothe in Nigel Charnock's *Children* (2009)
Photo: André Cornéliier

Robinson, who in 2003 choreographed and partnered Lecavalier in *Reclusive Conclusions and Other Duets*, as well as *Lula and the Sailor*, was impressed by her exceptional ability to recall lengthy sequences of unrelated gestures. “Other dancers could remember maybe 11 [sequences]. But Louise could do a lot more. Her memory and accuracy for detail is phenomenal!”

He calls her a formidable force in studio, demanding total concentration from herself and everyone else. “She wants to make sure everybody works hard. She has a driving personality, like a taskmaster. But in other ways she is very generous.”

Even though she describes herself as a dreamer, the lack of structure at La La La irritated Lecavalier enough to begin to set some rules. Slowly, company members began arriving together, slowly they began to consciously create a product together.

At the beginning, “we were volunteers. I don’t remember getting paid [for rehearsals],” she says.

La La La’s rise was international and meteoric, with Lecavalier’s visceral daring at its core. In 1988, the company participated in a London benefit concert with David Bowie; two years later, it joined the rock superstar’s Sound and Vision tour, giving 10 performances around the world. After that came shows with Frank Zappa and Ensemble Modern, and other special appearances.

She triumphed everywhere. But apart from accepting several of the highest honours from Canada, Quebec and abroad, including her latest, an honorary doctorate from Université du Québec à Montréal in 2017, she pays little attention to fame. She considers even the La La La glamour years only as diversions from her serious, rigorous mission of dance.

“The rock stars? For me they were just a side thing,” she says. “My main interest was to research the dance. I’m not snobbish. I never dreamed of meeting stars. I didn’t want to meet them; I might have had nothing to say ...”

However, she did like Bowie, whom she found naïvely excited about joining her in studio where she taught him a few moves to perform with her in the *Wrap Around the World* satellite broadcast choreographed by Lock and seen by 50 million people internationally. “But dancing with [Bowie] was a bit stressful for me; I didn’t want to drop him.”

Despite her experiences, Lecavalier remains remarkably down-to-earth. She has never swerved from her ambition to follow her instincts along the path to dance. For her, dance is a “dive into the heart of life,” a way of achieving her destiny as a human.

In 1993, a debilitating injury caused by “a bad manipulation by a good chiropractor” led to a couple of years of excruciating pain. Despite it, she created and performed La La La’s *Infante, C’est Destroy*, limping badly to and from each show. Ultimately, the pain drove her to take a break from performing to recuperate.

She went to Los Angeles to study ballet, but quickly found it incompatible with her hip problem. Instead, she landed a role in Kathryn Bigelow’s sci-fi thriller, *Strange Days* (1995), and took up boxing to train for her tough-girl role.

Lecavalier does have a life apart from creating, performing and touring for Fou Glorieux. She is the single mother of twin

girls, Romie and Janne, 17, from whom she derives pleasure “every minute,” rising early each school day to prepare their lunches, seeing them off to school and then welcoming them home for family time. Until they were 12 and academic studies took priority, the girls were enrolled in ballet lessons at l’École supérieure de ballet du Québec.

Although her own improvisation-originated dance is the antithesis of the codified art form, Lecavalier likes ballet. “It was funny to see my girls put their hair up. They were bunheads,” she laughs. “I didn’t push them [to take ballet] at all. I was the least-invested parent ... They have ballet legs now and beautiful feet — not like me!”

She also likes to spend time with friends, although these meetings don’t always go as planned. Robinson reports that trying to have a conversation with her in public can be frustrating: “She’s so well-loved, there are always too many interruptions.” Yet he finds her “refreshingly normal on a day-to-day basis.”

Bruyère, who works as the dancer’s outside eye in studio, calls Lecavalier “a little computer” because she focuses so ferociously, working full out even when she could easily conserve energy. Frequently, she takes her professional worries into personal situations. “Louise drives me crazy — she talks too much about dance!” Bruyère says, laughing. “She sometimes doesn’t separate dance and life. She is always questioning herself.”

Despite her renown, huge talent, imagination, courage and persistence, her mothering, homemaking, travelling, worrying, choreographing, dancing and daily responding to queries concerning her company, Lecavalier is still defined by a limitless search for the essence of dance, not only through the intelligence of her mind, but by that fragile instrument, her body.

At the end of our visit, she answers her own question of identity, proclaiming in a typical outburst: “I’m grounded. I’m a light, light person. I’m a thinker. I’m a light after all the questions.” Then, in the pause that always follows her wordstorms: “I’m never satisfied with myself — but I never want anything more, either.” ^{DI}



David Bowie and Louise Lecavalier, Sound and Vision tour (1990), artistic direction by Édouard Lock
Photo: Courtesy of Louise Lecavalier

Introducing ...

Four new artistic directors share visions for their ballet companies



Photo: Roman Novitzky

Tamas Detrich is certainly not a surprising choice to take over Stuttgart Ballet from its present artistic director Reid Anderson. Detrich has, in many ways, been groomed for this position for the past several years. Formally appointed by a unanimous vote by the board of directors of the State Theatre Stuttgart back in July 2015, Detrich has the credentials necessary to helm this world-class 61-dancer company, which he takes over in September 2018.

Indeed, many would say Detrich has been Anderson's right-hand man since being appointed artistic associate in 2009. Mentored by Anderson, Detrich was involved in the planning, staging and rehearsals of subsequent seasons. He was always seen as a nurturing influence on the company, so in many ways this is a natural line of succession that should sit well with dancers and audiences alike.

For one thing, Detrich has intimate knowledge of the all-important John Cranko works that form Stuttgart Ballet's great legacy of repertoire. Having performed a number of these himself, and having staged many Cranko ballets

Tamas Detrich at Stuttgart Ballet

BY GARY SMITH

for companies around the world, he knows their secrets and their strengths intimately. Since Cranko remains the lynchpin on which Stuttgart Ballet turns, a vital knowledge of his repertoire is essential for anyone assuming leadership there.

Detrich says, however, that a prime consideration of his tenure will be to balance such traditional, classical pieces with revolutionary new work that will keep the company at the forefront of ballet exploration and challenge the Stuttgart dancers. In addition to these new works from international choreographers (with whom he is still in negotiation) and the familiar ones by Cranko, expect to see works by stalwarts such as John Neumeier, Maurice Béjart, Kenneth MacMillan and William Forsythe, whose works have been part of Stuttgart seasons for many years.

Born in New York of American and Hungarian descent, Detrich trained in Stuttgart at the John Cranko School, graduating in 1977. Subsequently, he danced the leading Cranko roles at Stuttgart Ballet for 25 seasons. At the beginning of the 2001-2002 season, he was appointed ballet master, becoming familiar with the dance strengths of this German company.

Audiences will appreciate the kind of eclecticism Detrich will bring to the repertoire. And critics will no doubt sense a revelatory new feel to Stuttgart Ballet, even as it continues to move with the technical expertise we have come to expect. The company's own star stable of dancers from Alicia Amatriain to Friedemann Vogel will continue to dance major roles under Detrich's leadership. "I love working with both international and Stuttgart star dancers," Detrich says.

One of the great strengths here ought to be a smooth transition of leadership. Does that mean a lack of change and personal influence? I think not. With no designated company choreographers now, new freedom to explore can take place. Demis Volpi, formerly a leading company choreographer, was dismissed by Anderson prior to Detrich taking the reins. Marco Goecke is also no longer a company choreographer, but his and Volpi's works will remain in the repertoire. Young choreographers Louis Stiens, Katarzyna Kozielska, Roman Novitzky and Fabio Adoriso will continue to make works under Detrich.

"At present there is no company choreographer," Detrich says, "and the press has criticized me for that. That doesn't mean there will never be one. New impulses are a must. I need to discover new talents and nurture them."

Tamas Detrich will no doubt bring fresh ideas, energy and passion to the Stuttgart Ballet, without abandoning the very things that have made it great.

project of free outdoor performances — he wants to "integrate Hong Kong Ballet into everyday life in meaningful ways that will surprise and hopefully inspire the local community to see their city in a new creative light."

He hopes, too, that the company's repertoire will become "a library of works that reflect Hong Kong culture, integrating Hong Kong film, literature, music and design."

Although, in the last four years, Hong Kong Ballet has commissioned works by talented company dancers like the duo Yuh Egami and Ricky Song-wei Hu, its repertoire has leaned toward a European aesthetic. Hong Kong is in a rather peculiar place, richly and occasionally defiantly itself, yet politically intertwined with mainland China. What Webre appears to be proposing — a distinctly local aesthetic that one imagines might borrow from the regional and Chinese works the company has sometimes performed — is bold and intriguing.

However, Webre is keen to stress that Hong Kong Ballet is "also very much part of international ballet culture." Its repertoire includes many of the major male choreographers in dance today — Alexei Ratmansky, Christopher Wheeldon, Jirí Kylián and Nacho Duato. Another staple of the repertoire is Natalie Weir's *Turandot*. In August 2018, Webre's *Alice in Wonderland*, made for Washington Ballet, will have its Hong Kong premiere. And in the works is an "original full-length ballet that would be a valentine to my new home," he says.

Webre emphasizes the importance of inspiring the dancers to "develop fresh interpretations of the classics." To this end, he intends to continue inviting guest artists — Yuan Yuan Tan, Maria Kochetkova and Jurgita Dronina have performed in the past — and aims to launch the first annual Hong Kong International Ballet Gala in fall 2018.

Hong Kong Ballet has its own stars, too; its men are technically polished, its women, led by Jin Yao, are elegant communicators.

Septime Webre at Hong Kong Ballet

BY JOY WANG XIN YUAN

"The stars aligned" is how Septime Webre describes his journey to the artistic leadership of Hong Kong Ballet. To hear him speak four months after taking the post in July 2017, and a few weeks after the company's premiere of Anna-Marie Holmes' *Le Corsaire*, is to hear a man in love with his new city. Its energy reminds him of New York, he says, reserving special praise for the food ("I have gained a few pounds!").

After 17 years at the helm of Washington Ballet, the New Orleans-born Webre, who replaced Madeleine Onne, brings to this company of 46 dancers experience and energy. When Hong Kong Ballet first announced its decision to hire him, the general consensus was that the choice meant experience over novelty, and a steady creative hand over an attention-grabbing headline.

Hong Kong Ballet, which is primarily state funded, plays an important role in the city's cultural ecology. Its collaborations with Hong Kong's cultural nodal points — West Kowloon Cultural District, Hong Kong Dance Company, Hong Kong Sinfonietta, among others — range from choreographic showcases to outreach programs. Webre has begun plans for more frequent collaborations. And with new initiatives like Ballet in the City — a two-year



Photo: Calvin Sit

Previously, the company — which Webre calls “Asia’s most forward-looking” — undertook important tours, most recently at the Joyce Theater in New York, with some success. Looking ahead, Hong Kong Ballet will tour Europe in 2018, followed by stops in Taiwan, and, in 2019, a major international tour is planned to celebrate the company’s 40th anniversary.

All this is necessary but not often sufficient to raise a company’s profile. To do that, its leader needs to present a hefty combination of substance and style, the ability to attract and retain talent, to diversify the repertoire without losing its distinctiveness, to maintain a global outlook while creating opportunities for homegrown talent. These challenges are not peculiar to Hong Kong Ballet, and within that sweet spot between contradictory currents there is all to play for.

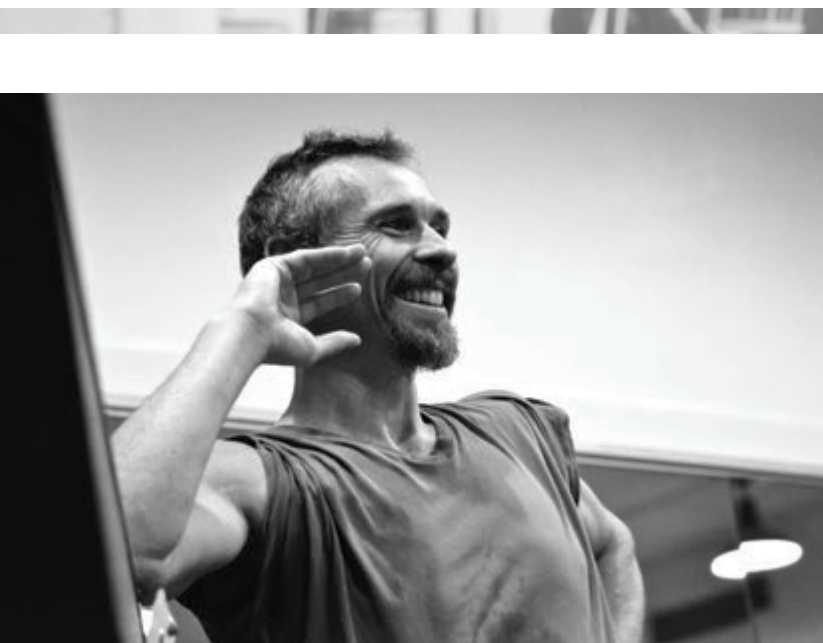


Photo: Jean-Pierre Raibaud

Nicolas Le Riche and the Royal Swedish Ballet

BY ANNE-MARIE ELMBY

In August 2017, Nicolas Le Riche, who was an étoile with the Paris Opera Ballet until 2014, began a new phase in his career with a five-year contract as artistic director of the Royal Swedish Ballet in Stockholm.

Le Riche sees classical ballet and contemporary dance as facets of the same art form. The Royal Swedish Ballet seems to be the perfect place for him to implement his egalitarian ideas, since some of the company’s 68

dancers have mainly classical training and others have mainly modern. While today’s typically versatile training equips dancers to execute a variety of styles and techniques, not everybody has to do everything, says Le Riche, emphasizing the importance of an individual’s personality in terms of casting.

This open-minded view of the art of dance was already present when he and his wife, Clairemarie Osta, also a former étoile with the Paris Opera, founded LAAC, L’Atelier d’Art Chorégraphique, in 2015. The responsibility for this innovative pedagogical and artistic project, situated at the Théâtre des Champs-Élysées in Paris, will be handed over to others.

Le Riche’s colleagues in Stockholm say they find him to be a good communicator and passionately dedicated to his new job. After he left the Paris Opera Ballet (where he danced for 26 years), he studied cultural politics and management, which has prepared him for this top administrative position. Still, he has had a busy year getting to know the Swedish style of company organization. For instance, at the Paris Opera Ballet, dancers have to audition to move from one rank to the next, while the Swedish custom is to be appointed. Le Riche believes in cherishing the existing traditions and does not intend to force through new ideas too quickly.

During his first year, Le Riche taught company class in order to get to know the dancers, and also led individual coaching sessions. He will continue the practice of having guest teachers for the current repertoire, and he has opened the doors to the public to attend rehearsals. As a choreographer, Le Riche has in the past created several works, but he did not come to Stockholm to promote his own creations and says that he is not planning to choreograph for the company.

He has already put his mark on the repertoire for the 2018-2019 season, which offers six different evenings of full-length ballets and mixed bills from established and emerging choreographers. Only Marcia Haydée’s *Sleeping Beauty* and Wim Vandekeybus’ *PUUR* were already planned by former artistic director Johannes Öhmann.

Le Riche has programmed Serge Lifar’s *Suite en blanc* (1943) and Swedish choreographer Pär Isberg’s *The Nutcracker*, inspired by a Swedish children’s book, and in the repertoire since it was created in 1995. These represent the classical style. A contemporary vocabulary is offered in Angelin Preljocaj’s duet *Annonciation* (1995) and Jiri Kylián’s *Wings of Wax* (2008).

New works are commissioned from Slovakian Lukas Timulak, French Jérémie Bélingard and Czech Jiri Bubeníček; the latter will create a full-length ballet.

The Royal Swedish Ballet has a long and distinguished history. In 1773, King Gustav III founded the Royal Swedish Opera and with it a professional ballet company. Former ballet directors include Filippo Taglioni, Antoine Bournonville (August Bournonville’s father), Antony Tudor and Erik Bruhn, among others. It will be exciting to see how Nicolas Le Riche will pursue his vision to enhance the company’s unique artistic identity.

Filip Barankiewicz at Czech National Ballet

BY VICTOR SWOBODA

Pragmatic might well be the word to describe Filip Barankiewicz's approach as the new artistic director of the Czech National Ballet based in Prague. With an 81-member company that performs 120 times a year, hard-nosed pragmatism is a necessary quality, especially when leading an enterprise largely supported by government funds and tourist ticket sales.

“Not many European theatres have the chance to do so many performances,” says Barankiewicz at the company's studios just a few minutes' walk from Prague's famous Charles Bridge. “I think performances are where a company develops the most.”

The 41-year-old also brings to the job his artistic instincts, which were honed at Warsaw Ballet School in his native Poland, where his father, Jerzy Barankiewicz, was a first soloist at the Polish National Ballet. For 18 years, Barankiewicz danced at Stuttgart Ballet, where as a principal dancer he shone in Cranko ballets and other classics, partnering many world-class ballerinas. Prague audiences came to know him as a frequent guest artist brought in by Czech National Ballet before his appointment in 2017 as the company's first foreign-born artistic director.

Barankiewicz's goals differ from those of his predecessor, Czech dancer/choreographer Petr Zuska. During his 15-year tenure, Zuska introduced a large dose of contemporary ballet — including many of his own works — into what had been almost exclusively a classical ballet troupe.

“We're not a small company that can survive by only doing contemporary work,” says Barankiewicz in English, which he speaks fluently along with Czech, German, Russian and Portuguese. “I want to expand the repertory, but I want to concentrate on classics because this is our base and that's important for our large company. Not that I want to turn us into a completely classical group. But before we do William Forsythe, we need to take other steps.”

His first season included the Czech debut of Ashton's famous *La Fille mal gardée*, and a new version of *La Bayadère*, based on Petipa, by Mexican-born, Cuban-trained Javier Torres. He also programmed a triple bill of Balanchine's *Serenade* (1934), Emanuel Gat's *Separate Knots* (2017) in its premiere and Glen Tetley's *Rite of Spring* (1974), which Barankiewicz describes as “very difficult and



Photo: Roman Novitzky

demanding — it makes the company grow together.” The triple bill, he admitted, was “not an easy sell” to Prague's conservative-minded public and tourist crowds who flock to familiar story ballets.

“Tourists come only once. It's necessary to educate our home audience because if we don't do it, culture is pushed to one side. How do you attract young people if they're always on their mobile phones?”

Barankiewicz has quickly begun molding the troupe in his own way, replacing 14 dancers with new recruits, including Canadian demi-soloist Zachary Rogers, hired from the Estonian National Ballet. A tall man himself, Barankiewicz seeks a tall company. The minimum height requirement for male dancers is 180 centimetres (5'10”) and for female dancers, 165 centimetres (5'5”).

“The first year will be a test. The dancers' contracts are prolonged by one year only,” says Barankiewicz, an accomplished teacher who often taught and coached rehearsals with companies in Germany, Prague, Helsinki and Stockholm.

Although the Prague Ballet School continues to furnish well-trained dancers, the members of the troupe hail from 19 countries and include stars like Japanese-born first soloist Miho Ogimoto, who was partly trained at the Royal Winnipeg Ballet School.

In 2018, Czech National Ballet will mainly tour the Czech Republic, but Barankiewicz would like to introduce the company to more audiences abroad. It's a challenge because government funding for international touring is limited.

He's also looking to test audience reactions with “ideas that are probably shocking. Maybe I'll attract people outside the regular ballet audience.” He did not elaborate, not wanting to scoop himself. *DI*



Khoudia Touré
Photo: Robert Wright

Crystal Pite Mentorship

David Adjaye (architecture), Zakir Hussain (music), Colm Toibín (literature) and Crystal Pite (dance) have each chosen an outstanding young talent for a period of creative exchange and inspiration in 2018-2019 through the Rolex Mentor and Protégé Arts Initiative. Vancouver-based choreographer Pite will work with Khoudia Touré, 31, a pioneer in urban street dance. Touré has helped enrich African dance through her hip hop-based Compagnie La Mer Noire, in her native Dakar, Senegal, and on projects that highlight women in African contemporary dance and foster underserved youth through dance education.



Gjon Mili, *Figure skater Carol Lynne, mid-leap, 1945*. Gelatin silver print
Photo: Gift of Ken and Jacki Widder, courtesy of San Diego Museum of Art

Motion Pictures

Motion Pictures: Photographs of Gjon Mili is at the San Diego Museum of Art until August 12. Mili (1904-1984), who immigrated to the United States from Albania, began work as a photojournalist for *Life* magazine in 1939. Utilizing specially engineered electronic flash and shutter synchronizers, Mili's high-speed photos reveal intimate glimpses of frozen moments in time. His work with strobes captured in a single exposure a series of movements by his subjects, often dancers and athletes. Mili's "light drawings" convey motion in a different fashion, by using a long exposure to follow the course of a penlight that moved along with a darkened subject. A single timed flash at the end revealed the subjects themselves.

Vivine Scarlett
Photo: Christopher Cushman, courtesy of Canadian Dance Assembly



Miss Swing poster featuring Ethel Bruneau, Fort Frances Hotel © 1970
Photo: Courtesy of Dance Collection Danse

Dancing Black in Canada

It's About Time: Dancing Black in Canada, curated by Seika Boye, illuminates the largely undocumented dance history of Canada's Black population before 1970, exploring legislation of leisure culture, dance lessons and the role of social dances at mid-century. The exhibition is in Toronto at Dance Collection Danse Gallery until June 22 and at Ignite Gallery at OCAD University from July 11 to August 19, 2018.

International Dance Day

World Dance Day on April 29, established in 1982 by CID, the International Dance Council based in Paris, is celebrated annually around the globe. It commemorates the birthday of choreographer Jean-Georges Noverre, known for his significant reforms in ballet production.

The 2018 message from Alkis Raftis, CID president, suggests ways to approach the past in choreography and education, ending with a quote from Confucius:

"Study the past if you would define the future."

The Canadian Dance Assembly's annual message is from Vivine Scarlett of dance Immersion in Toronto.

Dance, Scarlett says, "helps us move through life's experiences by expressing our stories and our history, by commenting on our present and nurturing our future."



Photo: Denis Poulin, courtesy of UQAM

Martine Époque 1942–2018

French-born Martine Époque immigrated to Canada in 1967 to teach Dalcrozian rhythm classes at the Université de Montréal. She was a co-founder of Le Groupe Nouvelle Aire, the seminal Quebec contemporary dance company where artists such as Paul-André Fortier, Ginette Laurin, Louise Lecavalier, Daniel Léveillé and Édouard Lock found an early home. In 1980, Époque became a professor in the new dance program at Université du Québec à Montréal. Époque received the 1983 Clifford E. Lee Choreography Award. Her later focus on the interface between performing arts and technology found notable expression in the National Film Board of Canada short, *Coda*, created with Denis Poulin in 2014.



Edward Hillyer in James Kudelka's *In Paradisum*
Photo: Cylla von Tiedemann, courtesy of Dance Collection Danse

Edward Hillyer 1958–2017

Edward Hillyer died in Montreal on December 17 of a heart attack. Born in Alameda, California, Hillyer trained at the San Francisco Ballet School and Illinois' National Academy of Arts. As a principal dancer with Les Grands Ballets Canadiens de Montréal, he was known for his dramatic, dynamic style, rigorous work ethic, and command of both classical and neoclassical work. Hillyer received the Clifford E. Lee Choreography Award for his 1989 *Descente de Croix*. He taught for l'École Supérieure de ballet du Québec, and was guest ballet master for companies around the world.



Photo: Courtesy of Marie-Danielle Grimaud

Nini Theilade
Above: 1931
Left: 1998



Photo: Courtesy of Marie-Danielle Grimaud

Nini Theilade 1915–2018

Danish dancer Nini Theilade died on February 13, at the age of 102. The former ballerina with the Ballets Russes de Monte Carlo, who was cast in leading roles by Léonide Massine, had toured Europe and the United States with her own solo programs as a young girl. In 1979, she founded Académie de Ballet Nini Theilade in Lyon, which continues under the direction of Marie-Danielle Grimaud. In her Copenhagen report for our Fall 2016 issue, Anne-Marie Elmby wrote about Thomas Seest's *Titania* series of films, in which Theilade, at age 100, re-enacted her expressive hand movements from her role as first fairy in Max Reinhardt's 1935 Hollywood film, *A Midsummer Night's Dream*.

— Obituaries by Kaija Pepper, with thanks to Anne-Marie Elmby, Jai Govinda and Alana Ronald

Anne-Marie Gaston (Anjali) 1941–2018

Anne-Marie Gaston, whose stage name was Anjali, was an internationally recognized performer of several styles of South Asian dance: bharata natyam, odissi, kuchipudi, kathakali and chhau. The Ottawa-born dancer, who died there on April 5, was a pioneer in presenting classical South Asian dances across Canada, beginning in 1970. Gaston was also a scholar, with a PhD from Oxford University in Indian artistic traditions. She published three

books — *Siva in Dance, Myth and Iconography* (1983), *Bharata Natyam from Temple to Theatre* (1996) and *Krishna's Musicians: Musicians and Music-Making in the Temples of Nathdvvara Rajasthan* (1997).

Her 2014 mixed-media work, *Lady Macbeth*, set in Rajasthan, was created to celebrate Shakespeare's 500th anniversary in collaboration with her longtime kathakali guru Sadanand Balakrishnan.



MICHAEL CRABB'S

Notebook

oldest living inductee, Blanche Lund, is 94. Too frail to travel to the event, she spoke touchingly on video from her Innisfil, Ontario, home about her long dance partnership with her late husband and co-inductee, Alan Lund.

The Encore! Dance Hall of Fame is arguably a misnomer. With the exception of former National Ballet of Canada prima ballerina Veronica Tennant, none of the 2018 inductees is famous beyond the little world of dance — or sometimes even within it. One suspects, for example, that only a small minority of attendees had ever heard of Ola Skanks, a pioneering figure in the development of African diasporic dances in Toronto and beyond.

Intentionally, the purpose of this virtual hall of fame — it has no physical existence — is to honour contributions in any dance form made by foundational or uniquely distinguished figures, regardless of whatever celebrity they may, or more likely have not, garnered in the process.

Other inductees included Toronto choreographer Danny Grossman, performer-choreographer Rina Singha and the late dancer René Highway. Vancouver-based choreographer Karen Jamieson, Montreal dance pioneer Jeanne Renaud, and, in prudent acknowledgement of the importance of deep-pocket donors — “community builders,” as they’re politely known — Toronto’s Jerry and Joan Lozinski.

Each inductee was introduced by a compact video biography and by someone who could personally testify to their importance. As a prelude and postlude to the lengthy presentation ceremony, there were “pop-up” performances, including a new solo choreographed by Matjash

Mrozewski for Evelyn Hart, who had earlier spoken with characteristic depth of feeling about her “idol,” Veronica Tennant.

The origins of this event trace back to the early 1980s. A decade before, National Ballet renegades Lawrence and Miriam Adams pioneered Toronto’s first centre for independent contemporary choreographers, the now legendary 15 Dance Lab. While as artists they enthusiastically embraced experimentalism, the husband-and-wife team were also concerned to preserve and celebrate Canada’s dance heritage. This interest crystallized into the Dance Collection, DCD’s initial monolingual name.

Under the banner Encore! Encore!, the Adams spearheaded the reconstruction, recording and notating of six historic Canadian dance works, presented in 1986. Nine mostly unsung luminaries of early Canadian dance were also inducted that year into the freshly minted Encore! Dance Hall of Fame.

Like the dance reconstruction project, it was intended that the Hall of Fame would be a continuing project but, as Miriam Adams explains: “We ran out of energy and money.” Instead she and Lawrence, with tightly restricted resources, focused on other important aspects of their heritage activities such as archival collection and publishing.

Although Lawrence Adams died in 2003, DCD has continued to thrive under Miriam’s leadership. It receives funding from all levels of government, but its evolution increasingly depends on private sector support. Invaluable as DCD’s activities unquestionably are, its public profile is neither conspicuous nor glamorous. Thus, in order to expand its donor base, DCD constantly strives to heighten its profile through fund/friend-raising activities. The aim now is to prevent this 2018 Encore! Dance Hall of Fame from succumbing to the fate of its ancestor. The ubiquity of the internet and the practicality of building a virtual hall of fame will help in that regard, but major fundraisers are huge undertakings for an organization of DCD’s scale. Something bi- or even triennial seems a more manageable target. There’s even talk of taking the event outside Toronto. Clearly, a momentum has been generated that must not be allowed to dissipate. *DI*

On March 25, more than 300 guests thronged Toronto’s Globe and Mail Centre, one of the city’s newest and most elegant event spaces. One look and you know that the 700 square-metre facility, perched atop its namesake newspaper’s new headquarters with commanding panoramic views of the city, does not come cheap, certainly beyond the ordinary reach of such a perennially impecunious arts organization as Dance Collection Danse. Yet, on a crisp spring afternoon, thanks to a munificent sponsorship, this venue provided the opulent backdrop for the relaunch of a project that had lain dormant for more than 30 years, the Encore! Dance Hall of Fame.

Even if some of the speeches predictably overran their allotted time slots, it was a well-accomplished event, fundraiser and celebratory gathering of dance professionals and dance supporters. A contingent of regulation-uniformed National Ballet School students extended the age range to span several generations. The

Author Insight

From Mexico to the World Stage The mission of Amalia Hernández

By Duncan Tonatiuh

If you browsed the internet on September 19, 2017, chances are you saw a Google doodle graphic celebrating the 100th anniversary of Amalia Hernández's birth. Hernández (who died in 2000) is best known as the founder of El Ballet Folklórico de México, one of the most successful folkloric ballet companies in the world. The group has visited more than 80 countries, has received more than 200 awards and has performed uninterrupted for more than 50 years in Mexico City's Palacio de Bellas Artes (Palace of Fine Arts).

Hernández, who was born in Mexico City, was determined to become a dancer when, as a young girl, she saw folk dancing in the plaza of a small village. She studied ballet and other forms of dance with several teachers, among them Madame Dambré, who had danced with the Paris Opera Ballet, and Hipólito Zybin, who had danced with Pavlova's company. Later, as a young woman, she studied classical ballet and Indigenous dances with the Campobello sisters in Mexico's National School of Dance. In 1939, she became interested in modern dance after seeing a performance by Anna Sokolow and Waldeen von Falkenstein, two American dancers who toured in Mexico. Soon after, she began studying with the latter (known as Waldeen).

For Hernández, 1952 was a seminal year; she founded her company and also participated in shows at the Sala Chopin theatre in Mexico City, for which she choreographed *Sones Antiguos de Michoacán*. This short ensemble piece, set to a violin and guitar trio, with the dancers in colourful skirts, was similar to the dance Hernández had seen as a young girl in the village plaza. However, she used her knowledge

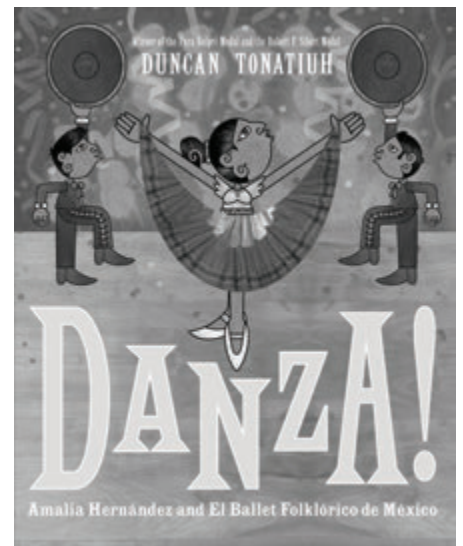
of ballet and modern styles to adapt the folkloric dance (from the southwestern state of Michoacán) to the stage.

Hernández had found her focus and mission. She began travelling around Mexico, learning as much as she could about traditional dances performed for ceremonial purposes and regional dances done in social gatherings. Some came from Indigenous traditions and others from Mexico's mestizo heritage — the combination of Amerindian, European and African traditions.

She also convinced a TV producer to let her and her seven dancers perform every week during a variety show called *Función de Gala*. Hernández had to choreograph new dances very quickly over more than 60 weeks, but the exposure helped establish the group.

The Mexican government asked Ballet Folklórico to represent Mexico in the 1959 Pan American Games in Chicago. In 1961, when the company won the prize for the best dance group at the prestigious Festival of Nations in Paris, it became internationally known, touring in Europe and Japan. Hernández's company quickly grew in size, and today some pieces include more than 60 dancers onstage. El Ballet Folklórico de México became so successful that Hernández had to create two companies: one to tour and one to perform at home in the Palacio de Bellas Artes, where they continue to perform every Wednesday and Sunday.

I have been aware of folkloric dance from a young age. I remember dressing up in elementary school as a charro — a type of Mexican horseman — on Mother's Day and doing the jarabe tapatío, or Mexican hat dance, as it is sometimes called. Folkloric dance is an important part of



most Mexicans' lives, as in San Miguel de Allende where I grew up. It is common for people to partake in local festivities where dance is often an integral part of the celebrations. It is also common for young people, especially children, to perform folkloric dances to celebrate important occasions.

I came to the United States as a teenager to attend high school and later on college. As a young adult, I became aware of the importance of folkloric dance for people of Mexican origin and, on dates that are significant for Mexican-Americans, like Cinco de Mayo — a holiday that commemorates the unlikely victory of the Mexican army over the invading French on May 5, 1862 — I always saw dancers stomping and swirling to the sound of the mariachis.

It was only fairly recently, though, that I became aware of Hernández and her impact, when I learned that my mother-in-law had danced with the Ballet Folklórico de México in the 1970s. The idea for a young readers' book about Hernández began to brew in my mind, so that children of Mexican origin can feel proud of their roots, beautiful dances and folklore.

Duncan Tonatiuh is the author and illustrator of Danza! Amalia Hernández and El Ballet Folklórico de México, published by Abrams Books for Young Readers in 2017.

PRIZED SOLO



BY TESSA PERKINS DENEAULT

Feminist work *Pour* yields rewards for choreographer Daina Ashbee and dancer Paige Culley

In 2016, Daina Ashbee was awarded the Prix Découverte de la danse for her solo, *Pour*, which premiered in Montreal at La Chapelle. The following year, Paige Culley performed *Pour* at Festival TransAmériques and received the same award for her interpretation of Ashbee's choreography.

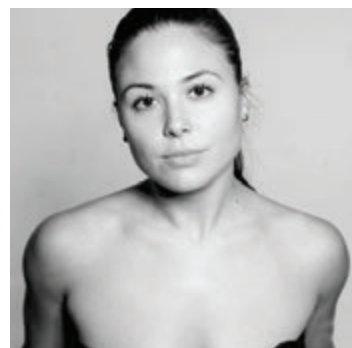
The awards, part of the annual Prix de la danse de Montréal, consist of \$5,000 and a one-week creative residency. Culley plans to use the residency to work on her personal practice. "I'm curious about developing what my sense of making dance is without being in correlation with another artist," she says.

Culley, who trained at the School of Toronto Dance Theatre and was a member of Compagnie Marie Chouinard for five years, is currently a freelance artist. She first worked for Ashbee in 2011, performing in *Unrelated*. The opportunity to tackle *Pour*, a challenging nude solo, "came at a time when I was looking for a challenge."

She had gained some experience dancing nude with Chouinard's company, although in a group setting and often with low lighting. After taking a workshop with Austrian Doris Uhlich and appearing in Uhlich's *More than Naked*, Culley became more comfortable in her skin, first during rehearsals and then in a performance that had 20 dancers wiggle their flesh, slap their bodies against each other and shake to the beat as Uhlich served as an onstage DJ.

Culley's perspective on nudity in dance shifted to something that is safe and not necessarily sexually loaded. Referencing choreographer Daniel Léveillé's philosophy that full nudity actually erases the sexuality associated with the body, Culley explains that she now views nudity as simply another way to costume a dancer that conveys a great deal about the choreography.

Since its Montreal premiere, *Pour* has toured across Canada to Vancouver, as well as to France, Finland, Spain and



Daina Ashbee
Photo: Patrice Mathieu

the Czech Republic. The work has been received positively, says Culley, although it places an intense demand on the audience due to its confrontational nature, use of repetition and slow build-up to seemingly painful movements as Culley writhes around on the floor, slaps her limbs on the stage, and screams in anguish and exasperation. Many viewers perceive *Pour* as violent and have asked during talkbacks why Culley was hurting herself onstage, but she said that, while the piece has its physical demands, it's no more painful than any other work she's performed. On the contrary, Culley finds the piece to be empowering and even playful.

Continued on page 34

THOUGHTS ON IDENTITY

Cloud Gate Theatre's Lin Hwai-min

BY PIA LO



Lin Hwai-min
Photo: Barry Lam

Top: Cloud Gate Dance Theatre's Huang
Mei-ya in Lin Hwai-min's *Formosa*
Photo: Liu Chen-hsiang

Taiwan is an ethnically diverse country with a post-colonial history of just over 70 years and a disputed political identity. Questions about Taiwanese identity spark ever-evolving debates, and those seeking answers often look to the arts.

Cloud Gate Dance Theatre, formed in 1973, is Taiwan's first and, still, only full-time professional dance company. Lin Hwai-min, the company's founder, choreographer and artistic director (until his retirement at the end of 2019, when he will be succeeded by Cheng Tsung-lung, artistic director of Cloud Gate 2), is a luminary of Taiwanese modern dance and culture, and many of his more than 90 works depict experiences relating to Taiwan.

One of his earliest, *Legacy*, created in 1978, is about the pioneering independence of the first wave of Chinese settlers to Taiwan some 400 years ago. *Rice*, inspired by the staple crop, premiered in 2013 with an open-air

performance in the rice paddies of Chi-shang, where Taiwan's renowned Emperor's Rice is grown.

However, Lin rejects the idea that his works attempt to define a Taiwanese identity. "I live in Taiwan, I work in Taiwan, all my input is from Taiwan. It's only natural for me to use local material."

Yet, Lin says, his works are more broadly based expressions of his own diverse experiences. "I have benefited from a mixed bag of backgrounds. My great-grandfather and grandfather, both famous calligraphers and poets, were 'old-school' Chinese. My parents were educated in Tokyo. Many of my dancers think I'm American because of the way I say things and the way I think."

Lin began as a writer, earning a master's degree in creative writing from the University of Iowa, before taking modern dance classes at Martha Graham's school in New York. Lin doesn't have much formal dance training, but he

Continued on page 34

Continued from page 32

This contrast between suffering and empowerment is intentional as Ashbee presents bodies in ways that subvert commonly held beliefs and assumptions.

“People say they feel the work is honest, especially women,” says Culley. Men, she says, often think they’re not getting it as they’re unsure how to look at a naked female body as something other than an object of sexual desire.

Ashbee, of Cree, Métis and European ancestry, has had her work, which tackles subjects including female sexuality, Métis identity and environmental issues, performed at festivals around the world. She is the artist-in-residence at Montreal’s Agora de la danse until 2020, as well as an associate artist of Centre Création O Vertigo.

Pour places the naked performer in stark, bright light. It consists largely of simple movements, slow moving and held for a very long time. Ashbee explained at a talkback during the 2018 PuSh International Performing

Arts Festival in Vancouver that the solo was originally inspired by the menstrual cycle’s intense emotions and transformations. She first imagined there would be blood on the stage, but realized blood was unnecessary and the choreography itself could evoke the pain of the female experience she wanted to represent.

Culley sees the work as feminist in many ways. “A lot of it is loaded just in the fact that I’m exposing my body to be looked at,” she says, explaining that her body is presented in a raw way that is not meant to be beautiful. “The work is feminist in that it does play on the border between a body that’s often seen as sexualized and the idea of what my body should look like as a young woman.”

Culley and Ashbee, true collaborators, have much in common: both are in their mid-twenties and moved to Montreal from British Columbia, and, more importantly, they share a passion for confrontational, feminist works of art. *DI*

Continued from page 33

has created a distinct movement language comprised of martial arts, qigong and modern dance, which his company members study alongside calligraphy and meditation.

Lin’s newest work, *Formosa*, premiered in Taipei in November 2017, and is currently touring internationally. *Formosa*, a Portuguese word for beautiful, is also Taiwan’s former name as a short-lived island republic in 1895, before it ceded to Japanese rule.

“*Formosa* is just a metaphor,” Lin says. “The work is universal, about people, their lives, typhoons, earthquakes, internal fighting — just like many other places in the world. It’s about chaos.”

“I have benefited from a mixed bag of backgrounds. My great-grandfather and grandfather, both famous calligraphers and poets, were ‘old-school’ Chinese. My parents were educated in Tokyo.”

— Lin Hwai-min

Lin’s creative process began by reading poems and essays by Taiwanese Chiang Hsun. “Although the excerpts I read were about the beauty of nature and people,” he says, “*Formosa* is not about beauty in the traditional sense.” The piece is violent and turbulent, but, he explains, “reality is cruel nowadays.”

Two years ago, a passenger aircraft crashed into the Tamsui River, near where he lives. “It was horrifying,” Lin says. “Every morning, I was awakened by the noise of helicopters searching for the bodies of the victims, and prayed they would find them. That was a great anxiety for me. I realized only after *Formosa* was completed that the helicopter was still flying in my mind. I never planned to choreograph anything about it, but whatever work I do, I draw from my life.” *DI*

Photos: Sarah Schaeffer, Gilles Weber

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Book Review

A Body of Work
By David Hallberg
Touchstone

www.simonandschuster.ca

Had David Hallberg not suffered a career-threatening leg injury, he probably would not have written this touching and inspiring autobiography. He wrote much of *A Body of Work*, subtitled *Dancing to the Edge and Back*, during the almost two years that he was undergoing extensive physiotherapy in Melbourne, Australia, and recuperating at home in New York. Certainly he would have preferred to write under different circumstances, but the layoff gave him time to reflect on the byways that had brought him to the pinnacle of the ballet world as principal dancer at both American Ballet Theatre and the Bolshoi Ballet, the first American to achieve that distinction.

When the renovated Bolshoi Theatre reopened in 2011, Hallberg was chosen to dance the male lead in *Sleeping Beauty* with reigning star Svetlana Zakharova in the title role. Awaiting his first entrance, Hallberg writes, it “felt as though I were in a pressure cooker. It was unbearable.” However, after the final curtain, knowing they had performed well, the two hugged and “gasp[ed] enormous breaths of relief.” An artist can experience no greater moment of satisfaction, and Hallberg recounts many of them.

Yet the overall impression of the book is one of underlying sadness. Each chapter seems to bring its own tale of woe.

His tribulations began in childhood. The relentless bullying that he endured at the hands of elementary- and high-school classmates hovers like a grim pall over the early chapters. Teased for his appearance (“I was effeminate”), Hallberg was once doused with a bottle of perfume just before class. The bullying continued for several long years. “I dreaded leaving home to head for the bus stop,” he writes. “I realize now how incredibly lucky I was to find both escape and a form of salvation in dance.”

Watching Fred Astaire on TV inspired young Hallberg to tape nickels to his shoes and create tap sounds in the basement. At 10, in Phoenix, Arizona, he was studying tap, jazz and hip hop. At 11, he added ballet reluctantly since ballet was not “cool.” But participation in Arizona Ballet’s *Nutcracker* illuminated his life’s path.

A strict Vaganova-trained teacher at School of Arizona Ballet named Kee Juan Han instilled the discipline and love of work that gave teenage Hallberg the ambition to aim for an American Ballet Theatre career, as well as the nerve to send an audition tape (now on YouTube) to the Paris Opera Ballet.

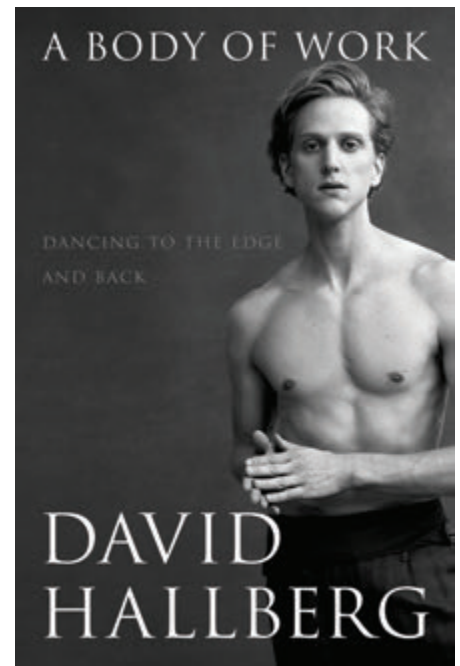
During a study year at the Paris Opera Ballet, his classmates did not bully him, but they did give him the cold shoulder. Hallberg tried hard to please, but he simply did not understand that the way to gain respect and friends in Paris required him to be disdainfully independent.

“The absence of friends had forced me to look inward instead of outward, to search for fulfillment and happiness within myself,” he writes.

Fortunately, throughout his life Hallberg found emotional support where he most needed it. The scene in the family car in which his mother first questioned her 15-year-old son calmly about homosexuality is described with touching filial affection. Both parents welcomed Hallberg’s first teenage love, “Jack,” into their home.

In his professional life, Hallberg was nurtured first by Han, and then by the likes of Yuri Fateev, a sensitive teacher, coach and director with the Mariinsky Ballet, and by choreographer Alexei Ratmansky.

Hallberg’s leg injury threatened to end his career at its apex. Complications led to insertional Achilles tendinopathy, which caused sharp pain in jumps. The Melbourne therapists prescribed simply walking up stairs to the beat of a metronome. Sounds simple, but the carefully monitored walking required months of repetition. Rehabilitation brought “a different sort of loneliness ... the kind that comes with deep depression.”



This is not a tell-all book by any means. Apart from his youthful romantic relationship, Hallberg mentions no later relationships or romantic encounters. Neither do we learn much about his views on the world. Some names of the books, artworks and museum artifacts that inspire him might also have painted a fuller picture of the man.

But ballet fans will be happy to read his telling observations about dance luminaries like Zakharova (“a strong woman who makes decisions based on nothing but her own instinct”) and former Bolshoi Ballet chief Sergei Filin, who offered Hallberg the principal dancer’s job over a meal in a Moscow sushi restaurant.

“I have all the approval from the government,” Filin told Hallberg, a simple statement that surely belies the extensive official discussions about the propaganda value of enticing an American star to Russia.

Not every dancer can achieve the heights of David Hallberg. Nonetheless, young students confronting bullies as well as working dancers who have suffered injuries can certainly draw inspiration from this story of a man who repeatedly faced and overcame adversity.

— VICTOR SWOBODA

LIZT ALFONSO DANCE CUBA

At the crossroads of a culture
in interesting times

BY TOBA SINGER



Lizt Alfonso in rehearsal
Photo: Duardo Patino

It inspires Lizt Alfonso that Cuban dance is broader than its renowned achievements in classical ballet. She credits both that breadth and the founders of Cuba's classical training system — Alicia Alonso and her former husband Fernando Alonso — for shaping her work today. "Cubans dance from birth," she says. "How we move, feel rhythm and music, is in our blood, passed from generation to generation in a natural way. At the same time, Alicia and Fernando Alonso, and the many teachers they trained who trained us, gave us a solid classical foundation."

Acceptance in the ballet studio came to Alfonso slowly. She did not meet the physical requirements for classical ballet, which Cubans sum up in one word, *condiciones*. Yet, after seeing the Cuban

National Ballet perform *Coppélia*, at age four, all she wanted was to dance ballet.

At nine, she auditioned for the Provincial School of Ballet Alejo Carpentier, the first stop for a serious-minded dancer on the path to the National School of the Arts, which aims to produce high-calibre professional ballet dancers. She was rejected. Her mother then enrolled her at Centro ProDanza, where, after several months with the exacting Laura Alonso (the daughter of Alicia and Fernando), she reapplied to Alejo Carpentier and was accepted. For six years, she studied ballet, character, period dances and a host of related subjects.

As it turned out, Alfonso ended up earning a bachelor's degree in ballet arts from the Instituto Superior de Arte in

1990. In an essay written during her studies, she points to a proliferation of companies in the Cuban dance scene that had gained momentum in the 1980s. By the 1990s, besides the Cuban National Ballet, Ballet de Camagüey and several smaller contemporary companies, Cuba also had groups that specialized in diverse genres, such as folkloric or flamenco.

Cuba had enacted Law 812 in the first days of its 1959 revolution, which stated that the government must fund the national ballet company, the Ballet of Cuba, known today as the Cuban National Ballet. The newer companies found it harder to wrest funding from the Ministry of Culture, and the ones that did promoted one distinct dance style. Many colleagues discouraged Alfonso from taking the risk of creating a company based on eclectic styles, as she intended: it simply had never been done before.

Alfonso, however, says, “Doors should remain open; nobody has a right to limit a person’s creative capacity to push open space in the arts universe.”

During her one-year tenure as Centro ProDanza’s director, Alfonso began using studio space there to work with a small group of dancers that initially included Cuban National Ballet principal Galina Alvarez and José Manuel Carreño, who went on to dance as a principal with American Ballet Theatre. As the group developed, it became Danza Ibéricas, which in 1991 took on an independent life as Liza Alfonso Dance Cuba.

As Alfonso describes it, “Our company is atypical because we put a mix of styles onstage in a single program, presenting a seamless and harmonic mix of Cuban dance.” This ranges from Yoruba drum-inspired folkloric, to rumba, to contemporary ballet, to Latin jazz and ballroom. “Our repertoire goes from the most authentic dance from our roots and musical fusion, to the great musicals staged by Ramiro Guerra and Luis Trapaga in the 1960s and ’70s,” says Alfonso.

In its first years, Liza Alfonso Dance Cuba was in survival mode, but, by 2000, she says, “We had performed in Spain and the United States. At that point, the National Council of the

Performing Arts offered a small state subsidy, which we appreciated because it showed the government’s recognition of the role we play in our nation’s cultural history.”

In 2002, Fidel Castro, then-president of Cuba, became interested in their work. “He asked what we needed to keep growing,” Alfonso says. “I requested a studio. He said that if we continued to grow so fast, one studio wouldn’t be enough, that we should think about a bigger place. I knew of space in the Havana Historians Office building and thanks in no small way to Fidel’s support, the company now has a fully restored and renovated headquarters in the heart of Old Havana. We are also a resident company at the Gran Teatro Alicia Alonso. Still, we keep our old headquarters. It offers new generations continuity with our beginnings.”

At a White House ceremony in 2016, then-First Lady Michelle Obama presented Liza Alfonso Dance Cuba with the International Spotlight Award. This followed then-President Barak Obama’s

historic visit to Cuba, touted as an effort to restore U.S.-Cuban relations.

What was it like to receive the award in light of the ongoing economic embargo on trade and travel between the countries?

Alfonso was overjoyed at having the company’s work valued by the American stage, screen and literary artists on the jury. It deepened her belief that the role the company plays as a goodwill ambassador can have a positive impact on ending the embargo. She also sees her company as a means for communicating the dynamism of Cuban dance culture to those whose access to Cuba is impeded by the embargo.

As an example, she cites audiences in Israel, which is the only country besides the United States to have supported the embargo in a recent United Nations roll call vote.

“Our successful tour of Israel in November 2017 demonstrated how our efforts have borne fruit and grown. Both Israeli audiences and the press welcomed us with an abundance of enthusiasm.” *DI*

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The hip-hop dancer's body goes through a lot of strain before achieving the desired technical complexities, effortless effect and aesthetic appearance. And the impact of hip-hop movements on the body does not stop even once mastery is achieved.

Hip hop is an umbrella term that includes several genres, such as breaking and hip-hop party dance. Generally, these dances have their own fundamental movement vocabularies, and they are taught very differently, based on the teacher's knowledge and experience, and the socio-cultural influences of the location where they are based. Dances can also be self-taught from watching peers at practice spots, dance jams and battles, or taught organically, without structured lessons or guidance, through hanging out together. Although there are foundational skills, their development is based on the improvisational skills of the dancers and their own ideas about movement.

With this seemingly limitless freedom come hybrid movements that can make the body more prone to injury. If learned in an environment that lacks safe dance practice, progressive learning and injury prevention principles common to other more formal forms of dance training, a shock to the system can result.

The impact of breaking, the original dance of hip-hop culture, on the body can be extensively analyzed; for instance, in biomechanical studies, it has been found that breaking involves considerable angular displacement.

Another characteristic, especially in toprock (the standing part of breaking), is the constant bounce, performed with weight on the toes, with the heels not fully touching the floor. This tendency to keep the heels off the floor is also found in footwork, in which the body revolves around the axis of the arms, which are supporting it on the floor, while doing intricate footwork and leg movements. This aspect

of breaking can be a factor for many acute and chronic injuries, if a safe and progressive overload (progressively raising the amount of body weight being supported) does not occur. The body has to adapt slowly to ways of moving that do not come naturally to ensure safe practice.

A big part of the mastery of breaking is to not reveal how a movement is done, resulting in an element of surprise. This is often accompanied with high speed, usually caused by momentum, a quality that is very well used by experienced breakers. Momentum assists with executing movements with a continuous flow that relieves the body from lifting weight, and assists with letting the movement flow create the next move. Momentum helps the body transition from one place to the next with more efficiency; however, it can also cause serious collision with the floor, the intensity of the impact depending on the floor surface and quality, and the dancer's clothing and technique. If one element that affects the collision is not in place, the friction that happens with high velocity may damage the joints, soft tissue or bones, and cause acute or chronic damage.

Breaking was born in an environment without the control of an educational and scientific system, which has been a positive factor in its nature of limitless possibilities. Also, the improvisational (freestyle) aspect offers a chance to explore and develop creativity and self-confidence and a way to think outside the box in terms of the endless routes a breaker may take to develop, deconstruct, reinvent and evolve a movement concept.

However, this independence may make it harder to develop safe guidelines for injury prevention. It's important to implement scientific dance knowledge in all the environments where breaking is performed, and to ensure teachers have the relevant knowledge, so they can respect the art form and also the need for safety. ▀

Nefeli Tsiouti is the founder of Project Breakalign, a research project on the prevention of injuries for breakers. She is an associate researcher at Cyprus Musculoskeletal and Sports Trauma Research Centre, and on the board of directors of Healthy Dancer Canada.

GLOBAL REPORTS

BY KAIJA PEPPER

Three well-established theatrical festivals dominate the dance landscape at the beginning of every year in Vancouver, starting with PuSh International Performing Arts in mid-January. Two popular shows at PuSh were the one-woman solo, *Pour*, at Scotiabank Dance Centre's black-box studio-theatre, and the group spectacle, *The Eternal Tides*, at the Queen Elizabeth Theatre. Vastly different in scale and scope, they both featured a vulnerable female body at the centre of the action.

Pour (2016) marked the return to the city of Daina Ashbee, a young choreographer familiar to Vancouverites from her time performing with Raven Spirit Dance. Now based in Montreal, Ashbee has become known for her confrontational works, and *Pour* is certainly one of them. Mostly floor bound, dancer Paige Culley is like an artist's model, moving into one pose after another, showcasing how the body contains within it endless ways to reveal effort and repose. There's something strong in the beauty and vulnerability of a young woman's nude body in such singular theatrical display, and also something disturbing as we watch its every minor and major effort. (Read more on Ashbee and Culley on page 32).

Like many choreographies relying on repetition to make their point, it was a little hard to stay with *Pour* throughout. The same issue undercut Lin Lee-Chen's *The Eternal Tides*. The 2017 piece, which marked the Canadian debut of Taiwan's Legend Lin Dance Theatre, presented a series of gorgeously staged tableaux. Take the opening, which featured a powerful drummer on each side of the stage, lit by warm candlelight, and a stage floor and backdrop draped in white fabric.



For what seemed like 20 or even 30 minutes, a single, slender figure, naked except for a loincloth, white-dusted, with Rapunzel-length hair, magnificently embodied the repetitive cycles of time and tides as she swept her torso, arms and hair in vast circles and spirals, first on the floor, then standing, and back to the floor, over and over, round and round. But it went on too long, and the *butoh*-slow movement of the ensemble sections that followed demanded a rigorous meditative state of attention from the audience.

The Vancouver International Dance Festival opened quietly on March 1, at Scotiabank Dance Centre, with a solo by Vancouver's Amber Funk Barton. *Vast*, intended to evoke the way each of us is alone in the universe, and yet also connected, favoured much stillness and waiting, but in the one main section of dance — when Barton allowed her body to let loose, to find its own enthusiastic rhythm — the piece itself found a convincing, invigorating pulse.

Lucie Grégoire arrived from Montreal with a solo performed by Kim Henry

(prefaced by a brief introductory solo from the choreographer). Again, it was the moments of energetic, generous dance — the body in choreographed time and space — that were most satisfying. For much of the time, Henry followed predictable paths around the stage, often just running, which is perhaps the reason that when she exploded into a *jeté* — it happened just twice — the leap resonated like thunder and lightning. As did the section when the light-limbed, nimble-footed dancer turned like a candle flame in the wind, her satin slip glowing.

The festival's Playhouse headliner was New York's Shen Wei Dance Arts in its Vancouver premiere. The popular company appeared in two well-respected pieces from its repertoire: *Folding* (2000), to music by John Tavener and Tibetan Buddhist chants, and *Rite of Spring* (2003), to a four-hand piano version of Stravinsky's familiar score. Shen Wei, the company's artistic director, creates with a visual artist's eye — his use of colour in costumes and set (his own design for both) complements his astute placement of bodies onstage in his

choreography. The two pieces have aged well, and the company's 12 dancers masterfully performed both the processional aspects of *Folding* and the energetic calligraphy of *Rite of Spring*. The latter thankfully did not follow the usual narrative about a virgin sacrifice, instead responding, story-free, to the music's exciting clamour.

In the Chutzpah! festival lineup at the Norman Rothstein Theatre were two works by Roy Assaf, an Israeli name much heard these days. His *Six Years Later* (2011) proved to be an intimate and touching duet, danced with unaffected grace by Madison Hoke, West Virginia-born, and Assaf himself.

Their articulate bodies presented a story of a couple's close connection, the relationship's different vulnerabilities accompanied by a mixed soundtrack that ranged from Beethoven's *Moonlight Sonata* to a 1960s pop song by the Marmalade. The latter set the action at a nightclub: the couple chatted as they walk

backward together, like they were on a dance floor, before relaxing into the beat.

Later, she pushed on his chest as if trying to get his heart started, as if the relationship had stalled. The action constantly shifted into new emotional territory as the pair grappled together to form shared shapes or delicately facilitated each other's moves.

Assaf's *The Hill*, from 2012 — performed by Assaf, Ron Cohen and Avshalom Latucha — was not as expressive. But the sections of choreography that built on the relaxed postures and repetitions of folk dance created a fresh and friendly theatrical vocabulary. The Israeli Army Band march that started the piece, along with goofy marching from the dancers, made the military parody clear.

On February 22, Ballet BC presented a surprising premiere for the contemporary 16-dancer troupe: a two-act *Romeo and Juliet* set to Prokofiev's romantic orchestral score. The choreographer was Medhi Walerski, the company's European

choreographer-in-residence.

The contemporary ballet choreography, with everyone in socks, had great sweep and momentum in the ensembles; exciting, forceful bodies filled the stage thanks to recruits from Arts Umbrella Graduate Program as well as four Ballet BC apprentices. It was ideal movement for young, hungry dancers. Only 10 characters are singled out to represent the familiar story, along with gangs of Montagues, Capulets and, in the second act, Shadow Figures, 17 men and women flitting around the deaths at the centre of this love story's finale.

Emily Chessa was a vibrant Juliet. She is physically ideal for the role — small and compact, and still in her 20s, she doesn't have to work arduously at simply being youthful. More importantly, her romantic yearnings were beautifully expressed in both the unaffected drive she brought to the choreography and in her bright expressive face. Some of the solo choreography for Romeo (Brandon Alley) was a bit too squirmy to read in dance or character terms (it was like he had hot coals coursing through his blood stream, literally, not metaphorically). In his light-hearted trios with Mercutio (Scott Fowler) and Benvolio (Patrick Kilbane), character was more successfully integrated into the choreography.

Walerski talks in the program about avoiding story ballets until this commission, and his interests are clearly in abstract work. Yet without the colour of distinct personalities, there's an awful lot of plot to get through, and the first act sagged toward the end as each scene of the well-known Prokofiev score had to be played out.

The striking monochromatic set by Theun Mosk featured a stage enclosed in dark fabric and a trio of large rectangular set pieces that stood in for doorways, with one upended to become Juliet's balcony. Walerski's layered costume design of grey and black had a similar minimalist aesthetic, evoking either contemporary or vaguely historical times, as in the severely high-necked and very trim gown of Mother Capulet (performed by ex-Ballet BC dancer Makaila Wallace). Certainly the production looked good and its grand sweep of passionate dancing from the popular troupe was enormously seductive. *DI*

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BY HOLLY HARRIS

Winnipeg's Contemporary Dancers experienced trial by fire this year, testing the resilience of the 54-year-old company founded by Rachel Browne. Following Brent Lott's unexpected stepping down in summer 2017 after 16 years at the helm, the board continues to search for his successor, due to begin in September. This season also marked the first time in seven years that the company, Canada's oldest modern dance group, has not participated in the Prairie Dance Circuit, produced annually by its five western Canadian co-founders since 2010.

The season opened at the end of November with the premiere show by its first artist-in-residence, choreographer and filmmaker Danielle Sturk's full-length *Flesh + Machine* at the Rachel Browne Theatre. The multidisciplinary show, with a cast of five, explored relationships, intimacy and public space using decades-old cameras, projectors, dollies and lighting effects.

The second production was part of the annual series presented in February, *Verge*, which this year featured choreography by San Francisco-born Stephanie Ballard, who has created more than 90 works for the troupe since arriving in Winnipeg at age 22 in 1972. A nine-member ensemble of emerging dancers was joined for the whirlwind, seven-day creative process by guest dancers Alexandra Winters and Arlo Reva, and filmmaker Kayla Jeanson.

The one-hour show, subtitled *Dance Dialogues*, not only featured dancers closely interacting with each other, but was also "in conversation" with the Banff Centre

in an homage to its longstanding summer dance program, founded by Gweneth Lloyd in 1946, now led by Emily Molnar.

One of the show's greatest strengths was its visual layering, immediately apparent with the opening montage of projected archival photos from the Banff Centre, which ranged from a young modern dancer (Tedd Robinson, a former WCD artistic director) rehearsing in a studio, to ballet dancers performing sky-high lifts against mountain backdrops, providing historical context for the entire evening.

Each dancer was showcased during a series of solos and smaller ensembles, with several delicious trompe-d'oeil effects, including an opening duet by a bowler-hatted Trevor Pick, evoking 1960s American pop artist Peter Max's iconic painting series, *The Umbrella Man*, and a prim, bespectacled Winters. As they performed with their own black-and-white film images projected on the upstage brick wall, an eye-popping virtual quartet was formed.

In another quirky duet, Ilse Guadalupe Torres Orozco and Allison Brooks leapt and spun to *The Girl from Ipanema*, while a grainy home movie showed the late, great Paddy Stone, a former Royal Winnipeg Ballet dancer, performing a jazzy routine in a Winnipeg North End back lane (filmed by the RWB's former artistic director Arnold Spohr). But there is often an edge to Ballard's work. When Shawn MacLaine suddenly appeared and crossed upstage in a long red coat and bowler hat, a note of danger was injected into the otherwise playful piece.

Excerpts from Ballard's full-length inter-generational work *George*, created in 2004 for WCD's 35th anniversary, included three lyrical solos, performed by Anna Protsiou, Emma Del Monte and Brooks to Chopin's *Études*. A quartet (Mark Dela Cruz, Neilla Hawley, Pick and Winters) includes archival film showing close-ups of Toronto's Dan Wild, who appeared in the original production.

A less-is-more trio featured Hawley, Guadalupe Torres Orozco and Protsiou reciting text by Chopin's lover, the writer George Sand, in their respective native tongues of English, Spanish and Greek, juxtaposed with Nina Patel's looming film image. Ballard's choice to incorporate images of former Winnipeg dancers Wild and Patel added texture to the production and reinforced its lineage to the past.

Another treat was seeing Reva, who studied at the Banff Centre's Indigenous Dance Residency, reprise her mesmerizing Feathers solo from Ballard's 2010 *Home again*, to Maria Callas' famous aria *O mio babbino caro*.

One of the riskiest solos was given to Dela Cruz, who looked like a ragtag angel in white trousers, with ribbons of fabric hanging from his tunic. As he silently inched toward the front of the stage, he tugged off ribbons and offered them to audience members. The scraps of fabric revealed handwritten historical facts and lore about Banff's iconic summer dance program.

Despite its cumulative power, the show felt fragmented at times, morphing into a crazy quilt of disparate pieces. Some artistic choices were overly cryptic, with deeper layers of meaning perhaps known only to Ballard and her collaborators. However, a palpable sense of joy, with the dancers appearing to have the time of their lives, made up the much greater whole.

The most powerful moment came at the end. As the full ensemble performed lines of canonic movement against their projected images, including a fleeting, powerful duet by Jennifer Bonner with Del Monte, the stage suddenly appeared to fill, doubling with dancers. As lights faded, Ballard's newly created "company" of artists — both human and digitized — stood silently facing the audience, eloquently symbolizing strength and solidarity. This is an apt metaphor for the organization as it begins moving toward its 55th year. ^{DI}



Toronto

BY MICHAEL CRABB



Even in his senior years, 70-year-old Mikhail Baryshnikov can command a stage with the most modest of bodily gestures and also now through the soulful inflections of speech. He does not claim to dance in *Brodsky/Baryshnikov*, which played five sold-out performances at Toronto's almost 1,000-seat Winter Garden Theatre in late January, yet the former ballet superstar's ability to amplify physically the emotional resonance of the late Joseph Brodsky's poetry proved unforgettably powerful. It was an ode to a deep friendship, a reminder that in their commitment to ideals the two men shared much in common.

Mark Morris, with whom Baryshnikov co-founded the White Oak Dance Project in 1990, brought his world tour of his Beatles-inspired *Pepperland* to Toronto's Sony Centre in February, the only Canadian stop.

Morris is such an old-fashioned choreographer that nowadays he counts as a true radical. His work is a salutary reproof to those who apparently believe that for dance to count as serious art it must be rendered inaccessible to popular audiences. For Morris, dance is emphatically about the body in motion, to music played live but never in slavish surrender to its impetus. Morris respects the compositional virtues of structure and clarity. He is keenly theatrical in his visual choices. He has a love of aesthetic beauty; how retrograde is that! Above all, Morris views dance as

integrally linked to human life and on the whole prefers to adopt a hopeful, even joyful attitude toward life's existential conundrums. All these elements and more were on view in *Pepperland*.

With a long list of co-producers that includes Canada's Banff Centre, *Pepperland* launched the city of Liverpool's Sgt Pepper at 50 festival last May; but it's no jukebox-ballet tribute. While the inspiration is the Beatles' landmark 1967 *Sgt Pepper's Lonely Hearts Club Band* album, Morris and his musical collaborator, arranger/composer Ethan Iverson, refract the nostalgia through a contemporary prism. Elizabeth Kurtzman's colours-of-the-rainbow costumes set the stage ablaze as Morris, in a jazzy Broadway style, riffs off or provides fresh insights to the familiar songs.

Peggy Baker has evolved a long way artistically since her association with Baryshnikov/Morris' White Oak Dance Project 28 years ago. No longer the expansive physical powerhouse she once was, Baker's ability to marshal inner concentration and spare yet telling physical expression — those inimitable arms — continue to make her a riveting performer.

Unmoored, a "dance story" choreographed and directed by Sarah Chase and unveiled at the Theatre Centre in February, is arguably Baker's bravest performance ever. It delves into matters so personal and intimate that, as Baker recounts the arc of her marriage to Ahmed Hassan, the composer/musician who died of multiple sclerosis in 2011, you fear

Unmoored will be sucked into a vortex of auto-therapy. Instead, it opens out onto a universal vista of courage, endurance and love. Only an artist of Baker's integrity and honesty could turn such a private story into an inspiring human epic.

Among a younger generation of local choreographers, Hanna Kiel is on a roll. Early in the year, the Korean-born-and-raised choreographer contributed *When the Wind Comes* to the National Ballet of Canada's Five Creations choreographic workshop. In late March, as part of Toronto Dance Theatre's 50th anniversary season (see review on page 60), Kiel's *GH 5.0* was among five contemporary takes on artistic director Christopher House's popular 1983 work, *Glass Houses*.

Somewhere in all this, Kiel found time to complete a new evening-length work for a cast of three men and one woman under the auspices of her own project-based company, Human Body Expression. Her *Chasing the Path*, unveiled in mid-March at Harbourfront Centre's Fleck Dance Theatre, sets out to explore the mysteries of human memory, in particular the slippery distinction between memory as conscious and invariably corrupted mental recall and the more truthful memories that lurk in the body, ready to express themselves physically when unexpectedly triggered.

Dramatists, filmmakers and choreographers deploy a range of devices to signpost what is "real" and what is being remembered. Kiel adopts a non-linear, quasi-narrative approach. The spare set, a

freestanding doorway — the portal from past to present — and 1970s-era furniture evoke a modest domestic arrangement.

The dancers may be seen as characters. They are clearly connected or have been connected in some way — family, friends, possibly a mix. The relationships are often fraught. Something very disturbing has happened in the past. Unison passages suggest this shared trauma. Solos, duets and other swiftly evolving combinations paint a more complex matrix of differently remembered experience. The choreography's dynamics vary hugely through the piece. By Kiel standards, there are extended moments of pregnant calm. It's altogether one of her most intriguing works.

Throughout its 67-year history, the National Ballet of Canada has countered its image as a purveyor of established classics by continuously commissioning new work, but, back in March 2009, it took the unprecedented step of presenting an entire program of premieres by three Canadians. Titled *Innovations*, it was a brave initiative that excited audiences,

including a notably younger contingent, and justly garnered critical plaudits. Given the unpredictable outcome of such risky programming, it is scarcely remarkable that only one of those three ballets, Crystal Pite's *Emergence*, has endured.

In March 2018, the National Ballet revived *Emergence* for the third time on its Toronto hometown stage under the banner *Made in Canada*. Its companions on the triple bill were *The Dreamers Ever Leave You* by company choreographic associate Robert Binet, and James Kudelka's *The Four Seasons*, choreographed in 1997 during his directorship of the company.

Binet's contribution turned out to be an ill-judged adaptation for a proscenium stage of what had originated in 2016 as an absorbing site-specific work tailored to be seen up close at the Art Gallery of Ontario, where viewers were free to move about the space. In its new context, Binet's choreography appeared aimless and unfocused.

Kudelka's reimagining of Vivaldi's famous score as a journey through the cycle of human life remains among his

most compelling one-act ballets and would have looked even better on opening night if the orchestra had not proved a distraction by failing to do full justice to the music.

Emergence, meanwhile, looked stronger than ever. It was Pite's first work for a big ballet company and she did not squander the large forces at her disposal. With its evocation of an insect hive and sly disruption of gender stereotypes, it remains a very contemporary commentary on mass instinctive behaviour.

Talking of contemporary, who would have imagined that a classical dancer could subtly inject a hint of modern rebelliousness into such a tradition-bound role as Prince Florimund in *The Sleeping Beauty*? Returning to a role he first essayed in 2015, Francesco Gabriele Frola, again partnering Jillian Vanstone's lovely Aurora, not only danced with exciting bravura but made you feel that the court he awakened from its century-long slumber could use a little shaking up; a Prince Harry rather than a Prince William, and all the better for it, too! *»*

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Montreal

BY VICTOR SWOBODA

For his second season at Les Grands Ballets Canadiens de Montréal, artistic director Ivan Cavallari announced a triple bill for 2019 called *Femmes*, which he described as “an ode to women.” A splendid intention, except that his decision to use three male choreographers instead of female ones launched media diatribes, a protest petition and indignant jibes from his own dancers.

In dismay over the negative press, one of the choreographers abandoned the project. Cavallari publicly apologized and the triple bill was renamed *Parlami d'Amore*. To his credit, Cavallari in his first season had presented two female choreographers, which incidentally was twice the number his predecessor, Grigori Pankov, presented during his 18-year tenure.

Ironically, around the time of the scandal, Montreal saw two evenings presented by established female contemporary choreographers in works created for female soloists.

Margie Gillis' *Viriditas* (in Latin, verdure, fecundity) was comprised of three successive solos linked to a theme of sharing knowledge between generations. It opened with Troy Ogilvie in front of a large-scale video backdrop displaying a forest so colour-soaked the images almost appeared three-dimensional. To plaintive Irish music, Ogilvie joyfully scampered about *Agora de la danse's* performance floor in Gillis' well-known free-spirit style. Ogilvie's smile seemed not to be an act, but a genuine expression of joy and a desire to share her enjoyment. Doffing her simple black dress, she romped in the nude, traversing

a video-projected “pond” on the floor. The choreography's skipping and posing did not add up to very much, but Ogilvie's glow added an enjoyable brilliance.

In contrast, Paola Styron, in striking red, moved slowly, deliberately, to a soft drone of orchestral strings. As Ogilvie had basked in a forest setting, so Styron seemed to wax philosophical in front of projected sky vistas. Toward the end, her hands swept across the floor as though gathering produce from the earth. Calm and unhurried, the choreography was in line with a gravitas that Styron projected without effort.

The most vigorous and final section had Gillis brandishing a long, white sheet with matador-like sweeps, suggesting a battle with her inner psyche and the outer forces of the world. At the outset, her face wore a grievous look, and, at the end, she showed painful grimaces. Following two solos invoking joy and harmony, Gillis chose to conclude with a vision of life as a grim start-to-finish struggle.

The other all-female evening, *Tout ce qui va revient* (What goes round, comes round), by choreographer Catherine Gaudet, was at the small La Chapelle theatre. It also featured three successive solos, this time loosely connected by a theme of Gaudet's ambivalent feelings about live performing. Created independently in 2014-2015 for Louise Bédard, Sarah Dell'Ava and Clara Furey, the solos were staged together for the first time, performed by the original cast.

As spectators entered, Dell'Ava distributed party hats ostensibly to help celebrate what she claimed later in the show to be her “birthday.” This was not

the only brick Dell'Ava removed from the performer/spectator barrier. Sometimes, however, she put another brick in its place, most notably while facing the audience and apparently struggling to control a fit of laughter. Was her fit real or just an act?

After a long section involving grotesque body twists, she spat out words, then casually stepped out of character to apologize for spraying a front-row spectator. Stripper-style gesticulations followed. At the end, she wound some coloured ribbon around her neck to suggest a mock hanging. Performing live brought pain and anxiety, the solo seemed to say, but being observed and desired was exhilarating.

The theme was explored more cursorily in Furey's solo. Impersonating a sexy rock singer in high heels and the briefest of black shorts, she stopped at times to stare quizzically at the audience, wondering, as all performers do, whether the public cared about her act.

In the third solo, Bédard sought not only audience approval but confirmation of her identity both on and off the stage. “Hello, my name is Louise Bédard,” she kept repeating, as though trying to convince both the audience and herself that a real personality lay behind the performer's mask.

Minor Matter by Berlin-based Ligia Lewis won a best production Bessie award in New York in 2017. Performed at the MAI by Lewis and two new male cast members, Tiran Willemse and Corey Scott-Gilbert, music ranged from courtly dances to pop to hip hop. Simulated wrestling matches between her and the men presented a genial “battle of the sexes.” Overall, the order of the day involved lighthearted co-operation as the trio built a series of human pyramids. Watching them aroused delight similar to that of watching children at play. In a sequence that children certainly would have enjoyed, the theatre went dark and the dancers' sneakers were set aglow by laser beams criss-crossing the performance space. A feeling of congeniality predominated and though the program notes spoke of a “choreography of love and rage,” on this evening at least, any harsh feelings were well concealed by gestures of bonhomie. *DI*

A modicum of novelty buoyed the opening half of San Francisco Ballet's 2018 season. From Benjamin Millepied came the premiere of *The Chairman Dances – Quartet for Two*, a romp through early and mid-career compositions of John Adams that seemed musically intelligent, but also slick, calculated, busy and mystifying, rather than inspired.

From New York City Ballet's Justin Peck came, on the same February 13 program, the local premiere of *Rodeo: Four Dance Episodes*, the choreographer's endlessly inventive and thoroughly energizing interpretation of the familiar Aaron Copland score, which departed delectably from Agnes de Mille's original setting of the same music.

But what really fascinated this quarter was the changing profile of the company's dancing strength. Years ago, several principals joined around the same period, which means they're all rushing to retire at the same time and the drain of talent could be perilous. This year, artistic director Helgi Tomasson has moved wisely in this respect. He hired Ana Sophia Scheller from New York City Ballet, and she branched her neoclassic credentials in a *Stars and Stripes* pas de deux on the January 19 opening night gala and, on March 20, as the principal woman in a revival of *Opus 19: The Dreamer*, an entry in a centennial tribute to Jerome Robbins.

However, the most exciting addition to the roster has been Ulrik Birkkjær, fresh from the Royal Danish Ballet. At that gala, he delivered a James for our time in the *La Sylphide* pas de deux, partnering Maria Kochetkova with the suavety he demonstrated in his many appearances this year, from Bournonville to the chief cowpoke in *Rodeo*.

Yet, it was Sasha De Sola who, among the women, most exemplified Tomasson's strategy for shaping a dancer. She took her first bow here as an apprentice in 2006 after studying the Russian classics at the Kirov Ballet Academy, then worked her way through the ranks to principal status. It was she whom Tomasson chose for the title role in the first revival of *Sleeping Beauty* in a decade. In her role debut on January 23, De Sola's Aurora left an indelible impression. Despite an off-balance moment in the Rose Adagio, this was a confident, technically astute interpretation that mingled youthful vigour and lyrical softness. De Sola has blossomed: she found an emotional line through this passive character, and the variation in the vision scene was spectacular. Carlo Di Lanno, as Desiré, wanted finesse as he leapt for the stratosphere.

In that same performance, Dores André offered a gracious, articulate Princess Florine, inaugurating a personally auspicious season. This Spanish-born dancer

joined the corps in 2004 and graduated to principal 11 years later. For a long time, she struck me as slightly recessive in performance, but, recently, she has been well matched with partners and has attracted the attention of visiting choreographers, like Peck, who have exploited her simmering sensuality to winning ends. In *Rodeo: Four Dance Episodes*, her high-kicking woman, the only woman in the work, lent a wonderfully raffish and endearing quality to the production. André's Hedda Gabler in the reprise of Val Caniparoli's *Ibsen House*, on February 15, was memorable for its swagger.

The men have consistently impressed in Tomasson's San Francisco Ballet. Soloist Max Cauthorn joined the company five years ago and has risen to soloist. Last year, in Liam Scarlett's philosophical horror story, *Frankenstein*, he was second cast as Victor Frankenstein, and, this winter, he was moved up to the opening night cast. Tall and well proportioned, Cauthorn looks a bit too youthful for this assignment, but his very earnestness was virtue.

But it was the revival of *Fancy Free*, one entry in the Jerome Robbins' centenary salute, which may be the most telling commentary on the rising generation in San Francisco. In this 1944 classic of three sailors on shore leave, companies commonly cast starry principals. Here, Tomasson drew the guys from the soloist rank (Esteban Hernandez) and corps category (Benjamin Freemantle and Lonnie Weeks) and, in their first time with the piece, they delivered rich, varied characterizations. Freemantle's duet with De Sola (her first time, too) exuded aching tenderness, while the Leonard Bernstein score added emotional resonance. Hernandez cleaved the air. Weeks dispatched his rumba with panache. *Fancy Free* may be a period piece, but in the right bodies, it glows.

The older generation contributed to the Robbins' feast, too. For the first time, Kochetkova (who left the company in May after 11 years) took on the role of the deadly Novice in the first revival of *The Cage* in 25 years, and proved how deadly sweetness can be. Frances Chung and Angelo Greco were suitable stand-ins for Natalia Makarova and Mikhail Baryshnikov in *Other Dances*, while Sarah Van Patten and Carlo Di Lanno probed *Opus 19: The Dreamer*. Robbins was well served by all. *DI*



San Francisco

BY ALLAN ULRICH



BY ROBERT GRESKOVIC

To date, the season could be characterized as one that revealed some uncertainties — slightly under-rehearsed aspects and a lack of readiness for debuts — as well as a sometime fresh and free energy to performing and casting. The hand of Martins, besides being present in the pre-planned bills — with such headings as All Balanchine, 21st Century Choreographers, New Combinations, Classic NYCB, Here/Now and Stravinsky & Balanchine — might also have prevailed in the casting, as it was rumoured that he had done the long-range planning for the full season before his departure.

The single new ballet to enter NYCB's vast store of one-act works was a second effort from corps de ballet dancer Peter Walker. Though *dance odyssey* has a more coherent and engaging shape than Walker's first work, its 12-dancer cast passes through its accompanying five-part, often jaunty Oliver Davis score more agreeably than memorably. A teasing duet for gifted corps de ballet dancer Devin Alberda and accomplished principal Anthony Huxley made the best impression in this work's mostly shapeless scheme. Principal dancer Adrian Danchig-Waring finds himself isolated and reclining mid-stage at the end of *dance odyssey*, after a would-be climactic duet with Ashley Laracey, but there's really no focus to the ending.

After almost a year offstage due to injury, Danchig-Waring was back at full strength and while the repertoire roles in which he shone consistently this season weren't debuts, his stellar projection and loving attention to detail in Balanchine's *Apollo*, *Chaconne* and *Agon* gave these central parts a new and compelling edge.

Of several newcomers to roles, soloist Indiana Woodward made confident and piquant work as Calliope in Balanchine's *Apollo*. Elsewhere, taking on the mostly thankless work Martins' choreography has for Juliet in his *Romeo + Juliet*, Woodward made as much as anyone might of this often awkward and stiff-limbed

role; she brought a warmth and shimmer. Accomplished Unity Phelan, also a soloist, advanced her budding career with vivid accounts of the role originally created for Allegra Kent in Balanchine's *Divertimento No. 15*, as well as in the high-flying, boot-wearing, leading role of *Cortège Hongrois*. As a central member of the community of devout and lively women in Alexei Ratmansky's gripping *Russian Seasons*, Phelan had another personal triumph.

Taking on prominent roles in Ratmansky's stirring *Namouna*, *A Grand Divertissement*, Lauren Lovette, Emilie Gerrity, Taylor Stanley and Megan Fairchild found challenges that each met with flying colours. Though the original interpreters of their roles (Wendy Whelan, Sara Mearns, Robert Fairchild and Jenifer Ringer, respectively) left indelible impressions, the newcomers brought vivid life to their challenges, spurred by the often surging and sometimes sultry moments offered by Ratmansky's keen shaping of Édouard Lalo's lush score.

One new, post-Martins' aspect of preparing dancers for their roles also came to light from an Instagram post, this one by Megan Fairchild: the fact that outside tutelage — coaching with former NYCB star Patricia McBride — helped prepare some of the dancers scheduled to perform the female lead in Balanchine's *Divertimento from Le Baiser de la Fée*.

This often haunting encapsulation of Stravinsky's full *Baiser* ballet had three different casts. Those led by Fairchild paired with Joaquin De Luz, and Tiler Peck with Huxley, showed a fresh sense of detail that suggested the benefits of McBride's input. A third cast, led by Erica Pereira and Joseph Gordon, both making their debuts in the ballet and without rehearsal time with McBride, looked tentative and green, though in the end Gordon seemed the best suited temperamentally to the male lead. Given more familiarity with the often tricky partnering and choreography, he could become a notable interpreter of this role.

Whatever question marks now hang over NYCB's future, its first season without a ballet-master-in-chief showed glimmers of positive change. Some of these sprung directly from bringing into the preparation of its vast and invaluable repertoire veteran dancers who were there when the landmark works were in their prime. ❖

The promotional pitch for New York City Ballet's 2017-2018 season trumpeted its September to June offerings with the following teaser copy: Escape. Explore. Embrace. By the time the company opened its six-week winter run in January, there had been an "escape" no one could have foreseen. On January 1, amid misconduct accusations, ballet-master-in-chief Peter Martins unexpectedly retired from the leadership he'd held since 1983, the year NYCB's founding director George Balanchine died.

Instead of a ballet-master-in-chief overseeing the company, suddenly an interim artistic team was in charge. Former NYCB dancer and current ballet master Jonathan Stafford heads a foursome that includes current ballet masters and former company dancers Rebecca Krohn and Craig Hall, as well as company soloist Justin Peck, who is also NYCB's resident choreographer.

A search for a new ballet-master-in-chief was announced amid word of Martins' departure, but no deadline was given. Likewise, no hard facts were offered to detail just how the duties of the day-to-day running of the company were being handled by the interim quartet. Early in the run, the odd post on Instagram by one company dancer or another indicated uneasiness hanging over the changed organization.

At last, La Scala Ballet has announced new soloists and principal dancers. Some of these well-deserved promotions were made after an open-call audition and others, like Martina Arduino and Timofej Andrijashenko, jumped to principal dancers from their former positions as fixed-term contract artists in the corps de ballet.

By promoting from within, the company has assured the retention of some of the most interesting newcomers on the Italian dance scene, after a period of having lost talented young dancers like Jacopo Tissi, currently first soloist at Bolshoi Ballet, and Carlo Di Lanno and Angelo Greco, who are principals at San Francisco Ballet. These three dancers left Milan after choreographer Mauro Bigonzetti became the new director. His was a very short reign — just eight months before resigning due to “health problems” — but it was long enough to lose some of the brightest talent searching for more challenging artistic direction than was then being offered at La Scala.

While Roberto Bolle prepares to take over the directorship of the company in two years (in 2020, when he'll be 45), French ballet master Frédéric Olivieri (who has been directing the dance department at Accademia Teatro alla Scala since 2008) is at the helm, maintaining the high artistic level of the dancers, giving them different opportunities to shine. Although the ballet season is limited in length and in its number of premieres, Olivieri tries to balance dramatic and pure dance, contemporary ballet and Petipa classics, offering a good mix to challenge the younger dancers as complete artists, not only technicians.

The opening title of the current season contributed well to his aims. John Neumeier's *La Dame aux Camélias* returned to the repertoire after 10 years, still a magnificent dance drama, deeply empathic in showing the inner feelings, dreams, fears, pettiness and glory of the characters in this sad story — which, it mustn't be forgotten, is based upon real people. This full drama is expressed through a choreographic text rich with details, such as expressive hand and head gestures, and with nuanced glances

(Antony Tudor was clearly an inspiration). It also has demanding choreographic phrases featuring quick changes in dynamics and energy, in driving movements and changes of direction. Now a blockbuster in many ballet company repertoires (this year in Europe alone it will be programmed by resident groups in Paris, Amsterdam, Stuttgart, Munich and Warsaw), *La Dame aux Camélias* is an amazing vehicle not only for the title roles of Marguerite Gautier and her lover Armand Duval, but also for the psychological detail of the other characters.

The casts were chosen personally by Neumeier, who supervised the latest rehearsals. Fair-haired, tall and elegant, 23-year-old Ukrainian Andrijashenko seemed ideal casting as Armand, and he exceeded expectations. He seemed

to have completely understood the tragedy of his character's love for Marguerite, as well as his innocence and sincerity. In his case, what made a difference were the details; for example, he displayed virile prowess in the famous solos, including the moments when Armand discovers that Marguerite has left him, which involves a relentless sequence of runs and jumps devouring the space, as well as arabesques and torso contractions that he transformed into deep cries. Or when he rushed into Marguerite's boudoir and stopped suddenly, shy, surprised and fearful of violating her private suffering. Or the way he tenderly touched her hand. No wonder that Neumeier himself said during a press conference that he had chosen Andrijashenko — at the time still a corps de ballet member — because the dancer had moved him during rehearsal.

Neumeier told me that he had not found a new Marguerite in the company, and the first performances were danced by Svetlana Zakharova, with Bolle as her Armand. Later, the 25-year-old Scala principal dancer Nicoletta Manni, partnering Andrijashenko, was lively and witty, but she still has to mature into all the complexity of the character: the intimate pains, the despairing loneliness so wonderfully choreographed in the third act. She was much better in the flirting and loving parts of the role, and also on other nights when she performed the ruthless Manon.

Newly appointed principals Virna Toppi and Arduino were impudent and malicious as Prudence; newly appointed soloist Christian Fagetti gave a perfect interpretation of the shy and clumsy Count N; Mick Zeni and Riccardo Massimi took on the key background figure of Monsieur Duval — a difficult, still role — with assurance and care for expressive details.

The run of performances of *Dame aux Camélias* was a source of continuous artistic discoveries, including what might be a new name on the rise — Gioacchino Starace, elegant and virile as Gaston. It was a well-deserved success for all involved, proving it is time to consider Milan's La Scala Ballet of international stature. *DI*

Milan

BY SILVIA POLETTI



Nicoletta Manni and Timofej Andrijashenko in John Neumeier's *Dame aux Camélias*
Photo: Brescia e Amisano, Teatro alla Scala

In the wake of Valentine's Day, it was not romance but its aftermath that took centre stage in the London dance scene. Not the rosy coupledom that romantics dream of, but marriages of dysfunction, madness, deception, crossed purposes and dissolution — all of them, as it happened, licensed by Shakespeare.

Opening on Valentine's Day itself at the alternative Battersea Arts Centre was Ben Duke's new *Juliet and Romeo* for his company Lost Dog. Duke established a name for himself with *Paradise Lost* (2015), a dance-theatre monologue that brought together the big theme of God's Creation with the obdurate banalities of everyday life. In *Juliet and Romeo*, he mines this vein further, imagining what would have happened if Romeo and Juliet had escaped their Shakespearean death and instead got married and lived — well, not so happily ever after, actually — in a small apartment, bringing up baby. Duke's tragedy is less grand than Shakespeare's, but way more relatable.

Indeed, the performance — very talky, with added dance scenes — began with relationship counselling. Juliet and Romeo first recounted and then acted out the scenes that had brought their marriage to this juncture.

It's a marvellously clever conceit, allowing the couple (Solène Weinachter and Duke) to traverse seamlessly between past, present and their different understandings of both, interspersed with confessions to the audience as if to their therapist. What we saw was a couple in which each party plays a role in the other's drama — but not one that they choose, understand or even know. The performance kept returning to one ambivalent and utterly foundational moment: Juliet waking from the dead just

in time to stop Romeo killing himself from grief, unaware that Romeo had at that very instant reasoned that life was worth living after all, and he might find fulfilment elsewhere.

The performers were a terrifically good mismatch, Duke's flop-haired English diffidence constantly snagging against Weinachter's more direct expressions of force and feeling. Their duets — both verbal and physical — were combinations of misalignments and mistimings, witless entrances and wilful exits. They were funny and sad, but what made this work hit home was not a canny recognition of their relationship, but rather the realization that their lasting romance was predicated upon their death, and in living they become inescapably both less and more than romance — a literary genre, after all — could ever be.

Over in the Jack the Ripper quarter of east London, Wilton's Music Hall and choreographer Mark Bruce have become longstanding partners, Bruce's darkly gothic sensibilities well matched with the shadowy atmosphere of London's oldest music hall. His *Macbeth* is more a moody imagining than a rereading of Shakespeare — indeed, it is in many ways a series of animated images rather than a narrative. And what images, as lurid and stylish as a Roger Corman film. The three witches stripped off bird-like headdresses to reveal grotesque gorgon faces, and pulled blank-faced baby dolls from handbags. Soldiers opened a ceremonial box to reveal a severed human head. Daggers and swords were everywhere; there's a forest of spears, and a court scene that had the guests doing a Scottish sword dance, as if there were blades beneath their feet.

Bruce's *Macbeth* is a truly ensemble

production. The music alternates between funereal dirges and high-pitched horror. Guy Hoare's lighting (and shading) glows and fades strategically, making the small stage feel unbounded and adrift. Phil Eddolls' fantastically adaptable designs turned castles into caverns and thrones into deathbeds. The seven-strong troupe of dancers managed to portray an entire cast of characters, but it was ultimately Jonathan Goddard and Eleanor Duval as the Macbeths who carried the show. Manipulative, deceitful and damned sexy, their marriage is an alliance of powers and it is, of course, both destructive and doomed.

For their now regular season at the upscale Barbican Arts Centre, Ballet Black revived Arthur Pita's 2014 *Dream Within A Midsummer Night's Dream*. It opened with familiar balletic partnering: a trio of couples in tights and tutus, their gendered division of performative labour (fish dives, supported arabesques and pirouettes) as wedded to the classical style as traditional marriage is to the church. That didn't last long.

A puckish, gender-fluid boy scout in toggled safari suit, green tinsel beard and smudged eye shadow sprayed them with fairy dust, liberating the partners from their customary roles into a magical realm of improper couplings and unbound erotics. Helena snorted a line of glitter and got off with Hermia. Oberon fell for the swooningly romantic vision of Lysander trailing diaphanous veils. Pita played his favourite cabaret songs, from Eartha Kitt to Yma Sumac. We were enchanted — and seduced. And when our couples returned to their traditional roles at the end, we knew they had changed. Love had taken them for fools and asses, and it did them a world of good. *DI*

London



BY SANJOY ROY

Copenhagen



BY ANNE-MARIE ELMBY

On February 10, 2018, 29-year-old Jonathan Chmelensky received his long-awaited promotion to principal of the Royal Danish Ballet. The promotion was made onstage by artistic director Nikolaj Hübbe after Chmelensky's debut as Prince Siegfried on opening night of *Swan Lake*, a restaging by Hübbe and Silja Schandorff.

Born in France into an international dancer family, Chmelensky attended the Conservatoire de Paris and was offered a scholarship to the Cuban National Ballet School in Havana. In 2007, he was invited to Denmark by the company's former director Frank Andersen, who was in Cuba during an exchange between the Cuban National Ballet and the Royal Danish Ballet. In 2013, Chmelensky was appointed soloist. In his dancing, Chmelensky is able to combine the ease of the Bournonville style and its focus on detail, with the virtuoso bravura of the Cuban school and a personal elegance.

A new collaboration with Royal Danish Ballet dancers and the National Gallery of Denmark in Copenhagen takes place during Wednesday late-opening hours, and is proving to be an audience magnet. The dancers each choose a painting, sculpture or installation that inspires them to create a short choreography, performed next to the artwork in the gallery itself.

One of the choreographers was Oliver Starpov, a 22-year-old who has already proven his choreographic talent in the Russian and Spanish divertissements in Act II of the Hübbe/Schandorff *Swan Lake*, as well as in other works. For his museum solo, he found inspiration in the Iranian-German artist Nairy Baghramian's installation *As Long as It Lasts*. Baghramian had transformed a piece of solid ceiling lattice into a fragile structure of wood and epoxy, balanced high on thin metal legs. To Starpov, the installation reflected the paradox of an artist's strong, perfect appearance versus

vulnerability and inner despair. At first embodying anguish to Maria Callas' sensitive voice in the aria *Casta Diva*, the mood later changed, and Starpov threw himself through the frail construction with daring vehemence.

Another Wednesday, in front of Danish artist Joakim Skovgaard's *Christ in the Realm of the Dead*, painted in the 1890s, Benjamin Buza danced his pas de deux, *Art is Long, Life is Short*, with Ida Praetorius. Instead of a religious approach, Buza stated in a talk that he interpreted the subject matter in general terms about someone offering hope and love to overcome obstacles. His open arms tenderly embraced and supported Praetorius in the loving duet, set to Arvo Pärt's adaptation of a Mozart adagio, before she moved on alone.

Under the collective title *Don't Leave Me Alone*, Danish Dance Theatre presented three works at Takkelloftet, a smaller stage in the Royal Danish Theatre building, Operaen, where the company has now found its permanent home.

Dutch Wubkje Kuindersma, a former dancer with Danish Dance Theatre who has become an internationally sought-after choreographer, brought her new piece for her former colleagues, *Tales of a Nordic Mind*. It is inspired by the Scandinavian landscape and her own experience of distance and how it affects relationships.

Here, loneliness and longing were personified by a melancholic male dancer meandering around the dark stage. Through seven glass screens that could be wheeled around, the dancers got a close view of each other, but the glass also separated them and at times reflected the spotlight. When a couple finally came together, they were caged in by the glass walls.

Stephen Shropshire's *Lamento della Ninfa* was a lyrical and quite classical trio for one female and two male dancers, who were always physically connected in lifts and intricate flowing moves, set to Norwegian singer Ane Brun's *Oh Love*.

Mostly, Danish Dance Theatre presents commissioned works made directly for them; an exception was Didy Veldman's *Frame of View* (2008), which artistic director Tim Rushton saw on a

visit to New York. Although it's unusual for these dancers to portray characters, they clearly enjoyed delving into the work's kaleidoscope of human situations, which ranged from the sad to the hilarious, at times reminiscent of a Georges Feydeau farce where people in perfect timing continually exit and enter a room. Here three doors were placed in invisible "walls" that allowed much swinging and climbing over and around them. The music ranged from Offenbach to Nina Simone and Jacques Brel, among others.

In Takkelloftet's foyer, dancer Lukas Hartvig-Møller demonstrated another talent by exhibiting photos that combined his colleagues, the scenographic designs and splendid views of the Operaen waterfront in an imaginative way. The first and third works of the performance later toured Denmark with a different cast.

At the end of March, Rushton, who had led the company since 2001, handed over the reigns to Swedish choreographer Pontus Lidberg, who brings extensive international experience to the job. Rushton's first project as a freelance choreographer will be a piece for Singapore Dance Company. In August, he returns to Copenhagen to stage works for Tivoli Ballet, followed by a full-length creation for Danish Dance Theatre.

Also in March, Ask la Cour Rasmussen, a Danish principal with New York City Ballet, paid a visit to Dansekapellet, a former funeral chapel in the north-western part of Copenhagen that has been converted into studios and a theatre. He presented his solo work *Britten Re:Imagined*.

As Rasmussen entered, as if aged and blinded, a huge silhouette of an embracing figure appeared on the domed ceiling. Closely connected to musician Jacob Shaw's deep-felt playing of Benjamin Britten's *Cello Suite No. 3*, Rasmussen moved through a whole life span of moods reflected in the softest to the most vigorous dancing, which took place around Shaw and throughout the circular space, often close to the audience, who were seated along the walls. The room was lit by lanterns, which were snuffed out one at a time; when just one remained, Rasmussen slowly left, his arms reaching into eternity. ⁰¹

Excerpt from
 Pina Bausch: The Biography
 By Marion Meyer
 Translated by Penny Black
 Oberon Books, 2017
www.oberonbooks.com



“ Whilst the male dancers of the Tanztheater [Wuppertal] usually appeared in dark suits or just in shirts and trousers, simple and unobtrusive, [Marion] Cito dressed the female dancers — according to the mood of the piece — in colourful dresses. The dresses frequently served as a mirror to emotions. It is Cito we must thank for the extravagant evening dresses which highlight a dancer's elegance and lend their movements a vibrant sensuality. She left an indelible mark on the unmistakable style of the company. No other choreographer dared dressing their dancers in evening wear without risking being associated with the Wuppertal ensemble.

Pina Bausch did not like disguise. It was her aim 'not to want to stand out, not to be transported away, not to disguise oneself ... the people on stage must be recognizable as people, not just as dancers. In order not to disturb the performance, I want them to be seen as people who dance.' While the dancers' costumes could hardly be described as everyday clothes, they gave the performers room to reveal their individuality. Often the festive evening wear creates an atmosphere similar to that of a ball, so that the dancers show themselves as refined night time guests, but with cracks in their smooth façades. The way the men and women attack or play childish games contrasts with the civilized superficiality of the costumes. In some works, such as *Viktor*, *Palermo Palermo* and *Masurco Foga*, the female dancers wear light summer or strappy dresses, not dissimilar to nightdresses, which make the dancers appear vulnerable. ”



BY JUSTINE BAYOD ESPOZ

The 22nd Jerez Festival offered proof this year that art is not created in a vacuum and that our collective social experience is making its mark on the art world. Dancer and choreographer Rocío Molina's latest production *Caida del cielo* (Fallen from Heaven) premiered in late 2016, almost a year before #MeToo, but this ode to the rapturous divinity of the terrestrial and the feminine smacks of glorious feminism.

Caida del cielo is inspired by the image of the fallen angel in Dante's *The Divine Comedy*, but program notes reveal that the crux of the work lies in Molina's dance, "which is born between her ovaries and the land she traverses, as it changes into a celebration of womanhood." Molina's journey from heaven to earth captures her transition from "a body in equilibrium to a body that celebrates its femininity." That transition managed to cause quite an uproar.

The curtains opened on a stark white stage. Molina, clad in a white bata de cola, rolled, squat walked and tumbled around the stage. If this is heaven, it's pretty boring. Molina's paused, repetitive motions became tedious, but everything changed when, standing mid-centre stage, she peeled off her dress to reveal her body, with her right arm covering her breasts and her left hand obscuring her pubis. Her nude figure was alluring in the low lighting. This is the fall — humanity's fall — from Eden: the moment when we became conscious of our nakedness and covered ourselves out

of shame. Molina was quickly wrapped in a robe, and her earthbound journey commenced, but not without first provoking reaction.

The shock at Molina's discrete disrobing onstage was palpable amongst the packed audience. It's not often in flamenco that artists bare more than their soul. I myself have witnessed only one or two other instances of nudity over my near 14 years of watching. However, the real brouhaha erupted on social media the day after, when a photo of the moment was posted online and commenters, many of whom hadn't even seen the show, accused her of going too far and desecrating the flamenco art form. The fact that the nude female form can stir this much controversy in 2018 means that Molina's piece is timely, to say the least.

Once clothed in her now commonplace spandex bra and capris, Molina added the element of a spandex thong. As her male musicians took time out by eating snack-sized bags of chips, one of them slapped a bag onto her crotch. Each time she reached down to take a chip, one of the men slapped her hand away, chiding her for trying. The ensuing dance climaxed as she finally sent chips flying from her waistline and promptly devoured the few chips left in the bag. The piece is a funny and intelligent commentary on female masturbation specifically, but more generally on a woman's enjoyment and free expression of her sexuality. This piece in particular and the show as a whole — with its hardcore

flamenco fusion musical score and uninhibited dance and imagery — was a punk rock ode to liberation.

Whereas Molina struck a match that set a contemporary powder keg ablaze, dancer/choreographer Rafaela Carrasco used her match to light the wick of memory and empathy. The success of *Nacida sombra* (*Born Shadow*) lies in Álvaro Tato's dramaturgy, which springs from an imagined literary dialogue in the form of letters between four of the most prominent female artists of Spain's Golden Age in the XVI and XVII centuries. The letters set a framework in which each tells how her life has been a fight against the conventions of the female gender, lives in which loneliness is the price for bravery, and the struggle for freedom is arduous and painful.

Each of the four female dancers embodied one of the heroines, taking us from mystic Teresa of Ávila's convent cell to the noble courts of Spain, where we find María de Zayas, whose novels were banned by the Spanish inquisition, then on to the theatre stage in search of fabled actress and lover of King Philip IV, María Calderón, and finally to Mexico to find Juana Inés de la Cruz on the night before entering the convent and beginning her novitiate.

The poignant letters, in a voiceover by acclaimed Spanish actress Blanca Portillo, inspire awe toward women who were so fearlessly ahead of their time. Joining Carrasco onstage were dancers Florencia O'Ryan, Carmen Angulo and Paula Comitre, who gave eloquent accounts of this message of strong femininity and timeless struggle.

Flamenco is almost an afterthought in *Nacida sombra*, which is rare for Carrasco. But her choice to focus most of the choreography on a more lyrical compendium of Spanish classical styles of music and dance is appropriate to the time period being evoked as well as to the overarching theme and ethos of the piece. Her choreography is taut and graceful, with a bright assertiveness bubbling just beneath the surface, giving the movement the depth and intrigue that make its source material so fascinating. This thoughtful and moving work was rightly awarded the festival's Critic's Prize. ^{DI}



Oslo & Gothenburg

BY FREDRIK RÜTTER

Over the last 20 years, Oslo Danse Ensemble has created one major production annually, always triple bills, but this year the company asked Norwegian choreographer Jo Strømgren for a full-length work. His *Salve Regina*, which premiered at Dansens Hus in Oslo at the end of January, is titled after an early Catholic song, which is used as the soundtrack together with modern electronic music by Jørgen Knudsen.

Salve Regina moves between the Baroque era and the present. The opening is set in a town square, with jugglers who make fun of a noblewoman, using Strømgren's well-known floating movements. The ending moves from a Baroque monastery to the present, with church bells hammering in our ears, suggesting the power the church has over ordinary men and women who have to face tough times before they see a new horizon. Strømgren, who had his first ballet staged in 1993, is an experienced man of the theatre who still has a lot he wants to share with his audience.

Norwegian National Ballet has had John Cranko's *Onegin* (1965) in its repertoire since 1997. This season, company director Ingrid Lorentzen cast four different couples for the run, which gave each cast only two or three performances each. That's a lot of work for only a few appearances. In the title role of *Onegin*, she brought in two male guests from Stuttgart Ballet, including Canadian Jason Reilly, who partnered Norwegian National Ballet's Yolanda Correa.

Onegin is still worth watching today, which says a lot about the quality of

Cranko's work. He balances the dramatic build of the ballet between grand ensemble dances and intimate confidential solos and pas de deux.

In the first act, Lensky (Lucas Lima) dances a solo before he melts together with his fiancé, Olga (Miharu Maki), in a duet. Another intimate duet is when *Onegin* (Philip Currell), bored with life in the country, dances with Tatiana (Eugenie Skilnand).

The end of the third act was a fantastic tour de force between Skilnand and Currell, dancing with volcanic emotions, leaving technique behind. When Currell left in despair and the curtain was lowered, it was a heartbreaking moment, with Skilnand standing alone in the middle of the stage, not moving a muscle, but telling us everything about her state of mind with her face and eyes. When a narrative dramatic ballet is danced with the strength of emotion shown here, not much can beat it.

The Young Company, with dancers aged between 17 and 23 who represent about six nationalities, is connected to the Norwegian National Ballet. They have been busy dancing a program consisting of five ballets at home in Oslo and on tour.

The group's director, Kaloyan Boyadjiev, created a duet, *Different Futures*, in which two dancers try to get together, but realize they do not have the same goals. Two new, well-crafted works by Norwegian choreographers Kristian Støvind and Cina Espejord were also on the program. Støvind's *This thing called ballet* started and ended with the dancers standing posed as in a painting by Edgar

Degas. Espejord's *Some see stages* included set pieces that reduced the dancers' freedom of movement, forcing them to make quick decisions in order to find new ways to move.

Well-known works by George Balanchine and Ohad Naharin rounded off the program; it was the latter that the young dancers handled best. Although *Valse-Fantaisie* is not one of Balanchine's most complicated works, without the right attack the brief ensemble ballet, set to Glinka, loses the needed sharp edges, and you are left with a school performance, as was the case on the evening I saw it danced.

It was when the curtain went up to present Naharin's *Minus 16* that the evening caught fire. The dancers dove into the Israeli choreographer's feast of humour and explosive moves with enormous energy and vitality.

At the beginning of March, GöteborgsOperan — directed by Icelandic Katrin Hall and situated in Gothenburg, Sweden's second largest city — premiered a piece by Sharon Eyal, another Israeli choreographer. Eyal's *Autodance* lived up to its title. Walking around the stage on every beat of the music, the dancers transformed themselves into automatic driven creatures, moving on a high demi-point throughout, which created an impression of creatures from another world.

Also on the program was a new work by Tibetan Sang Jijia, who, like Eyal, has done work for Carte Blanche in Bergen, Norway. Jijia has danced and worked elsewhere in Europe and has studied with William Forsythe, so his choreography, one could say, is just as European as Eastern. At the moment, he is a resident artist with two Chinese companies. In Jijia's *As it were*, a key prop is an endless stream of sheets of paper that fall from the ceiling. There was so much that it took the focus away from the performers — whose dancing was strong throughout the evening, but who had to struggle here to handle all the paper covering them. *DI*

The Young Company's Isabel Vila, Jacob Roter and Jonathan Olofsson in Cina Espejord's *Some see stages*
Photo: Erik Berg

Graeme Murphy has had the kind of career in dance that people dream of. Consider where he started — growing up on the island of Tasmania, just south of Australia's mainland. In the 1960s, Tasmania was hardly the cultural centre of the Australian continent. However, a young Murphy found himself in classes with a professional — former Borovansky dancer Kenneth Gillespie.

A few years later, Murphy was accepted as a student in the Australian Ballet School, and then became a performer with the company. It was soon apparent his talent lay in choreography, and together with his longtime creative associate, Janet Vernon, Murphy has developed a massive back catalogue of works for the Australian Ballet, as well as for Sydney Dance Company.

The Australian Ballet's mixed bill, titled simply Murphy, is part celebration and part retrospective. It makes sense to highlight his contribution: Murphy has been a commissioned choreographer for every one of the company's artistic directors since the company was founded in the early 1960s.

The evening was curated by Murphy himself (presumably with Vernon's help), and although some of the works are wonderful — and wonderful to see reconstructed on the grand stage at Melbourne's Arts Centre — some did not need a revival. Take, for example, the romantic bedroom scene from *The Silver Rose*. Created for Bavarian State Ballet in 2004, *The Silver Rose* is a work that never gained much traction in Australia, perhaps because the story is not well known.

An excerpt opened the program, with Dimity Azoury as the Marschallin in a curly red wig and negligee, rising as though from a dream from her bed. Her duet with Ty King-Wall, as Octavian, is designed to be sensual and passionate, but it is hard for the audience to jump into the scene without the larger context of the work to ground it.

Murphy has brought many romantic stories to life through movement. The romance between Odette and the Prince in his *Swan Lake*, or between Clara and her soldier boyfriend in *Nutcracker: The Story of Clara*, better demonstrate the way his movement can highlight relationships between two characters.

The Silver Rose, *Nutcracker: The Story of Clara* and *Swan Lake* are only three of the many full-length works Murphy has created over the course of his career. The latter two are regularly revisited and reconstructed by the Australian Ballet, with *Swan Lake* perhaps the work most closely associated with the tenure of current artistic director David McAllister. The work was one of the first that McAllister commissioned, and is the one that the company performs at home and overseas on a regular basis.

The program also included Murphy's *Firebird*. Created to align with a celebration of the Ballets Russes tours to Australia, this contemporary reimagining draws heavily on Biblical myths. In this version, the two lovers are represented by Adam and Eve, and the evil Koschei is a serpent-like creature that tempts Eve with the apple. Notably, this *Firebird* launched the career of Lana Jones; Murphy created the title role for her nearly a decade ago in 2009. Now a principal artist, Jones' brisk and precise technique and strong character skills are back on display as Firebird, although it almost seems as though she has outgrown the skittishness that Murphy built into the role.

The evening also brought back some of the many works that Murphy created for Sydney Dance Company. In 1979, Murphy and Vernon took the company's reins and turned it into one of Australia's most successful groups. Over three decades, the two created experimental works on the company, often collaborating with other contemporary artists, composers and designers.

For the Murphy program, dancers of the Australian Ballet performed excerpts from *Air and Other Invisible Forces* (1999), *Scheherazade* (1979), *Ellipse* (2002) and *Grand* (2005). These works show the kinds of experimentation Murphy played with at

those stages of his career. In all of them, we can see that Murphy never strayed far from his roots. Sinewy, contemporary movements and inventive gestures populate a choreographic landscape that is often quite traditional; the classic lines of the arabesque never really disappear, for example.

The Sydney Dance Company works were brightened by the original sets and costumes; for Murphy, these elements are always more than just background elements. The program highlighted the contribution of set designer Gerard Manion, as well as costumes designed by Akira Isogawa that ranged from strange to chic, with layers of textures, colours and sweeping design ideas.

Melbourne



BY JORDAN BETH VINCENT

For *Ellipse*, Manion's set looked like an enormous pipe structure that weaved over the heads of the dancers, but also comes all the way to the floor. It is both a frame and a toy to jump over for dancers Jade Wood, Brett Chynoweth, Jill Ogai and Marcus Morelli. Isogawa's costumes for *Ellipse* are particularly outrageous and fun: fringed skirts over high-cut briefs in fluorescent stripes.

The evening accomplished exactly what was intended: to celebrate the work of Graeme Murphy, his associate Janet Vernon and his many other collaborators. *DI*

Reviews



Ballet Hispánico

Lopez Ochoa / *Línea Recta*
Manzanales / *Con Brazos Abiertos*
Pérez-Salas / *3. Catorce Dieciséis*

Even without a playbill, it may have been possible to pick up on the fact that all three pieces in the terrific program presented by Ballet Hispánico in Victoria, B.C., in April were created by women. The evening just felt a little different. Throughout, women were central, but not as male-gaze objects of desire. There were none of the usual love stories, no battles between the sexes or conflicts between males striving for dominance. Women and men were equal.

Annabelle Lopez Ochoa's *Línea Recta* (2016) opened the show with Eila Valls bare-foot onstage in brilliant red, her back to the audience, a long, frilly cola (train) spread out behind her. She began

to move in ways familiar from traditional flamenco: arms above the head, wrists cocked, hands twirling, torso contained. Soon though, her proud carriage melted, her body became fluid and her train became a toy for her to play with. It wrapped around her neck, roiled around her arms.

When four men arrived, the train moved between and around the dancers as, in Ochoa's unusual take on flamenco, the performers actually danced with and touched each other, doing away with the usual oblique, war-like challenge, where the dancers circle each other from afar. In the following segments (marred slightly by the stop/start transitions between

them), four women — in red still, but with abbreviated trains — joined the men in what is both a tribute to the passion of flamenco and a reimagining of it as a dance of partnership.

In the satirically titled *Con Brazos Abiertos* (*With open arms*), dancer Diana Winfree stood in for Mexican-American choreographer Michelle Manzanales, who uses the 2017 work to comment on her own life as someone caught between two cultures: not Mexican enough for the Mexicans, not American enough for the Americans. Like *Línea Recta*, this piece involves multiple segments that often seem to have nothing to do with each other. Full-company dances of great joy — where men and women alike whirled in iconic Mexican embroidered trousers and giant sombreros, or took over the stage in extra-long white skirts

and spun until the space felt overflowing with fabric — alternated with poignant, quiet pieces, highlighting Winfree's long limbs, control and stillness.

As the group sombrero dance ended, Winfree appeared alone on the stage holding her own, plainer version of the famous hat. Now, though, the sombrero is not a thing of joy; rather, it is a symbol of what she wants to both embrace and separate from. She rarely lost contact with the hat: it balanced on her hands, her neck, her arms, her legs. She even tried to climb inside it.

Toward the end, she tossed it in the air, only to have it come back and land over her heart. Later, she danced with Lyvan Verdecia to Radiohead's *Creep* ("What the hell am I doing here? I don't belong here."). Verdecia and Winfree were not at ease with each other at first. She nudged him to move, but it took time for him to respond. Eventually, though, they found a way to work together. He lifted her; she lifted him. To call it hope for the future may be too much, but wouldn't it be nice?

The wildly varied moods of *Con Brazos Abiertos* — reflected in a soundscape that includes a snippet from Cheech and Chong, a reading by actor Edward James Olmos, and a popular Mexican song from the 1940s sung by Julio Iglesias — sound incompatible, but Manzanales wove them with such intelligence and skill that the funny and the sad, the boisterous and the quiet, make a whole cloth.

Tina Ramirez founded Ballet Hispánico 48 years ago in Manhattan to give Latin choreographers and dancers a voice. Often, as with the two previous pieces, commissioned by current artistic director Eduardo Vilaro, that has meant presenting dances with recognizably Latin movement styles or addressing Latin cultural issues. But not always. The final piece, *3. Catorce Dieciséis* by Tania Pérez-Salas, is Latin only by virtue of its creator's Mexican heritage. Built around the idea of the unending number pi (3.1416), this 2002 work makes no references to Hispanic culture and uses no recognizably Latin movement. Instead, it would fit in any contemporary ballet company's repertoire — but they would have to be able to perform it as well as these dancers.

3. Catorce Dieciséis showcased the company's technique and was the most artistically integrated work on the program. Set to music by Vivaldi and other Baroque composers, the piece moved seamlessly through a series of scenes as through a kaleidoscope: the colours and moods shifting but ever moving forward. Quick, sharp movements, unexpected flexes of the feet and undulations of the back and chest, brought out the astringent quality in the music, making it sound thoroughly up to date. Unlike the others, this piece is not meant to be fun, yet as a picture of the human condition — keep moving or die — it was beautiful.

— ROBIN J. MILLER



Ballet of Flanders

Clug, Foniadakis, Lock, Nijinsky / Mixed Bill

Ballet of Flanders' contemporary mixed bill, *Selon Désir*, opened on March 31 in Gent's charming Baroque-style opera house. It was an appropriate venue, because each of the four pieces featured links between new and old. The many connotations of a very basic emotion — the title is loosely translated as “to each their own desire” — plus interpretations by choreographers of widely different origins made for an intriguing melting pot of artistic ideas and styles.

Opening the bill was *Les Noces* (*The Wedding*), to Stravinsky's masterful score of the same name, which premiered in Paris in 1923, with choreography by Bronislava Nijinska. The only other notable ballet set to this score is one created for the Flanders troupe in 2013 by Romanian Edward Clug, which returned here as the evening's opener.

Clug is recognized not only for his sharply rhythmic style, but also for the modern stamp he puts on classical themes. He brought this to bear in his take on a present-day wedding, with a subsequent awakening of youthful sexual curiosity.

Designer Marco Japelj chose minimalist forms as the main set pieces, two box-shaped structures that revolved, suggesting both the interior and exterior of simple houses. The village folk were part and parcel of the proceedings, from a stag party with riotous young men (in loose black coats) practically stripping the groom (to the bride's furtive delight and her mother's annoyance), or in raucous celebration when the groom (Philippe Lens, in a reprise of the role he created) was lowered jestingly onto his shy bride (Lara Fransen).

Clug's movement references Russian folk dance, with wheeling lines of men and women (the latter in peasant blouses and tiny briefs) running on half-toe, with grounded knee bends and, for the men, high Cossack-style jumps. There are nods to Nijinska's iconic choreography in the sculptural, reclining-head poses, interspersed with contemporary off-kilter moves and hand patterns. The piece was attractive and witty, but, in essence, rather shallow. Although Clug caught the music's rhythmic complexity

well, the nuances of the rich choral score somehow eluded him.

In 1912, *L'après-midi d'un faune* was a choreographic first from the great dancer Vaslav Nijinsky (Nijinska was his sister), and while Ballet of Flanders has hosted several successful re-inventions, the original version, remounted by a superb interpreter of the title role, French étoile Nicolas Le Riche, was chosen for this bill.

Faune looked and sounded as sumptuous and fresh as ever. The erotic somnolence of a pagan summer is conjured in the first strains of the Debussy score and by the glorious Léon Bakst backdrop. Principal dancer Wim Vanlessen performed the title role with technical finesse and musicality. Although not quite exuding the animal sensuality of other legendary performers, his was nonetheless a valid interpretation. This boyish-looking faune was a hot-blooded pubescent, whose last arching release on the nymph's scarf (which so shocked Nijinsky's public) appeared totally in keeping. As the lead nymph, Ana Carolina Quaresma was elegant and beautiful, but one wished for better lines and smoother footwork from her six compatriots.

Greek choreographer Andonis Foniadakis' *Selon Désir* premiered in 2002 by the Ballet du Grand Théâtre de Genève and was originally slotted to end this program. It would have made an uplifting finale — the performance was a triumph, a whirling tornado of energy from the first exhausting solo (dynamo Fransen again) through to the massed movement of colourfully dressed bodies jumping, swinging and swirling through Bach's powerful choral evocation of the *St John Passion*. Julien Tarride composed the brooding electronic

connection to the second section, the contrastingly introspective and sublime *St Matthew Passion*.

Under a smoke-hazed light that emanated from high beyond the flies, Foniadakis' choreography suggested humanity's searching, suffering quest — the desire to understand life. Figures broke ranks to form more intimate groupings, some lifting dancers with arms stretched high, others offering support in taut, tension-filled formations.

The enigmatically titled *The Heart of August* was Canadian Édouard Lock's fragmented portrait of two mythical lovers, Orpheus and Eurydice. In part one, premiered here in 2017, Eurydice is doomed at death to remain forever in the underworld, which is a nightmarish place — cold white spots change position at mind-blowing speed, picking out figures hurtling themselves from the wings or highlighting dance moves featuring dizzily fast arms. Eurydice, in a slinky black dress, is a plaything of the god Pluto (bare-torsoed Juliano Nunes).

The Heart of August ... Continued, the evening's finale, was more contemplative. It homed in on the lover's final parting after she seduces him to take one last, forbidden glance. The silent movie effects — all monochrome colours, flickering lights and rapidly shifting spots — made for an intriguing opening, the fin-de-siècle mood heightened by the music, Gavin Bryars' deconstructed compilation of Strauss waltzes. But Lock's hard-edged and repetitive moves palled — behind the slickness was little depth; beyond the diamond brilliance, not enough content. At 55 minutes, this part seemed eternal, in the worst sense.

— JUDITH DELMÉ



Gärtnerplatz Theatre Ballet

Karl Alfred Schreiner / *Jean*
Michael Keegan-Dolan / *Antonín*

With *Jean* and *Antonín*, artistic director Karl Alfred Schreiner fulfilled a dream he has had since he took over Gärtnerplatz Theatre Ballet in Munich in 2012: to stage a symphonic ballet. That dream came true in March with his own *Jean* to Jean Sibelius' *Symphony No. 7* and *Antonín* to Antonín Dvorák's *Symphony No. 8*, commissioned from Irish choreographer Michael Keegan-Dolan.

The two ballets premiered in April last year at a much smaller venue, because the Gärtnerplatz Theatre was under renovation. This was the first time they were performed on the big stage to live music, played with sensitivity by the Gärtnerplatz Theatre Orchestra.

The symphonic ballet was for the longest time a controversial genre. In 1933, when Léonide Massine presented one of the first, his *Choreartium* to Brahms' *Symphony No. 4*, many critics were outraged, claiming it was blasphemous and redundant to add dance to this kind of music, which points to nothing but itself.

Sibelius held the same

opinion. In an interview in 1919, he said the symphony is pure music, adding that it goes beyond the possibilities of language. This is the starting point for the two choreographers, who agreed that you cannot impose a story or a narrative upon a symphony. Instead, they wanted simply to make the music visible, and to express all the emotions and fantasies they heard in it.

Nevertheless, Keegan-Dolan has embedded the music for *Antonín*, the first part of the evening, in a specific situation: an Irish wake, using the music, which spans the gamut from gay to melancholic, to express the feelings of the mourners. According to a program note, he heard a strong religious strain in the Dvorák score, which made him think of the Biblical figure of Lazarus, who died and was brought back to life by Jesus. Thus Keegan-Dolan has a modern-day Lazarus as a central character.

At the beginning, Lazarus was lying in an open coffin mid-stage, clad in a suit. As the mourners, dressed

in black dresses and high heels (the women) and suits (the men) arrived, their relationship to the deceased and among themselves was revealed. For instance, on seeing each other, two women stiffened, turned and walked in different directions. After everyone took their seat on rows of chairs placed on both sides of the coffin, most took off their shoes to engage in a kind of ritual, rhythmically slamming the shoes together.

Then the mourning began. Groups gathered and dispersed, dancing with balletic movements, but mostly with bent knees, which blurred the lines and added a feeling of disarray. A woman (Verónica Segovia) sat on the floor, silently screaming in pain, immersed in her own sorrow. In a slowly rising crescendo, the party developed. Some dancers swirled across the stage, while others took off their clothes. Another woman was lifted to the coffin and lay over the corpse. In a frenzy, the rest of the dancers whirled around, on and off the chairs, until they suddenly froze. The corpse rose, lit a cigarette, took a couple of drags, passed it on to someone and left. Then the action started again, until a

firework of confetti burst over the stage. With this surprise ending, Keegan-Dolan raised the questions: What does it mean to die, and what does it mean to those left behind?

Schreiner's *Jean* had a more sinister take on death. The piece began with a man (Giovanni Insaudo) crawling onstage on all fours. He then lay down, arching head, arms and legs as if in death throes. Dancers appeared from behind light grey transparent curtains, as if materializing out of banks of fog. They were clad in bluish-grey shorts and tops (the costume designer for the evening was Bregje van Balen), and as a group resembled the spray of breaking waves. The room, darkly lit by a flickering candle, had a dream-like atmosphere from another era.

In contrast to the rigid figure on the floor, the movements of the group of 16 dancers, together and in smaller units, were light and undulating. At times, a man bent a woman forward, so she looked like a small wave hitting the shoreline. Two couples moved as if fighting, but without ever touching. Other dancers moved in circles in a mix of joyful ballet- and breakdance-like movements, changing into groups with gnarled fingers and silent screams. Suddenly, the candle was extinguished and a woman standing downstage was lowered into a grave-shaped hole. In the flicker of a second, everybody dropped dead.

Throughout, Schreiner created a contrast between the inert and decaying figure on the ground and the vitality of the youthful dancers, but at the same time, the ending suggested that youth is not exempt from death. Nevertheless, the piece to me

never took off: there were too many disparate ideas strung together without any seeming relation. The ending, which should have provided a dramatic climax, was little more than just another episode.

The two pieces, however, complemented each other well by contemplating death in different ways: *Antonín* celebrated the joy of life, *Jean* the inevitability of death and the transience of all existence.

— JEANNETTE ANDERSEN

Featuring Marius Petipa's Act III from *Swan Lake*, staged by Nedvigin, and the world premiere of *Remembrance/Hereafter* by Craig Davidson, the bill clearly reflected a ballet company in transition.

Where McFall created an open, collaborative environment, designed to foster creativity, Nedvigin has a more traditional, top-down approach and a vision to ground the repertoire in 19th-century classicism, as part of a

previous two acts, the palace scene appeared curiously out of context, but the Petipa excerpt made a statement about the company's polite new identity. In the Princesses' waltz, six newcomers with similar body types lilted through pliant arabesques, then fanned themselves modestly with uniformly supple épaulement.

As Prince Siegfried, Moisés Martín cut a sleek profile, with smooth co-ordination



Atlanta Ballet

Petipa / *Swan Lake Act III*

Craig Davidson / *Remembrance/Hereafter*

Tension between the push to innovate and classical restraint has been keenly felt at Atlanta Ballet since 2016, when former artistic director John McFall stepped down and Gennadi Nedvigin, a graduate of the Bolshoi Ballet Academy and former principal dancer with San Francisco Ballet, took the helm.

The strain was apparent in *March* in the double bill, *Black Swan*, the third production of Nedvigin's second season, at Atlanta's Cobb Energy Performing Arts Centre.

more conservative "balanced mix" of classical, neoclassical and contemporary ballets.

For many dancers, the new order wasn't a good fit. By the end of Nedvigin's first season, nearly half, including many of the company's most experienced artists, departed — their vacant positions filled by about 15 new recruits, hungry to prove themselves.

Swan Lake's Act III provided that opportunity, with its character dances and devilishly difficult *Black Swan* pas de deux. Without the

and a gift for mime. As Odile, Emily Carrico met the role's technical challenges admirably, with dramatic verve that delivered on her character's cunning and arrogance.

She dove into an arabesque promenade, mocking Odette's soft abandon, then snapped to a steel-toed *sous-sus* and glanced knowingly at the audience as if letting them in on her scheme. When Siegfried offered her roses, signifying his intent to marry her (and, unwittingly, Odette's demise), Carrico seemed to accept them with a darkly sardonic, "Oh, you *shouldn't* have."

If restraint and subterfuge characterized the first half of the evening, Davidson's

Remembrance/Hereafter married the company's freshness with the heartrending lyricism of Franz Schubert's *Death and the Maiden* quartet. Here, Davidson broadened the theme of death to encompass transitions, an apt topic during Atlanta Ballet's current state of flux.

Davidson recently retired as a soloist with Dresden's Semperoper Ballett; before that, he danced with Royal Ballet of Flanders. In 2015, he created his first commission for West Australian Ballet and recently completed a second residency at New York City Ballet's Choreographic Institute.

In what he calls a "contemporary classical" style, Davidson deftly handled choreographic form using a mostly classical vocabulary. Emotionally, he played it safe. He avoided "viewing death as trauma," a program note said, and instead explored the "beauty of that final surrender."

Kate Venables' set design, a hanging garden of roses, hovered above dancers' heads and descended into three points, creating a mixed sense of beauty and doom.

Similarly mixed emotions fill Schubert's music, played live, driven by tension between romantic expression and classical form. Violins evoke the maiden's anxious, high-pitched voice, which flutters and flies over a driving baseline of call and response motifs, as if there is constant questioning in the composer's soul. Low-register melodies, steady and measured, evoke Death's consoling voice and impending approach.

New company dancer Jessica He embodied the music's fraught tensions, reaching off balance, every fibre yearning as she darted one way, then another.

An ensemble clad in plum and ivory often framed He with evenly spaced, weighted motions. Bodies yielding into gravity represented death's inevitability. Streaming through diagonal strides, they pivoted and unwound in lush, open lines — a forward lunge, a leg thrust high to the side — then closed into fifth position, arms pressing straight to either side, finite and absolute.

In a compelling pas de trois, He vaulted onto the shoulder of one male partner, pivoted and was levered down into the arms of the other, who pressed her up into an inverted lift. She spun into a supported arabesque, then, her toe tracing curves along the floor, was passed back and forth between partners, meandering, as if caught up in her own indecision.

The ballet's final section, a celebration that reunited the departed with the living, captured Schubert's lyricism, but not his darkness. Schubert's breathlessly driving tarantella is anything but celebratory. Its galloping pace feels like a desperate flight from Death on horseback, and high-pitched notes evoke wraiths flying overhead. Here is perhaps where *Remembrance* failed to meet the music eye to eye.

The final image captured Davidson's overarching idea perfectly. As the ensemble whirled around He, who was held above her partners' heads, she was suspended in mid-air, tilted on a spiral, as if falling and ascending at the same time.

The image was emblematic of the company in the midst of change, pulled between romantic yearning and classical form, between drives to create and to preserve, and between flight and fall.

— CYNTHIA BOND PERRY



Toronto Dance Theatre

Christopher House / Mixed Bill

For its 50th-anniversary season, Toronto Dance Theatre toured in Canada and to South America with a program of works created by artistic director Christopher House over his 24 years at the company's helm.

Entitled House Mix, the evening was truly a mixed bill. Some works were clean and crisp, some stark, some classic and some mesmerizing in their repetitive nature. However, all were crystallized, deeply physical, and performed with presence and panache by 12 of the company dancers. If there is one word to describe the show overall, and House's works generally, perhaps it would be elegance, in the scientific sense: simple and effective. House has a skill for distilling

a work down to its essence, using form, timing and space clearly, and highlighting both the diversity and unity of the cast.

Martingales (2014) was perhaps the most obvious example of this elegance: a straightforward but engaging medley of ball tossing, running, spiralling and looping. With an electronic score performed live by Thom Gill, the piece began with dancers nonchalantly tossing and catching balls. The music switched from ambient sound to a driving three-quarter rhythm, urging the dancers into a complex running pattern of spirals and loops, sometimes solo, sometimes in pairs face to face and holding hands, with one partner running



It was a reminder that we were viewing a retrospective — many of these works were created in a very different time. In some ways it is unfair to look at them through a 2018 lens, but, simultaneously, it is impossible not to, and watching some of the older works in the context of #MeToo and other social movements intensifies the gender stereotypes. It is, however, interesting to note a distinct contrast between the more traditional gender divisions in the older works, and the clear and intentional androgyny of the newer and remixed works. Costumes for four of the five pieces are basically unisex, and dancer roles are much more uniform.

In both *Thirteen* and *Echo Dark*, House returned to works from his early TDT career, deconstructing, reconstructing, re-working and re-imagining them for today. *Thirteen* involved a more complete undoing of form and structure, allowing the dancers to explore — in an improvisational context and in just 10 minutes — the movement language taken from what has been called a signature work, *Glass Houses* (1983). One dancer introduced a movement idea and then all three riffed on this, played with it, challenged one another, reinvented the idea throughout the space until the next idea was proposed and the process repeated. Christianne Ullmark was a standout — crisp and specific in her movement, while simultaneously assertive and playful.

Echo Dark, a reimagining of *Echo's Object* (2005), was the standout piece on the program. With stark and unchanging lighting and sound, the build of the

work was carried entirely by House's masterful sense of timing, use of pause and element of surprise. The five dancers began planted on the spot, wearing huge army-green canvas skirts. Their arms and torsos moved in contorted, bound and stilted arcs. When they suddenly turned and started travelling upstage with a dramatic arching kick, the military boots beneath their skirts were a surprise, and were used to dramatic effect throughout.

House's 1998 *Vena Cava* is an understandable choice to close the program: an athletic, large ensemble work with a driving score and a relentlessly fast pace. The dancers hardly pause for a moment, and their

presence, clarity and acuity are palpable. A solo by Erin Poole two-thirds of the way through was a welcome and needed change of pace: her fluid, supple movements evoked a praying mantis — long-limbed, precise and calculated. The solo provided an opportunity to zero in on the individual before a return to the rush and chaos of the group.

It was revealing to see House's works stacked up together against one another. We witnessed, in one evening, both the evolution and continuity of a choreographic aesthetic, and saw firsthand how the definition of the word elegance can change over time.

— KATE STASHKO

backward. Entrances, exits, pairings and partings were perfectly co-ordinated. From a final organized chaos of catching, sinking, whirling and tossing, the work dissolved as it began, with balls and dancers gradually dropping out, in what was a somewhat anticlimactic end, though the simplicity seemed appropriate.

Excerpts from one of House's earliest works, *Fjeld* (1990), followed. The female duet featured elegant, circular movement and unembellished gestures — a hand on a shoulder, a head in a lap — to portray a somewhat stereotypically feminine quality. The male trio was a series of tableaux of bodies, nude from the waist up, draped over and entwined with one another. Moments of vulnerability — an exposed ribcage, underarm, throat — provided a less clichéd view of masculinity, and created a desire for the female duet to have the same scope.

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ALEX WELLS



GALLERY SPACE

When I was a boy, my parents often took our family on trips to experience Indigenous cultural ceremonies. These taught us about the different medicines that come from plants, when to hunt and when to harvest, and how to honour the earth, stars, plants and animals.

This is also where, at age five, I started to dance, gradually trying all the categories. The ones that called to me most were the fancy dance and, especially, the hoop dance, which I have been involved with for three decades now, from the age of 13.

Traditionally, hoops were made out of willow, but now they're plastic (hot water piping has the perfect thickness) or bamboo. The movement has always been freestyle, often used to form the shapes of animals and plants honoured during the ceremonies.

The outfits we wear are an extension of who we are and where we come from. Beadwork decoration features traditional family designs, and each tribe has its own way of making moccasins to suit the terrain in which they live. I prefer to use bull hide, with thick wool inside on the bottom, and with no grip on the sole for easier slide.

I lived pretty much on the road for my early performing life, but now I'm based on a ranch and head out to dance at powwows, festivals and other events.

— ALEX WELLS, LIL'WAT NATION
MOUNT CURRIE, BRITISH COLUMBIA

Alex Wells forming a buffalo head design,
K'ómox longhouse, B.C.
Photo: Melody Charlie

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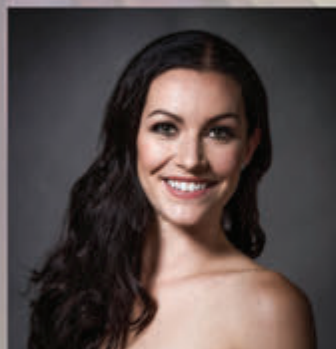
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