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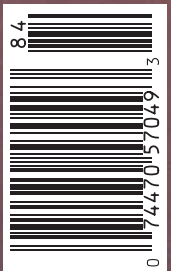
CRYSTAL PITE'S
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Builds Relationships

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CLASSICAL AND CONTEMPORARY
DANCE IN CANADA AND ABROAD

WINTER 2018 VOL. 46 NO. 4

PUBLISHER Vancouver Ballet Society

EDITOR Kaija Pepper

ART DIRECTION Brenda Finamore

COPY EDITOR Margaret Jetelina

OFFICE ADMINISTRATOR Sojin Kim

FULFILLMENT Inovva

PRINTING Horseshoe Press Inc.

MAILING Mail-O-Matic

ADVERTISING Jorssen Media

WEB MANAGER Brynn McNab

SOCIAL MEDIA Tessa Perkins Deneault

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

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Distributed in Canada by Magazines Canada

Distributed in the USA and internationally by Coast to Coast



Canada Council
for the Arts

Conseil des arts
du Canada

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



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

ISSN 1189-9816

Federal Tax Exemption No. 0308353-22-27

Public Mail Agreement No. 40050848



This Winter issue of *Dance International* is mailed out at the end of November, so it should arrive at your door in plenty of time for holiday reading. If you act quickly, there is even time to send out a gift subscription to that dancer or keen theatregoer in your life.

An annual subscription is a thoughtful, handy and reasonably priced way to support a friend or family member's love for dance throughout the year. We've made it super easy by including a form on the inside back cover. Or you can go to our website for an efficient PayPal transaction, at www.danceinternational.org.

This issue is full of great dance and dancers! Crystal Pite was back in town working on a piece for her own company, Kidd Pivot, and I managed to arrange a morning coffee date with what surely must be one of the world's busiest and most exciting choreographers, reported on within. For our accompanying cover story, Tessa Perkins Deneault chatted with dancer Renée Sigouin, who is apprenticing with Pite's company.

We have another special Galleryspace, too, featuring the work of a Nisga'a tattoo artist from northern British Columbia, Nakkita Trimble. Our round-up reports from around the globe cover the usual range of artists and companies, as do our reviews, including a thoughtful look at Ballet Ireland's extra-spooky *Giselle*.

I hope you will consider gifting an annual subscription of our not-for-profit publication, which features insightful stories and beautiful photography in every issue. If you're pressed for time, you are welcome to phone our Vancouver office at 604-681-1525 for a quick processing of a credit card order.

All good wishes for 2019 — we have some great issues lined up ahead!

KAIJA PEPPER

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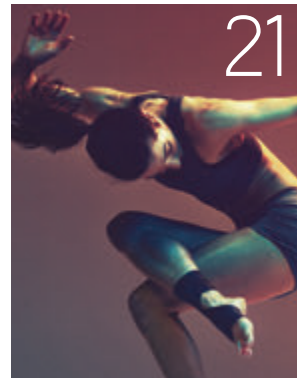
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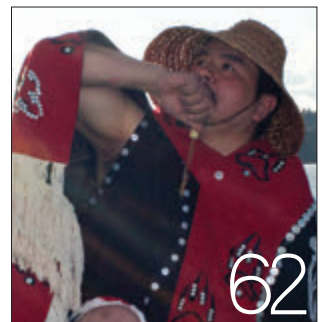
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Photo: Chris Hardy

Creating Relationships

CHOREOGRAPHER HELEN PICKETT
BUILDS BONDS ONSTAGE
AND OFF *By Cynthia Bond Perry*

To find a way into Helen Pickett's creative existence, and the many worlds she creates, look to her characters.

In Pickett's *The Crucible* — commissioned by Scottish Ballet and based on the play by Arthur Miller — Abigail Williams is a young teen traumatized by seeing her parents killed. Yearning to fit into the structure of the family where she is a servant, Abigail develops a crush on John Proctor, head of the household. Their affair is the tipping point, Pickett said, for a girl who is too young to understand the sexual encounter and, then, too emotionally fragile to recover from the ensuing rejection. With the role of Abigail, Pickett digs deep to unearth the layers of a character who will feed hysteria within her community to devastating effect.

Set to premiere at the 2019 Edinburgh International Festival, *The Crucible* is the centrepiece of Scottish Ballet's 50th anniversary season. When we met in the lobby of New York's Joyce Theater last spring, Pickett was in the thick of creation, in between trips to Glasgow, Tulsa, San Francisco, Oklahoma City and Charlotte, North Carolina, where five of her ballets were in various stages of planning, rehearsal and production.

Pickett is a contemporary ballet choreographer of substance, with deep convictions, an effervescent sense of humour and a wide-ranging intellect. She is also one of few women working in the ballet world's higher levels, and one of fewer still who are tackling full-length narrative ballets of serious dramatic heft.

Pickett spent 11 years with William Forsythe's Frankfurt Ballet and shares his respect for classical ballet, love of collaboration and commitment to discovering new modes of creation. Since leaving the company in 1998, however, she has accrued about 20 years of further experience to distinguish her voice as a choreographer.

"I have a movement style from my heritage. But it always needs to evolve," Pickett says. "The human component — each new company — shapes every piece."

In each company Pickett enters, she forges intimate connections with dancers. Through these relationships, she gets to the essence of her characters, whose multifaceted personalities are like windows into her creative worlds.



Scottish Ballet's Sophie Martin rehearses as Abigail Williams in Helen Pickett's *The Crucible*
Photo: Andy Ross



Sarah Hillmer, Pickett's choreographic assistant, has worked with her for eight years. "Helen cares deeply about people. I think she's really drawn to a human story," Hillmer says. If there's a through line in Pickett's career, she adds, it's the need to understand the "why" of her characters' behaviour.

Such curiosity runs in Pickett's family. Her parents worked as actors in New York during the 1960s before settling in San Diego shortly before their daughter's birth. As a child, Pickett put on her own plays at home, her parents and grandfather comprising the cast. Her ballet ambitions started at age eight when she saw *The Nutcracker*. Disappointed that the ballerinas didn't stay up on pointe the entire time, Pickett resolved to become the first to do so.

As a scholarship student at San Francisco Ballet School during the mid-1980s, Pickett wore her pointe shoes extra wide so she could work her feet more against the floor. For Pickett, the pointe shoe was not a restriction — it was, and remains, a means to greater freedom and possibility. "It was the precarious nature of the shoe that I loved," she says.

Pickett first encountered Forsythe when she was a student in San Francisco, and would watch from the studio doorway while he was creating *New Sleep* with the company. Forsythe's method of inviting dancers to bring their voices to the creative process, and discovering new movement ideas together, aligned with Pickett's yearning for independence and tendency to question authority and rules of engagement in the classical ballet world.

"I'd never seen a person work like this with dancers," Pickett says. "Laughter. Asking people's opinions, getting in the mosh-pit."

Within a year, Pickett had joined Frankfurt Ballet and performed in one of *New Sleep's* leading duets during her first season there.

Pickett learned her craft through Forsythe's collaborative process. Forsythe would choreograph several phrases, each up to five minutes long. He'd then ask dancers to "cut and splice, deconstruct, create new solos, new duets, new quartets, new trios out of it," Pickett says. "It was on-the-job training."

After a dislocated knee signalled her retirement from Forsythe's company, Pickett entered a period where, she says, "I kept stepping into different métiers of creativity." She joined the Wooster Group, a New York-based experimental theatre company, at age 31. With the group's director, Elizabeth LeCompte, Pickett participated in multilayered theatre works, built from the ground up. She also studied method acting, learning new tactics for accessing a character by diving into her own psyche to understand the layers of a character's personality.

Work with video artist Eve Sussman in the early 2000s allowed Pickett to experience many aspects of filmmaking. Through the stillness inherent in film, Pickett says she learned about the intensity and psychology of a character's internal life. She also studied somatics with Irene Dowd during this time. The combined influences of theatre, film and somatics would later give her tools to heighten emotions and sensations in her ballets.

Pickett was teaching a workshop in Forsythe's improvisation technologies at Boston Ballet's studios when she invited company artistic director Mikko Nissinen to observe. Nissinen was seeking new choreographic voices, and, he said, Pickett's background in classical ballet, Forsythe's contemporary approach and theatre made her "well-positioned" to be a successful dancemaker. He commissioned a work, and the company premiered Pickett's *Etesian* in 2005.

Named after Aegean summer winds, *Etesian* was a study of touch in partnering. Dancers often lose sensitivity to touch, Pickett says, because rehearsing requires frequent physical contact. With *Etesian*, Pickett helped dancers tune into the energy of their partner when touching them. This opened channels of communication that electrified their performances.

Boston Ballet nominated Pickett for a 2006 New York Choreographic Institute Fellowship Initiative Grant, which she

John Welker (Gutman) kneeling, Heath Gill (Kilroy) centre and artists of Atlanta Ballet in Helen Pickett's *Camino Real*
Photo: Charlie McCullers

received to create a 10-minute work-in-progress for a Boston Ballet studio showing. Within two years, Pickett had expanded it into a one-act ballet for Aspen/Santa Fe Ballet. Titled *Petal*, the work “was about spring and the vibrancy of Gerber daisies and also the delicacy and the strength of this little, velvety piece of living nature,” Pickett says.

Petal explores the nature of human connection, especially through the senses. On a stage saturated in yellow, pink and purple hues, four couples slip through shifting configurations, folding into each other and opening outward. As the music’s lilting momentum grows urgent, two men and a woman alternately push one another’s limbs away, and through a woven progression of supported arches, floor slides and overhead lifts, every detail speaks of the pulls and tensions of relationships — the urge to connect with others, the fragility of trust and the beauty of nature when freed to exist in its fullness and glory.

Petal’s sensory rush of colour and lyricism has helped to make the work Pickett’s most popular ballet. Directors often ask why she doesn’t make more ballets like it. “It’s not that *Petal*’s not a good piece — I stand by that piece,” Pickett says. “I just don’t want to be defined by a formula.”

Over the years, Pickett has developed new approaches to directing dancers, drawn largely from research conducted while earning a master of fine arts in dance from Hollins



Helen Pickett
Photo: Tatiana Willis

University in Virginia. She pursued interests in crossing the theatre’s fourth wall via the senses, especially proprioception and tactility in movement. Pickett’s research gave her new language to communicate with dancers when she staged *Petal* on Atlanta Ballet in 2011.

On opening night, viewers were palpably engaged from the start, when dancer Nadia Mara stretched her body through lemniscate (figure-eight) patterns. Company artistic director John McFall then commissioned Pickett to create *Prayer of Touch*, which led to her appointment as resident choreographer for what would become a five-year term.

Pickett’s collaborative approach fit well with Atlanta Ballet, where McFall created an open environment, nurturing dancers to contribute ideas and opinions to the dance-making process. “The dancers and I got to a point where we could finish each other’s sentences, in movement,” Pickett says.

Trust and rapport provided a baseline for creative risk-taking. In *The Exiled*, her second Atlanta Ballet commission, Pickett dug into a dramatic scenario she’d long wanted to explore — an existential world in which three criminals are trapped behind a Plexiglas barrier while two vigilante characters called Reckoners hand down judgment on the three.

Pickett and several dancers wrote an original script together, creating a narrative that became her anchor. “It was my first foray into working with narrative, which I absolutely fell in love with.”

Pickett took another leap of faith with her final work for Atlanta Ballet, her first full-length narrative ballet — an adaptation of Tennessee Williams’ *Camino Real*. During its 1953 Broadway premiere, the surreal play stirred the minds of poets and artists, but for the most part failed to touch down with general audiences, according to Pickett. She conveyed the essence of Williams’ message through the intertwined arcs of five characters — especially Gutman, a villain who maintains a tyrannical grip on the town, and Kilroy, the big-hearted hero. Stranded on the Camino, a kind of purgatory of lost souls, Kilroy must choose to live, silenced, under Gutman’s thumb — or die on his own terms.

Camino Real’s themes — the silencing of voices, persecution of knowledge and hatred of differences — reappear in *The Crucible*, Pickett’s second full-length narrative ballet. She is also working with some of the same collaborators: designers Emma Kingsbury and David Finn, who have created an austere Puritanical realm, and composer Peter Salem, who propels *The Crucible*’s story through an emotionally textured score.

Also like *Camino Real*, Pickett invited dancers in *The Crucible* to bring personal research and experiences to their characters. It’s a process she nearly always employs, because, she says, it brings authenticity to their performances. She wants us to recognize ourselves in the ballet’s characters, “all the foibles and, also, all of the places where we put our foot down and say no.”

In Miller’s play, the Salem witch trials are an allegory for U.S. Senator Joseph McCarthy’s anticommunist campaign of the early 1950s, but its themes are timeless and universal — intolerance, misuse of power and the choice to live without integrity or die to preserve it.

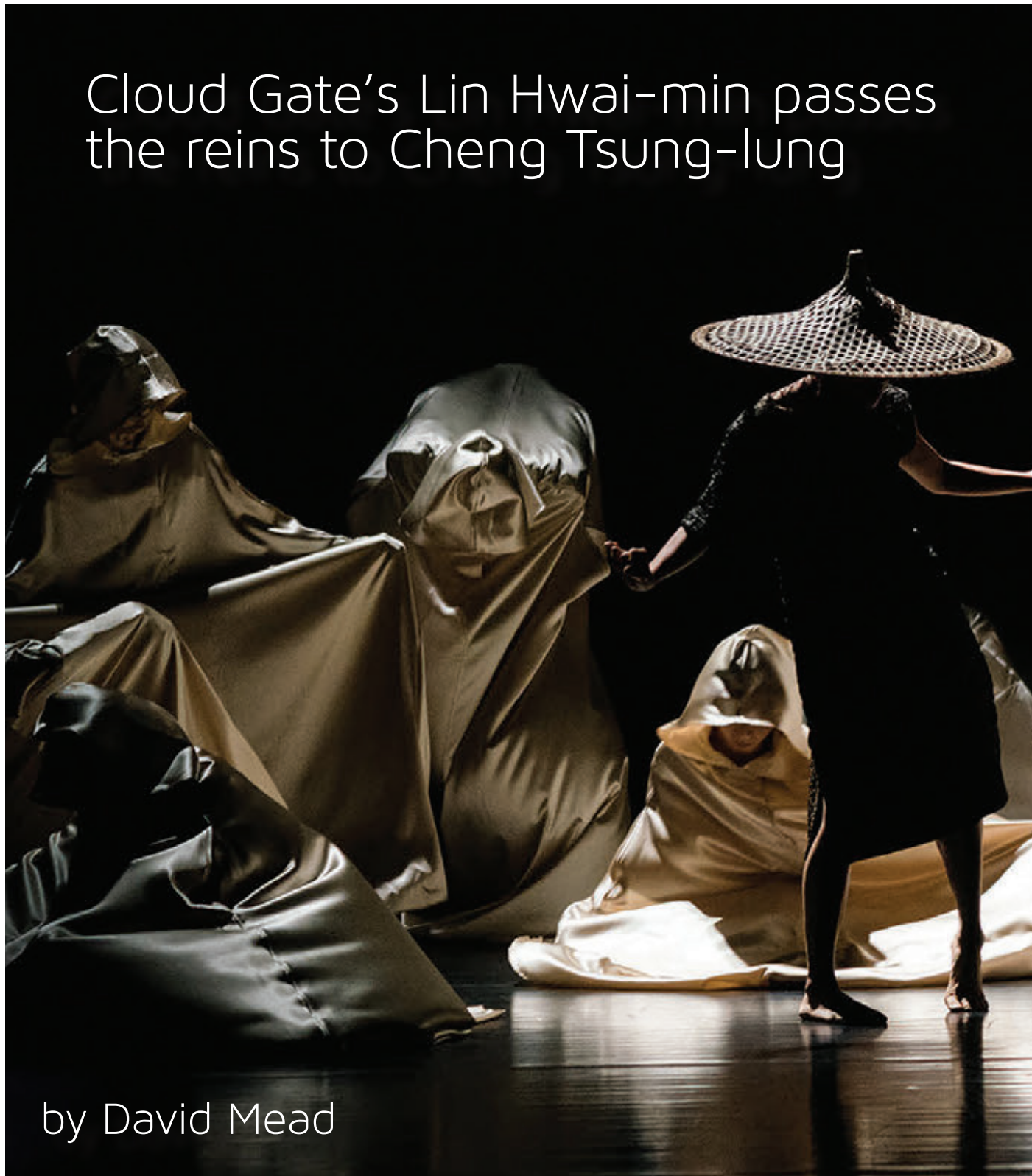
Scottish Ballet artistic director Christopher Hampson plans to tour *The Crucible* to major Scottish cities and, hopefully, internationally. Meanwhile, Pickett is preparing another world premiere with Charlotte Ballet, slated for April 2019, based on photographs of Stephen Shore and the formation of memory.

Whether a misguided youth like Abigail, or a down-on-his-luck hero like Kilroy, Pickett’s characters and her ballets are a way for her to continue digging, “folding in,” helping to uncover deeper questions and reveal new truths about what it means to be human.

For audiences, Pickett’s worlds are multifaceted and ever-changing. It can be disorienting to lose oneself there. Intimacy can be terrifying. But in venturing into these virtual realms, three takeaways emerge: through trust, people open up. Through connections, they explore. Through relationships, human beings struggle, learn and evolve. ▯


THE FUTURE U

Cloud Gate's Lin Hwai-min passes the reins to Cheng Tsung-lung



by David Mead

UNFOLDS



It's the announcement everyone in Taiwan knew must come at some point, but that no one wanted to hear: Lin Hwai-min is retiring as artistic director of Cloud Gate Dance Theatre, the company he founded in 1973 and has led ever since. He steps down at the end of 2019, to be succeeded by Cheng Tsung-lung, present artistic director of Cloud Gate 2.



Cheng Tsung-lung
Photo: Lee Chia-yeh

The first contemporary dance company in the Chinese-speaking world, Cloud Gate today is Taiwan's most significant cultural organization. At home, Cloud Gate Dance Theatre and Cloud Gate 2 not only fill theatres, but summer outdoor shows can attract 30,000 people.

Internationally, a huge touring program has made the main company the country's prime cultural ambassador. Always looking to the future, Cloud Gate's Art Makers project is helping train and develop emerging choreographers, and, although less so than in the past, its influence is still evident in professional dance training. Away from the stage, the Cloud Gate Dance School, started in 1998, has a chain of centres around Taiwan where children and older people can participate in classes that emphasize understanding of the body and creativity. The school also undertakes a number of projects connecting dance with social concerns.

It is all a long way from Cloud Gate's beginnings. Lin had returned to Taiwan after studying in America and spending time in Europe. A couple of projects fell through before the director of the Taiwan Provincial Symphony Orchestra invited him to do some choreography to accompany a performance of theirs in Chiayi. "So, there we go," Lin says. "Cloud Gate was born."

Although he had choreographed in America, Lin had no experience running a company, which meant, "I could be stupid enough to start one," he says with a smile. From the outset, he was keen to attract audiences who wouldn't otherwise see top-class dance. "To keep the company going and to keep that grassroots audience happy, which is difficult, you have to make good enough dance to keep them sitting still and not running out. In a way, the audience trains the choreographer."

Cloud Gate has very much been built in Lin's image. The dancers' training is a unique mix of tai chi, martial arts,



Lin Hwai-min
Photo: Liu Cheng-hsiang



Graham technique and ballet. His choreography is often delicate and graceful, with jumps light and softly landed, before exploding into dramatic, sometimes violent action. Underlying everything is strength and determination. Movement is invariably connected with breath and, more often than not, has an internal focus that draws the audience in.

When asked to pick out highlights of his 45 years at the helm, Lin shifts away from the stage, and tells of a “spiritual encounter” one night when hiking on a pilgrimage. In a small temple, “a lady came up to me and grabbed my hand. She said, ‘Mr. Lin, thank you so much for your beautiful art.’ And then she disappeared. She didn’t introduce herself or anything. I felt very much blessed. It’s things like this that make you feel useful. I know people’s expectations can become an obligation. But I like that.”

Many of Lin’s best-known pieces are firmly rooted in Taiwan’s culture and troubled history, making them easy for local audiences to relate to. For the majority of Taiwanese, his most famous piece remains *Legacy* (1978), which is rarely performed now. It tells the story of early migrants from China who travelled to Taiwan to build a new life. “*Legacy* was first performed at a turning point in the history of Taiwan, the evening after Jimmy Carter announced the United States’ breaking of diplomatic relations,” says Lin. It gave encouragement and support at a time when people in Taiwan needed it, he believes. Other favourite pieces are ones most loved by today’s audiences: the spiritual *Songs of the Wanderers* (1994); *Portrait of the Families* (1997), a hard-hitting look at Taiwanese history that includes powerful references to massacres, political prisoners and executions; and the serenely beautiful *Moon Water* (1998) and *Cursive* (2001).

More recently, he has pondered violence, hope and environmental concerns. In *Rice* (2013), he contemplates humankind’s destruction of nature, while paying tribute to the land, farmers and their crops. In *Formosa* (2017), he uses gesture, script and song as he considers the state of his homeland and its society — a place of problems and tragedy, yet also of hope.

While *Formosa* shows Lin, now 71, is still a force to be reckoned with as a choreographer, he is acutely aware of the issues that have faced some well-known dance companies after the choreographer in whose image they largely lived is gone. He speaks of Tanztheater Wuppertal, which has struggled since Pina Bausch’s passing, the rapid fading of Merce Cunningham’s work, of



TAMSUI’S CLOUD GATE THEATRE

Overlooking the Tamsui River estuary, set amid tropical trees, the modern Cloud Gate Theatre nestles into the hillside. The elegant complex was born out of necessity after a blaze destroyed Cloud Gate’s home across the river in Bali in 2008.

“We didn’t plan to build a theatre,” says Cloud Gate executive director Yeh Wen-wen, laughing. “We thought we only needed a studio, then we thought, maybe a theatre. Then, well, we must have an archive and office space, and we should have exhibition spaces ... The dream became very big.”

The site is held on a 40-year lease from the New Taipei City government. Construction costs were met entirely from donations, from schoolchildren sending in their pocket money, to US \$5 million from the Alphawood Foundation Chicago. The names of all donors are now carved into a wooden wall at the theatre’s public entrance.

The main building includes a state-of-the-art 450-seat theatre; three studios, two of which can be converted into black box theatres; a 1,500-capacity outdoor space; and office and technical accommodation. The theatre stage is backed by huge windows with curtains that can be pulled back to reveal the trees and greenery of the neighbouring golf club. Some visiting companies perform with the curtain open, so productions are seen in natural light.

Outdoors, the unusually shaped copper roof has already turned green, blending with the environment. To further help make the building part of its surroundings, 200 trees were planted around the huge site. “I am growing dancers and growing trees,” jokes Lin Hwai-min.

Cloud Gate Theatre has quickly become a visitor attraction in its own right. The outdoor areas are always open and visitors may walk around, admire the sculptures by noted Taiwanese artist Ju Ming, visit the bookstore and coffee shop, or drop in on the exhibition of Cloud Gate photographs or the Cloud Gate Art Gallery. “It’s bigger, better and more beautiful than I ever expected,” says Lin, “but what is important is that it’s a place for the future.”

— DAVID MEAD



Nederlands Dans Theater post-Jirí Kylián and of the many problems that have bedevilled the Martha Graham company.

Such thoughts came dramatically to the fore in 2017 when Lin was knocked over by a car, badly injuring a leg and sidelining him for many months. His leg is now held together by a complex framework of titanium pins, as he is quick to show in photos on his iPhone. “What would happen if that car didn’t just knock me over?” he asks. “I would be gone.” Thus, he decided to step down while he is still here and can make sure the company and theatre are well positioned to continue without him.

Cloud Gate is presently in a good position for a transfer of leadership. In 2015, the company moved to the Cloud Gate Theatre in Tamsui, a town to the north of Taipei, giving it a permanent home of its own for the first time. Just as important, there is Lin’s successor, Cheng Tsung-lung. “A good choreographer, and getting better and better,” says Lin, who goes on to explain that Cheng didn’t care too much for performing on campuses or in villages initially,

an important part of Cloud Gate 2’s program. “But he texted me one day after an outdoor performance in Kaohsiung. He said, he didn’t know why, but it had touched him and he had cried.

“I feel this company belongs to the people of Taiwan. It is not mine. I am just a bigger screw that holds things together,” Lin adds. “The company will ease itself into another era. I will remain on the board, and if Mr. Cheng thinks it is appropriate, he can present my work. I may do something if he invites me to choreograph, but I would be very happy not to. I have to step away so nobody feels my shadow.”

On his part, Cheng recognizes that the company’s history and Lin’s choreographies will always be important, but, he adds, “I don’t want Cloud Gate to become a museum. Everything changes so fast these days: the pace of technology, the pace of life, daily experiences. But how you cry, how you feel happy, are still the same. We can still be true to ourselves, but I want to adapt to the times, to speak to people of my generation.”

Cheng’s own choreography is quite varied, sometimes modern and edgy, sometimes surreal, the movement frequently sharper and darker than Lin’s. Like Lin, however, he takes a lot from his surroundings. For instance, he says, “*13 Tongues* is from the things I see in the streets of Taipei. *The Wall* is from inside me and shows how I felt at the time.”

At Cloud Gate 2, Cheng has also been keen to experiment and bring in new and emerging choreographers. The Spring Riot 2018 program featured new works by Liu Kuan-hsiang, who had made a number of well-received solo pieces but hadn’t worked with a group before, and Tsai Pao-Chang, co-artistic director of

Tainaner Ensemble, one of Taiwan’s best-known theatre groups. “The Cloud Gate 2 dancers have been working with me for quite a while. They have gotten used to my way of moving, what I like, and we have our own particular chemistry together. But dancers can get set in their ways and Kuan-hsiang provides a very different kind of movement. With Pao-Chang, it was more about process and the experience of using spoken language.”

The passing of the directorial baton will lead to some wider structural changes at Cloud Gate, however. Having done it himself briefly, Lin thinks directing both companies is too much for one person. With there being no obvious candidate to take over from Cheng, the two companies will be merged with a slightly reduced overall number of dancers. Lin doesn’t rule out bringing Cloud Gate 2 back one day, though, should the right choreographer-director emerge.

Mr. Lin, as he is universally known, is far more than an artistic director. His face is recognized throughout Taiwan,

Cloud Gate 2 in Cheng Tsung-lung’s *13 Tongues*
Photo: Lee Chia-yeh

even by those with no interest in dance. It is difficult to think of another choreographer or company anywhere so beloved and respected. "We get the support of people right through society." Looking back, he says he is proud he was able to give Taiwan a company to call its own, one that performed for ordinary people.

Cheng admits his agreement to take over came with a little fear behind it. "Mr. Lin, Cloud Gate, all the people that work here, I always looked up to them. But this is an organization with 45 years' experience. All these people, all that experience, will support me. The only real challenge I have is creating new works. Choreography. That is the most important thing. By devoting myself to creating good works that are close to my thinking, any problems will be solved. I'm rolling up my sleeves and ready to face the challenges." ^{DI}

Ballet

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Wojciech Kilar and the Sound of *Dracula*

Musical insights into Krzysztof Pastor's new production for West Australian Ballet

Aurélien Scannella has broadened the scope, size and skill level of the West Australian Ballet in his five years as artistic director, culminating in an ambitious new production of *Dracula*, which opened at His Majesty's Theatre in Perth in September. Scannella secured Krzysztof Pastor, artistic director of both the Polish National Ballet and Lithuanian National Ballet, to choreograph this co-production with the Queensland Ballet.

Pastor's decision to use the music of his Polish compatriot Wojciech Kilar (1932-2013) was key to the production's success. Kilar wrote scores for more than 100 Polish films and his Hollywood career included films with Roman Polanski and Jane Campion. His European post-minimalist style with its slow-building tension was essential to the success of the Francis Ford Coppola 1992 thriller *Bram Stoker's Dracula*, which launched his international career.

Film scores are created as background music and don't always translate well to ballet, where (in the absence of dialogue) the music often sits front and centre. Pastor overcame this problem by interspersing large chunks of the *Dracula* film score with segments of Kilar's concert and other film music, listed chronologically in the program. The inserted music allowed Pastor to create set pieces and contributed to the ability of librettist Pawel Chynowski to build a strong plot.

The grinding low string timbre from Kilar's symphonic work *Koscielec 1909* gave a menacing edge to the scenes from Dracula's gothic castle, while the sumptuous feel of Mina's London ballroom was established by the recurring Grand Valse from the film *The Leper* (1976). Kilar's *Valse Romantique* from the film *The Promised Land* (1975) was used in several places, its continuously alternating major and minor chords lending a bittersweet yearning to *Dracula's* dark love story. The tango from the film *Jealousy and Medicine* (1973) accompanied a pas de deux between the solicitor Jonathan Harker and Dracula, in a scene that was a potent mix of seduction and horror.

Music co-ordinator Michael Brett arranged the disparate musical excerpts into a cohesive whole, performed with vitality by the West Australian Symphony Orchestra under Judith Yan. Kilar's mix of driving minimalism and passionate romanticism was perfectly partnered by Pastor's neoclassical choreography, where contemporary gesture was likewise framed within classical terminology.

British design team Phil R. Daniels and Charles Cusick Smith (who designed the company's highly regarded 2016 *Nutcracker*) meticulously recreated Victorian-era costumes and architecture. The silhouetted gravestones and cathedral latticework of Romantic painter Caspar David Friedrich's 1818 *Monastery Graveyard in the Snow* was recreated in 3D for the graveyard scene in Act II.

The compelling unity of music, choreography and staging swept the audience over the occasional humps of kitsch awkwardness (for example, the makeshift carriage with its trotting occupants and the baby doll tossed around the stage) to a thrilling end.

At the September 11 performance, Chihiro Nomura was a delicate and passionate Mina, her simultaneous revolt and attraction to Dracula conveyed eloquently in her face and hands. Mina's fiancé Jonathan Harker was the attentive and unfailingly graceful Gakuro Matsui. Reika Sato's pointe work as a spellbound, floppy Lucy was outstanding and Ludovico Di Ubaldo was all angles and long limbs as the agitated psychiatric patient Renfield.

Christian Luck was a writhing, contorted Old Dracula, morphing after drinking blood into the Young Dracula, danced by an alluring, wolf-like Oscar Valdés. Valdés brought an elegant sadness to the role, making Mina's compassion for him more believable. Pastor's emphasis on the dual nature of Dracula's character, underscored by Kilar's music with its constant slide between major and minor chords, created a story that was as much about love and grief as it was about revenge. *DI*

West Australian Ballet's Matthew Lehmann (*Dracula*) with Alexa Tuzil, Kymberleigh Cowley and Sarah Hepburn (his Vampire Brides) in Krzysztof Pastor's *Dracula*
Photo: Jon Green

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BY KAIJA PEPPER

CRYSTAL PITE'S NEXT STORY

REVISOR TAKES SHAPE IN VANCOUVER

Back home in Vancouver last June, Crystal Pite received an honorary doctor of fine arts degree from Simon Fraser University. At the ceremony, the dean of the Faculty of Communication, Art and Technology, Aoife MacNamara, introduced Pite as “an internationally renowned Canadian choreographer, whose works are sought by some of the world’s best dance companies, including the Paris Opera Ballet and the Royal Ballet.” MacNamara noted the work Pite choreographed in 2014 for SFU dance students, *Singularity*, performed at the university’s downtown Woodward’s campus.

Singularity also included students from Arts Umbrella, where Pite has a longstanding relationship as guest faculty, and Modus Operandi, a school run by David Raymond and Tiffany Tregarthen, who dance with Pite’s company, Kidd Pivot. This kind of project is a good example of how, despite the pace of her international career, Pite remains embedded in her local community.

When we sat down at a café a few days after the degree ceremony (she had just dropped off her eight-year-old son, Niko, at school), Pite explains, “I needed students from all three schools so we could get enough dancers together to do these experiments for my Sadler’s Wells piece, *Polaris*. I imagined it with a cast of thousands, but the biggest group I’d worked with was 36 for *Emergence* [for the National Ballet of Canada].” *Polaris* would premiere in 2014 with more than 60 dancers from her own troupe and a large contingent from the London Contemporary Dance School and Central School of Ballet. In 2015, it won the best modern choreography award from the Critics’ Circle National Dance Awards in Britain.

There were, says Pite, many simple questions that research with the student group could answer. “Like if you line people

up shoulder to shoulder, how many can fit onstage? Or, if you put them front to back, how many people fit on the diagonal? You could do the math and tape it out on the floor — but really!” she smiles.

In any case, Pite is a keen collaborator. “I do love working with people, and if there’s one thing I’m good at it’s choosing the right people to surround myself with.”

These include her fairly consistent group of about eight company dancers, who she praises as “heavy hitters.” It’s with this handpicked troupe — who come together from Canada, the United States and further afield whenever projects are in development or on tour — that she is creating her next Kidd Pivot work, *Revisor*. The piece, which premieres at Vancouver’s Playhouse theatre in February, includes a large element of farce. “Their characters are so extreme,” she says, her face lighting up, “and so distinct and funny. I’m laughing just thinking about it!”

It’s her third collaboration with Electric Company Theatre’s Jonathon Young, who is writing the script. The title is inspired by an article Young read some years ago about Russian theatre director Vsevolod Meyerhold’s 1926 non-realist production of Nikolai Gogol’s farce, *Revisor* (known in English as *The Government Inspector*). “We’ve adapted the title, not translated it,” says Young when we met up later that week. “Our central character is a revisor, which is someone who usually works in law and who is responsible for the revision of legal texts.”

The day we spoke, he had just come from a working session with Pite to record the script with actors; this will form part of *Revisor*’s soundscape, providing a score used both for content and as music. Then, says Young, they need to figure out “how much else needs to be built in and around” the script, such as music and, of course, physicality. The relationship between text and movement is complex and intimately interwoven, as it was in *Betroffenheit* (2015) and in his and Pite’s second collaboration, *The Statement* (2016), for Nederlands Dans Theater.



There were, says Pite, many simple questions that research with the student group could answer. “Like if you line people up shoulder to shoulder, how many can fit onstage? Or, if you put them front to back, how many people fit on the diagonal?”

According to a review in Britain’s *Independent*, “*The Statement* is a dazzling account of complicity, naivety and guilt ...” Pite “has a gift for working with text, illustrating, undercutting and opening up the words on the soundtrack — in this case, Young’s play for four voices.”

“What we discovered with *The Statement*,” says Pite, “was that this relationship with the text and the body could be sustained. Granted that was a one-act, 19-minute-long play, but it worked beautifully and so it gave us the courage and inspiration to do something even bigger.”

During the recording session for the evening-length, eight-voice script for *Revisor*, both Pite (the choreographer and director) and Young (the writer) were involved with directing the actors for rhythm, character and intention. They asked each other questions, says Young, “like, do we have the pattern of voices right here? Because I’m writing a conversation, I want a balance between who is saying what and who is figuring out the problem, just as Crystal is thinking about how things are going to stack up and tumble about onstage.”

Both are reticent to talk about themes this early in the process. Pite says they are still “circling around the content,” with several weeks of rehearsals scheduled for Vancouver, followed by a second technical residency at the Banff Centre in Alberta in February. It seems safe to say, however, that *Revisor* will be about the absurdity of power, and about

corruption and occupation, all current political preoccupations. And there will be much play between forms.

“It’s like I’m with a co-worker who is writing in a slightly different language than I am,” says Young. “We’re working together to create images.”

The interplay between what words can do and what dance can do — how they contribute in terms of both form and content — has long been a defining factor in Pite’s choreography. Text has inspired many of her works, as with *Field: Fiction*, inspired by Annie Dillard’s *The Writing Life*, and *The Tempest Replica*, a Shakespearean tale that incorporates many projected words and phrases.

“Text has always been an essential part of how I think about theatre,” she says. And not just text: stage design, costuming and music, too, are all part of the palette from which Pite and her collaborators build a work.

“There are so many different types of people who come to the theatre, and some of them are willing to follow a passage of abstract choreography, and others aren’t,” she says. “They want other pathways into the content.” The important thing “is to have a conversation with the audience.”

Meanwhile, Pite says her work with text — with *Revisor* and other pieces — is helping her discover “just how powerful dancing actually is. The movement pops out with greater relief and clarity against what the text does. Somehow it’s helping to identify what the essence is in dance.” *DI*

Dancers from Simon Fraser University Dance Program, Arts Umbrella Graduate Dance Program and Modus Operandi in Crystal Pite’s *Singularity*
Photo: Jonathan Kim, courtesy of SFU’s School for the Contemporary Arts

RENÉE SIGOUIN'S DREAM APPRENTICESHIP

ON BOARD WITH CRYSTAL PITE'S KIDD PIVOT

BY TESSA PERKINS DENEALT



Renée Sigouin in Company 605's *Inheritor Album*
Photo: David Cooper

It sounds like something out of a dream: shadow one of the world's pre-eminent choreographers as she travels the globe presenting new works and preparing remounts, all while joining her company as an understudy. As an apprentice with Crystal Pite's Kidd Pivot, Renée Sigouin is living this dream.

Sigouin met Pite through her work with Kidd Pivot company members Tiffany Tregarthen and David Raymond. She was performing with their group, Out Innerspace Dance Theatre, while Pite served as a choreographic mentor for their 2016 work, *Major Motion Picture*. From this experience, Sigouin knew she could learn a lot from working with Pite and decided to approach her to be a mentor as part of her application for a British Columbia Arts Council Early Career Grant. Though Kidd Pivot doesn't have a formal apprenticeship program, Pite invited her on board as the company's seventh apprentice.

So far, Sigouin has followed Pite to Nederlands Dans Theater in The Hague (where she is an associate choreographer), to Paris Opera Ballet and to the Banff Centre for Arts and Creativity. She has served as a test subject for new movement, understudied Tregarthen and Cindy Salgado in the remount and tour of *Betroffenheit*, and participated in the creative residency and will join the world premiere tour for Kidd Pivot's latest project, *Revisor*.

Sigouin grew up on a farm in Saskatchewan near Saskatoon, and her first exposure to the process of professional dance was with the Dare to Dance program supported by Dance Saskatchewan, which brought in choreographers and dancers to work together toward a public performance. One of those choreographers was Joshua Beamish, who she later apprenticed with in Vancouver.



Renée Sigouin
Photo: Michael Slobodian



Vancouver, where she moved in 2008, seemed like a good place to develop a dance career. After about a year, she was ready to go back to Saskatchewan, but then found out she would be dancing in the opening and closing ceremonies of the 2010 Vancouver Winter Olympic Games. It was also around this time that Tregarthen and Raymond asked her to audition for their training program, *Modus Operandi*, where she had the opportunity to perform works by several local choreographers. Her time with *Modus* was formative: “I gained a lot of tools for my own independent curiosity as a dance artist. I also learned to make my own movement and bring my own interests to whatever creative project I’m working on.”

During a week in the studio with Pite in the Netherlands to prepare for an NDT premiere, *Partita for 8 Dancers*, Sigouin helped to develop new movement sequences and was in awe of Pite’s work ethic. “She accumulates all of this material and keeps going, keeps editing and refining,” says Sigouin. “I took that lesson to keep going and keep adding layers.”

Working with the other dancers of Kidd Pivot has also been rewarding. “The dancers all have a deep physical practice that they’re always rigorously working on.” Sigouin has learned a lot about delving deeply into a role by observing the way they are continually adding to their characters in *Betroffenheit*. She finds it inspiring to see them working on their roles in such detail, adjusting a head tilt here or adding a new gesture there.

A typical work day begins with Sigouin warming up and taking class with the company before they split up into small groups or pairs to develop a sequence from the show they are currently developing or to work on remounting their individual parts. There is a great deal of delegation from Pite, says

Sigouin, and everyone, including the designers and entire creative team, is always given something to work on. Pite keeps everyone on task and has clear direction, but, at the same time, Sigouin says, “She’s so generous. She knows how hard it is and what it takes to be a dancer.”

Before lunch, the company regroups to review what they’ve been working on, and in the afternoon they continue with the same process of experimentation and development. “I sometimes find it really difficult to generate movement, but Crystal lets herself just create,” explains Sigouin. “She is comfortable being in the unknown and then taking time to edit and refine the movement. She comes with a few specific ideas and then the dancers work with her to create the movement.” They go through a process of improvising and movement generation before narrowing down to the essential elements that make up a piece.

Sigouin has danced with many local Vancouver groups, including Company 605 and Wen Wei Dance, and continues to perform with Out Innerspace, which is developing a piece to premiere in 2019. Balancing her time between her apprenticeship and her work with Out Innerspace has been relatively simple as Tregarthen and Raymond are also involved in both companies.

As part of her BC Arts Council Grant, Sigouin was given six weeks of studio time to work on her own choreography. She appreciated having the time to see where her creative impulses would lead and developed a 10-minute solo that she hopes to further refine and perform.

Whether working on her own or collaborating with others, Sigouin enjoys exploring the way our bodies create meaning through dance. As she says, “I always feel like there’s some type of poetry conveyed in the body.” ▯

ROSANGELA SILVESTRE AND DEEP HUMAN MEMORY

In a forest studio in Brazil open to the elements



BY GLORIA BLIZZARD

It is 6 a.m. and Rosangela Silvestre is watering the terraced landscape with a hose, her tiny frame dressed in soft lavender and grey sweats. Tropical trees tower above the four-storey studio built into the hillside behind her. Nestled in the forest, here in the island town of Morro de Sao Paulo, off the coast of Salvador, Brazil, is Silvestre's open-air studio. With sleek wooden floors and no walls or locks, it is called the Silvestre Temple. It is a place of meditation, spirit, community and nature — all integral parts of the dance technique that the Brazilian dancer and choreographer has developed over the last 20 years.

Initially trained in ballet, Silvestre pursued post-secondary studies in modern dance at the Federal University of Bahia. In 1985, she witnessed a performance by a local dance troupe led by Raimundo Bispo dos Santos, known as Mestre King, who was to become her greatest teacher. Mestre King, says Silvestre, “brought a body with African memory to modern dance.” He valued African ancestral memory, deeply embedded in the social and sacred dances of Brazil, and trained generations of dancers until his death in January 2018.

Through his teachings, Silvestre also experienced the embodiment and expression of universal human memories found in the elements of nature.

Silvestre is deeply philosophical, drawing inspiration from many spiritual traditions, including Buddhism and African religions brought years ago to the Americas by enslaved Africans. Most of these systems reference the four directions and their associated elements (North – Earth, East – Air, South – Fire, West – Water). She is also influenced by her Caboclo (Indigenous) great-grandfather and his reverence for nature. Silvestre made this universal knowledge an integral part of her technique. For her, dance “is a cosmic communication, every day, all day. It is guidance for life that we should be aware of.”

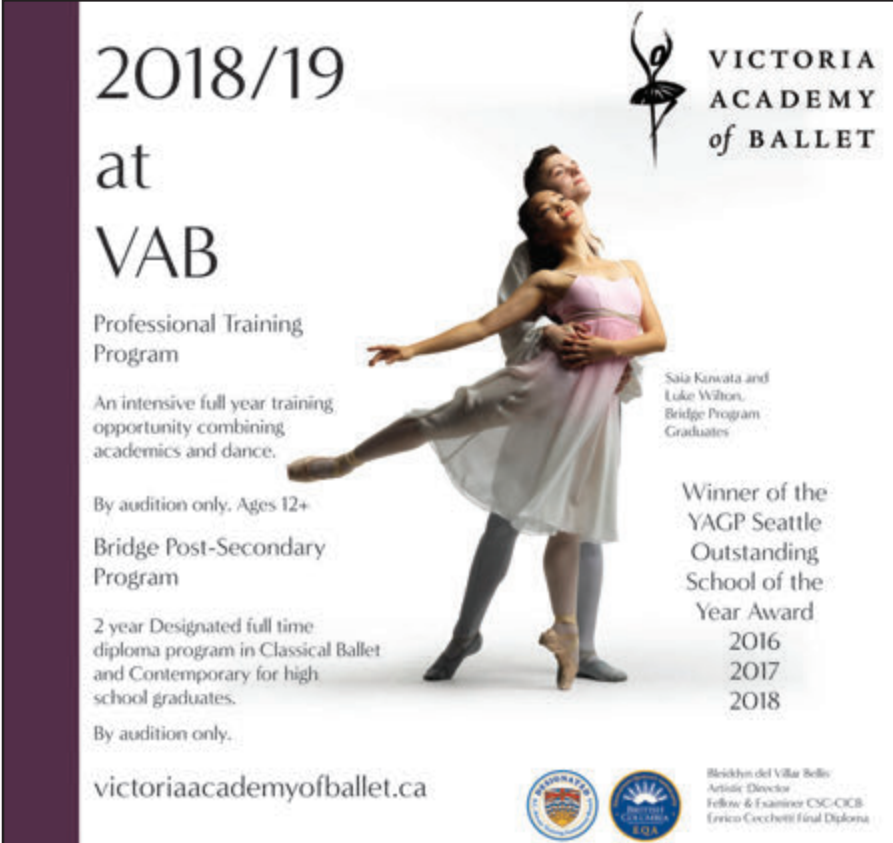
Her goal is to invite dancers to be present, connected with nature and with universal energies available to support movement. During a recent workshop on Morro de Sao Paulo, she led seven dancers, including myself, in a trek through the island, where we danced in the ocean and under a waterfall. We danced at the mud cliffs of Gamboa Beach, covering ourselves in wet earth. We revelled in exploring movement in close physical contact with water and earth. We danced while the tropical breezes dried our skin, the essence of the element air supporting our arms and breath.

Many who study with Silvestre go on to choreograph using this movement vocabulary that incorporates explorations of ballet, modern and “movements that activate African ancestral memories. You don't have to be from Brazil to allow those particular expressions to come alive,” she says. “The seeds of those gestures are in all of us.”

When not in her island studio, Silvestre lives in the United States. She does not stay still for long, though. Her technique has resonance worldwide, and she tours constantly, teaching in Europe and all over the Americas. In addition, she holds two dance intensives a year in Brazil. Her choreography has been commissioned by numerous companies, including Brazil's Balé Folclórico da Bahia and Viver Brasil. In New York, she has choreographed for Ballet Hispánico and the American Academy of Ballet, among others. She has also toured with American jazz musician Steve Coleman, improvising onstage as another instrument.

Silvestre also sings and composes, and in 2011 released a full-length album, *Voices of Nature*. She sees no separation between art, music, dance and regular life.

"I am always dancing. When watering the plants, I am training the body. I am in meditation. I am doing my puja [prayers]. No separation. Everything that I manifest is an extension of my reality, my spirituality and is connected to everything that I do. I dance life." *DI*



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DRAWING

when you left

In the studio with Ballet BC

Our previous issue featured Val Nelson's drawings of Crystal Pite and Jonathon Young's *Betroffenheit*. This quarter, we're pleased to present her impressions of Ballet BC rehearsing artistic director Emily Molnar's *when you left*. Shortly before the work premiered last May in Vancouver, Nelson visited the company's studio at Scotiabank Dance Centre to immerse herself in the process of creation. — DI



ILLUSTRATIONS BY VAL NELSON

Kirsten Wicklund had some brief solo passages that she was intensely fine-tuning during the time of my visit. I appreciated the expressiveness of her muscular upper body and made several sketches, using both ink (as in this drawing) and pencil. Generally, in drawing a figure I prefer using gestural line, as opposed to pure realism, to get across not only what the subject looks like, but also to bring a sense of movement through time. — VN

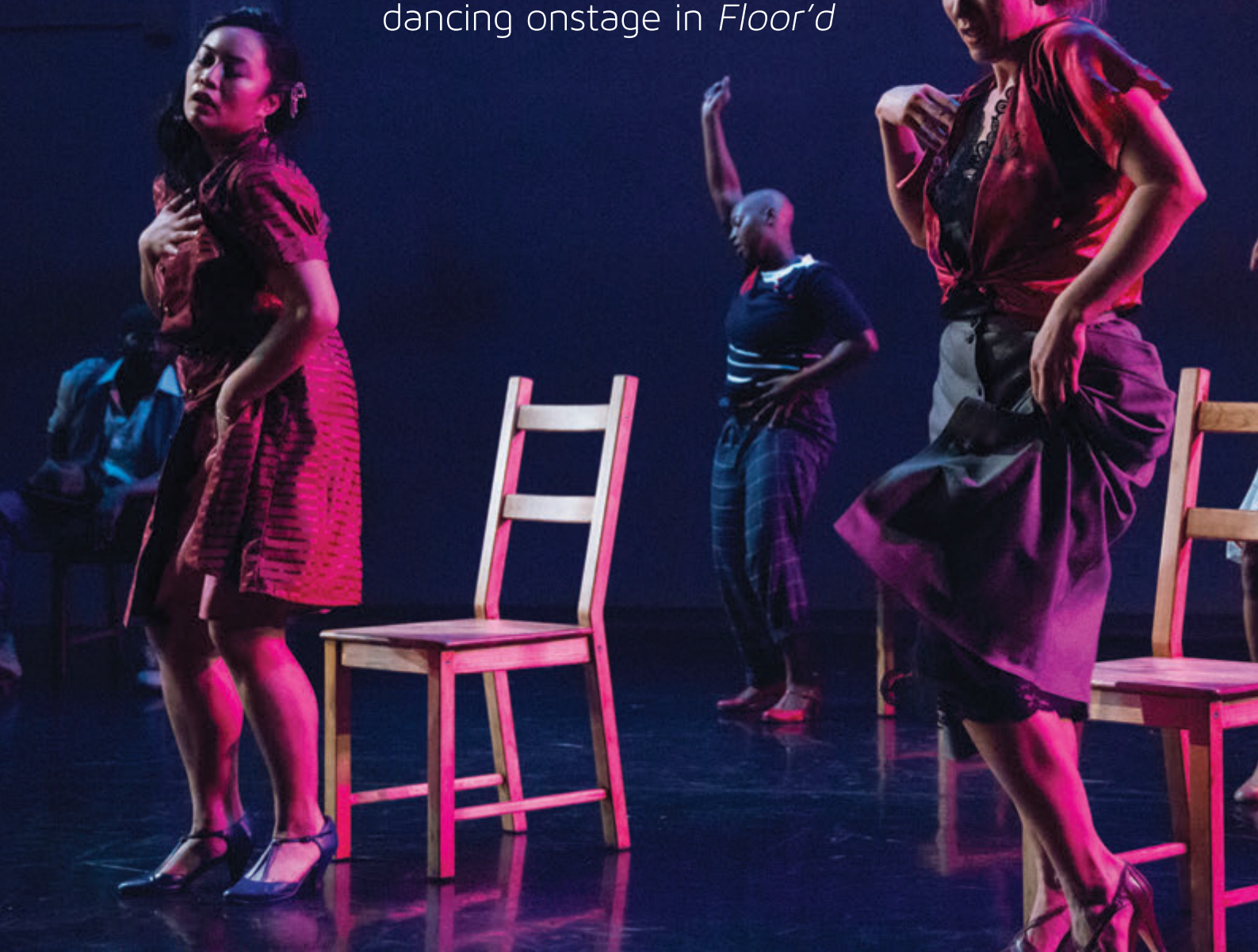




This line drawing is an interpretation of one of the sequences that the dancers were asked to repeat many times on the two days I attended studio rehearsals. Clusters of dancers executed this particular movement in canon. Patrick Kilbane caught my eye, partly because of where I was sitting and partly because he seemed to be doing everything full out, which offered me more dynamic shapes to draw. Besides doing rough sketches, I also filmed some of the rehearsal on my smartphone. Later, in my own studio, I used this material as reference and ended up drawing these multiple overlapping images of Patrick as he executes the short sequence lasting just a few seconds. — VN

THE JOINT IS JUMPING

Natasha Powell puts social dancing onstage in *Floor'd*



Sarah Tumaliuan, Caroline "Lady C" Fraser, Tereka Tyler-Davis and Ashley "Colours" Perez in Natasha Powell's *Floor'd*

All Photos: Tamara Romanchuk



by Kathleen Smith

Every so often, you watch a dance show that rearranges your personal paradigms and priorities. I went to one of those last spring; it was called *Floor'd*. Produced, directed and choreographed by Toronto-based artist Natasha Powell for her company Holla Jazz, *Floor'd* — performed by seven dancers and a nine-person band — is a series of dances that explore vernacular jazz forms and, more specifically, the jook joint phenomenon of post-emancipation Black America.

"In its essence," Powell tells me over tea some weeks later, "a jook joint or house is where Blacks went after work to wind down, gamble, drink, dance — basically it was a space to get together. I noticed that we are doing the same thing with hip hop in the clubs now. That letting loose kind of vibe inspired me."

Raised in Scarborough and Ajax, Ontario, Powell studied ballet and street dance. "My dad's Jamaican and my mom's Grenadian, so the Caribbean celebratory social dance thing was always in my home," she says.

That may be one reason why, more than the piano and soccer lessons she also took as a child, dance stuck. "It was something I felt I could connect with," says Powell. "I was quiet and quite shy, and still am, but I'm able to speak through dance."

Powell became a comp kid, attending dance competitions across North America in her teens. While she loved it, Powell wasn't convinced about dance as a career path. She wasn't sure she was cut out to teach, the inevitable progression for most dance professionals after performing. But she kept taking dance jobs when she could and began to think about what it might be like to create work.



Left to right: The ensemble; Jan Morgan; Raoul Wilke, Miha Matevzic and Hollywood Jade; the ensemble

After graduating in accounting at George Brown College, Powell relocated briefly to Vancouver, working in film and television production, teaching at Harbour Dance. There, she connected with Moncell Durden, a hip-hop scholar and documentary filmmaker. He shared some of the vintage social dance footage he was crafting into the film *Everything Remains Raw* (available on YouTube).

Much of the material was devoted to the many styles of dance that fall under the umbrella term swing dance, which includes well-known forms like the lindy hop, as well as solo jazz dance (commonly referred to as vernacular jazz), and others. The connections to African dance forms are clear.

“Seeing all these black-and-white clips led me to compare history and current practice,” recalls Powell. “It just made me want to know more. About how hip-hop dance was so connected to jazz. Which led to questions like ‘why was the jazz dance I was learning in the studio not more closely connected to all of this?’”



Durden sponsored Powell for a residency in New York where she tried to find answers by taking a deep dive into the history of social dance. She looked up still living pioneers of various forms — lindy hop inventor Frankie Manning’s partner Judy Pritchett, for example. And she brushed up on iconic dances and steps like the Susie Q, apple jacks, the Charleston and the mess around. Powell also studied Katrina Hazzard Gordon’s book, *Jookin’*, and its descriptions of other dances that were part of jook culture like the shimmy, fish tail, black bottom and the funky butt.

Back in Toronto, Powell worked full time as an arts administrator and Ontario public servant, going to work with her dance clothes in a backpack and hitting the rehearsal studio after five. With Janet Castillo, Powell formed Catalyst Dance to develop Fringe shows. And with close friend Jasmyn Fyffe, she started working on what would become *Gimme One*

Riddim, which explored Jamaican ska music with both dancers and musicians onstage. “This was where I realized how special live music in a dance performance can be,” says Powell. “And the impact it can have on the performers, and the choices that they make in connection to the music. When it’s live, the art-making in the moment creates surprises that push the artists out of their comfort zone.”

Without necessarily being aware of it, Powell was laying the groundwork for *Floor’d*. A period of rest following a knee injury forced further reflection. “It took a long time to heal. I realized that, given the fragility and vulnerability of the profession, I wanted to be sure I was doing what I wanted to do. I wrote an artist statement for the first time during my recovery — and that’s where the social dance thing got articulated. Alongside my feelings about family, about hip hop, it made me realize that social dance was at the forefront for me.”

Toward the end of 2016, Powell began working on *Floor’d* in earnest, and one of her primary lines of inquiry became how to choreograph for jazz dance. “That was a bit of a struggle,” she recalls. “Improvisation is such a key part of jazz.”

Powell took heart from her growing understanding of the lindy hop scene, where routines were often choreographed, and from clips of the Nicholas Brothers, seminal French hoofers who also crafted dances. And then there was *Shuffle Along* — a 1921 Broadway musical featuring tap and vernacular jazz forms that has been remounted periodically, most recently in a new adaptation in 2016 with choreography by master tapper Savion Glover.

“Thinking about those contexts,” Powell explains, “I tried to find a balance or working relationship between choreographing people dancing together and improvisations. I almost think of it as a jazz musical structure — the rhythm sections, then the improvisations on top of the rhythm sections, then a verse, then a funk section and so on.”

Powell decided from the outset that live music would be part of the equation. Musical director Gerald Heslop assembled a group of players, ranging in experience from veteran trumpeter Raymond Blake and pianist Bruce Skerritt to younger musicians and recent grads. One of the most remarkable aspects of *Floor’d* was the relationship between musicians and dancers as they shared adjacent performance areas close enough for them to make regular eye contact or even dance together.

The cast — Tereka Tyler-Davis, Caroline “Lady C” Fraser, Hollywood Jade, Miha Matevzic, Ashley “Colours” Perez, Raoul Wilke and Sarah Tumaliuan — are a charismatic and versatile bunch. Powell had worked with most of them before in diverse dance arenas from street dance battles to house sessions to contemporary concerts.

Together they built *Floor’d* in the studio, step by step, phrase by phrase. “Every rehearsal we would have at least 30 minutes of just that foundational stuff, and then we’d stretch it a little bit so the dancers could begin to embody the movement. My goal was to give them this dictionary of work that already existed, this vocabulary, and see where each of them was within that.”

Powell recalls watching archival film footage with the cast, mostly for inspiration. “The struggles of that time — the Depression, slavery and emancipation — impacted how those

dancers danced, impacted how they lived and so impacted their expression. Our struggles are different.”

Powell mentions the many discussions that followed these viewings as integral to the creation process. “For example, Caroline is white and she wondered if she would even be in these types of spaces during that time. So how does she dance, how does she bring what she has to the vocabulary? It was really about having those conversations about who we are as people and how that is part of the dance.”

Powell also worried about whether she was the right person to explore this work around the intricate historical intersections of swing, social dance, jook and vernacular jazz. “There is a small, but strong swing dance community in Toronto,” says Powell. “I’ve taken their classes, but they’ve been doing and studying these dances for years. My self-doubt was about coming from other dance backgrounds, like hip hop and a different style of jazz. Was it OK for me to lend that to the work and talk about my experience with it?”

I ask Powell what finally convinced her it was OK to be doing this work. “I’m still not,” she laughs. “But I’m just going forward with it and doing what I need to do. It feels like there’s a responsibility to not hoard information for myself. I need to share it.”

Fortunately, the response within the Toronto swing dance community has been positive. “A lot of them came to the show,” Powell says. “Mandy Gold [founder of the swing studio Bees’ Knees] who has been in the community for a long time, reached out to me and was able to come. We had a conversation and she was very supportive of the work I’m doing and the people I was connecting with, understanding that the Black roots of the work means it’s important to have Black artists involved.

“There’s still a lot to do, especially since there’s not a lot of accessible documentation. Slowly, with the rise of social media, people are translating old film footage to new formats, and some of that stuff is coming out. But it’s still a work in progress.”

Although these are primarily American forms (as far as Powell knows there wasn’t a similar jook scene in Canada), she feels social and vernacular jazz dance is still hugely resonant to diverse artists and audiences in Canada. Powell cites scholar Seika Boye’s work exploring the lost and found history of Black social dance in Montreal and Toronto as inspirational. “Education is one of the things I want to do with Holla Jazz as well,” says Powell. “In subtle ways, with talk-backs, with conversations.”

Holla Jazz will present something new for the Danceworks season in Toronto in 2020. Powell is also hoping to remount *Floor’d*, both to expand on some of its ideas and to provide Toronto and other audiences an opportunity to see what all the fuss was about (the initial four-night run of the show sold out before it even opened).

But years of doing arts administration has taught Powell the price of taking on too much, too quickly. “I don’t want to rush Holla Jazz into a not-for-profit structure right away. Looking at developing a board and things like that are challenges for small companies that don’t have the infrastructure. Yet we still need to attract funding.”

Whatever the future holds for Holla Jazz and Natasha Powell, it sure does look bright. Fuelled by a fascination with the history of social dance that is both intellectual and based in the body, Powell appears to have found a multifaceted niche, one with many hidden reservoirs of historical and political power.

“When I started, I had no idea if anything made sense, no idea how it would turn out, it was all new. But everyone was open to this process and for me that was a huge part of why I chose those artists to work with on *Floor’d* — who in the room was going to be open to trying new things? Everyone works differently — some people are counters and they really understand the structure, others are more intuitive. That’s the beauty of jazz — you have all these people coming together with a single goal in mind.” ^{DI}

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Thunderstruck

Thunderstruck: Physical Landscapes features artworks, filmed works and installations exploring the landscape in which dance is created, presented and received in Canada. This free exhibition, curated by Jenn Goodwin, is on display in Ottawa at the Canada Council for the Art's Âjagemô gallery until January 27, 2019.

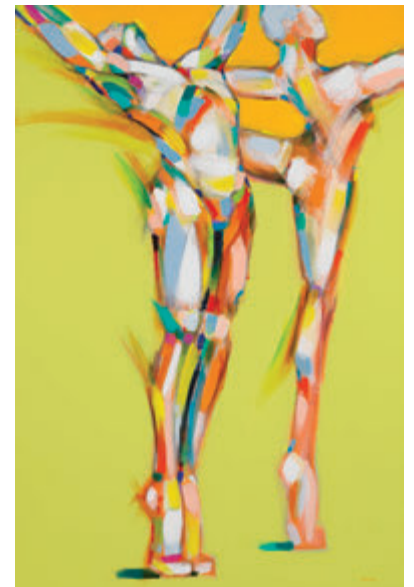
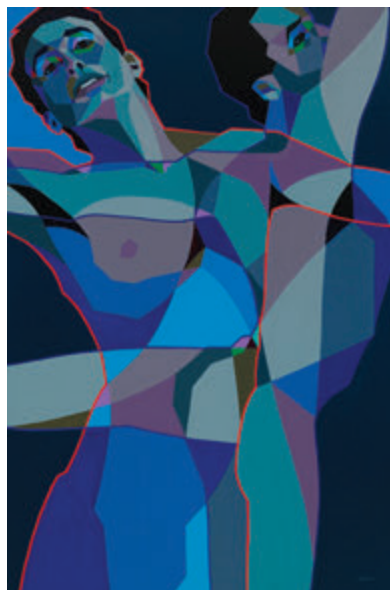
Angela Miracle Gladue
Fancy Shawl, regalia
Designed by Gladue and Echo John
Photo: Candice Ward
Collection of the artist

Macaulay Steps Back

Alastair Macaulay, the *New York Times*' chief dance critic, will retire from the position at the end of the year, but continue to contribute pieces while working on his own projects. These include teaching and lecturing, as well as finishing a book on Merce Cunningham. He also wants to spend more time in Britain, his home country. "The challenge of describing something as difficult as dance for the general reader is about as exciting as journalism gets," Macaulay said in a press announcement. Macaulay, who joined the paper in 2007, celebrated 40 years of reviewing this May. His replacement has yet to be announced.

Perfect Line

Fernie Museum, in Fernie B.C., presents *Perfect Line*, an exhibition by Canadian artist Gordon Milne, until March 31, 2019. Over a period of 18 years, Milne has attended the company class at Alberta Ballet each week to draw the dancers at work. This ongoing and intimate relationship has inspired a distinctive feel to his drawings and paintings celebrating movement in dance. The exhibit features numerous studies drawn during these sessions as well as 12 large-scale works completed in the artist's studio that illustrate the quest for the perfect line by both dancer and artist.



Paintings by Gordon Milne
Above: *Renversé* (Jonathan Rennà),
acrylic on canvas, 72" x 48"
Right: *Sunrise Studio A*,
acrylic on canvas, 72" x 48"
Photos: John Dean

MICHAEL CRABB'S

Notebook



For the audience at the September 14 premiere of Norwegian choreographer/director Alan Lucien Øyen's *The Hamlet Complex* at Oslo's state opera-ballet house, the only clue to its important Canadian connection was a fine-print acknowledgment. At the bottom of the credits page in the house program, it read: "Thanks also to the dancers at Banff Centre for Arts and Creativity for contributions to text and movement under the program Creative Gesture in July 2018" (my translation with an assist from Google). It was a more sizeable contribution than most in that Oslo audience could have appreciated.

The Hamlet Complex is a theatrical hybrid of dance and spoken word, something of an Øyen specialty and, arguably, more readily accepted in Europe than in North America, where audiences still tend to be attuned to discrete performance disciplines. There's a great deal of talking, but also a lot of movement in a contemporary vein that reveals no distinct choreographic signature. This is explainable. Øyen begins each creative process by talking about his subject with the artists. In this instance, it was Shakespeare's *Hamlet*;



Above: Artists of Norwegian National Ballet in Alan Lucien Øyen's *The Hamlet Complex*
Photo: Erik Berg

Left: Alan Lucien Øyen in studio rehearsal of *The Hamlet Complex* at Banff Centre for Arts and Creativity
Photo: Don Lee

not so much the play itself as its psychological themes, contradictions and central existential puzzle — the "To be or not to be" business.

More than most choreographers, Øyen gives his performers considerable agency in making the movement. Øyen shapes and adjusts to achieve the overall theatrical effect he envisions, but as co-creators the artists' personal experiences and emotions are deeply embedded in the work.

Øyen, who has been one of two resident choreographers at the Norwegian National Ballet since 2013, is not averse to linearity or narrative, but, in *The Hamlet Complex*, narrative incidents are

presented like tumbling pieces of a time- and character-morphing jigsaw puzzle with no predetermined arrangement. Øyen accepts that the assembled image will differ from viewer to viewer. He expects an audience to be engaged and wants them to find their own meaning.

The three-act production seen in Oslo — almost 210 minutes including two intermissions — was already well advanced when Øyen came to Banff Centre to work on a project with the same name for four weeks last July. Norwegian composer Henrik Skram's commissioned film-score-like symphonic music was written. (In Banff, there was a very effective sampled score by

Norwegian sound designer Gunnar Innvær.) Åsmund Færavaag's monumental sets were being built.

Øyen and Andrew Wale, a British actor/writer/director who has collaborated in many productions with Øyen's own company, Winter Guests, arrived in Banff with some working ideas and elements of script. Wale was also a key performer, together with actor Yvonne Øyen, a Winter Guests core member (and Alan's sister). The remaining international cast of 14, two of them primarily actors, the rest dancers, had been chosen by audition and were promised an immersive, innovative creative experience, which by the enthusiastic account of several of them, is what they got. *The Hamlet Complex* in its Banff version could be seen as a work-in-progress; yet, after just four weeks of work, it was performed with intensity and polish.

Many of the themes later elaborated upon and expanded in Oslo were present in the compact 90-minute Banff version: loyalty and duty, truth and deception, betrayal and vengeance, love

and loss, and the flickering unreliability of memory. At the centre of it all, theatre stands as a metaphor for illusion and reality and, needless to say, there's a conflicted relationship between mother and son, a Freudian Oedipus complex projected into adulthood, blighting emotional authenticity and leading toward psychic disintegration and death. (During a pre-show talk at Banff, Øyen opined that the Oedipus complex should properly be called the Hamlet complex.)

Also, as acknowledged by Øyen, text and movement created by the artists in Banff reappeared in Oslo. Effectively, Øyen's time in Banff gave him a crucial running start when he arrived back in Oslo with only six weeks to get his mega-version (22 dancers, five guest actors plus eight wonderful children drawn from the Norwegian Opera's Children's Choir and Norwegian National Ballet School) onstage. Much was added. Øyen plays even more with the meta, self-referential elements of *The Hamlet Complex*, layer upon layer, like a matryoshka doll.

An aging, prickly Queen Elizabeth I character serves to reinforce a more strongly emphasized theme of death, its nature and inevitability, as she banters warily with her Fool (splendidly played by Wale), whom she knows is really Death. She also emblemizes another continuing theme of how we are all players in our own contrived dramas. Shakespeare's play-within-a-play is humorously performed for her by a troupe of child players.

In a stunning coup de théâtre, one of several in a production that made extensive use of the Oslo stage's seemingly limitless technical/mechanical resources, Wale's Death helped Kate Pendry's Queen, now stripped of regal trappings, fall backward into an open grave. The stage then rose to reveal her standing beneath a forest of suspended gravestones.

The Hamlet Complex in its Oslo version was an intellectually stimulating theatrical experience of haunting power, complexity and visual spectacle, but it could not have happened the way it did had it not been for Banff Centre's role as an incubator and testing ground. *DI*

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Photo: Maxine Hicks

Paul Taylor 1930–2018

Paul Taylor, who died at age 88 on August 29, was a titan of modern dance. Unlike Cunningham and Graham — he danced for both before forming his own New York-based troupe in the early 1960s — Taylor has not bequeathed a particular school of movement. The stylistic range and thematic dissimilarity of his choreographic output — almost 150 works — was too vast for that. It is not easy to grasp that the

man who made the buoyant, joyful *Aureole* in 1962 — a watershed in Taylor’s early career — could also make a dance so deeply unsettling and bleak as *Big Bertha* eight years later.

In various ways, Taylor certainly influenced other dancemakers, notably American-born Danny Grossman, who after a decade in Taylor’s company left to form his own in Canada in the mid-1970s. Like Taylor, Grossman the choreographer was not afraid to depict the darker aspects of human nature and also shared his antic exuberance. Neither was a great fan of religion: witness Taylor’s *Speaking in Tongues* (1988) with its sinner-preacher and Grossman’s *Passion Symphony* (1998) with its groping priest.

Of all the great American modern dance choreographers, Taylor arguably enjoyed the greatest popularity. Some believed he’d rejected his radical roots. (That didn’t stop Pina Bausch or Twyla Tharp from dancing for him.) Taylor’s canon comprises masterpieces from all phases of his long career. Some of these have entered the repertoires of other companies, among them the National Ballet of Canada and, in its early iteration, Toronto’s Dancemakers.

Taylor was concerned about his legacy and planned accordingly. He retuned the company’s title and mandate four years ago to include work by other American modern dance choreographers. Last May, he anointed one of his finest dancers, 35-year-old Michael Novak, to carry the torch. There is an institutional framework and a strong will to ensure that Taylor’s choreography — lyrical, poetic, zany, sad, serious, satirical and deeply humane — will live on in live performance to influence future generations.

— MICHAEL CRABB

Lindsay Kemp 1940–2018

Lindsay Kemp, the influential British dancer, mime artist and choreographer, died on August 25 at age 80. Except perhaps for those fortunate enough to have seen Kemp’s company during its 1978 visit to Toronto, his reputation in Canada and the United States was slight compared with the respect he commanded in Europe.

Although trained as a dancer, Kemp also studied mime with Marcel Marceau. In the early 1960s, he founded his own company. There Kemp developed multi-disciplinary productions that seamlessly blended dance, mime, music, song and spoken word into sensational theatrical extravaganzas. He was often the troupe’s mesmerizing star performer.

As a mentor and teacher — David Bowie and Kate Bush were among his grateful and admiring students — Kemp had a broad theatrical impact. Kemp’s aesthetic was a major influence on Canadian dancer/choreographer Robert Desrosiers who studied and performed with Kemp in the mid-1970s. The extravagant theatricality and mixing of dance and mime in Desrosiers’ subsequent choreography show a deep debt to Kemp.

— MICHAEL CRABB

Obituaries

Arthur Mitchell 1934–2018

Arthur Mitchell, dancer, choreographer and artistic director, died on September 19 at age 84. A former star of New York City Ballet, which he joined in 1955, Mitchell was the first African American to become a principal dancer in a major ballet company. At NYCB, George Balanchine created several memorable roles for the Harlem-born Mitchell, including the renowned *Agon*, a pas de deux for him and a white dancer, Diana Adams, in 1957; their duet, with its lithe, closely entwined steps, was daring at the time. Inspired to create opportunities for children in Harlem by the death of Martin Luther King Jr., Mitchell co-founded Dance Theatre of Harlem in 1969, creating an opportunity for black dancers to perform in a classical style and an affiliated school.

Alicia Graf Mack, director of the Juilliard Dance Division and a former dancer with Dance Theatre of Harlem, describes Mitchell as “bold and brave enough to challenge and change perceptions, always with beauty and dignity. As a master coach, he poured so much into his dancers, meticulously teaching more than performance techniques, but how to represent something larger than ourselves with a sense of empowered purpose.”

— KAIJA PEPPER

Ola Skanks 1926–2018

Ola Skanks, inducted in March 2018 into the Encore! Dance Hall of Fame presented by Toronto’s Dance Collection Danse, passed away on August 13. Michael Crabb called Skanks “a pioneering figure in the development of African diasporic dances in Toronto and beyond” in his Summer 2018 Notebook for this magazine. The choreographer and teacher, who learned to tap dance from watching movies and later studied Western interpretive dance, opened her own studio in 1974 in Toronto. She was recently celebrated in Dance Collection Danse’s exhibit, *It’s About Time: Dancing Black in Canada 1900 to 1970*.

— KAIJA PEPPER



Top: Tanztheater Wuppertal in Dimitris Papaioannou's *Neues Stück I (New Piece I)*
Photo: Julian Mommert

Bottom: Tsai-Chin Yu of Tanztheater Wuppertal in Alan Lucien Øyen's *Neues Stück II*
Photo: Mats Bäcker

TANZTHEATER WUPPERTAL

A company in crisis

BY JEANNETTE ANDERSEN

This season, Tanztheater Wuppertal Pina Bausch commemorates the 10th anniversary of Pina Bausch's death in 2009. It should have been a festive celebration for a company entering a new era, with the hiring last season of Adolphe Binder as artistic director, and her commissioning of new pieces by two young choreographers — the first works not by Bausch in the company's repertoire. But this promising future was put on hold when the company's advisory board announced in July 2018 that they had fired Binder, stating, "This decision has unfortunately become necessary in order to restore this unique cultural institution's ability to operate at full capacity." Binder does not accept her dismissal, and a full-fledged court case is the result.

After Bausch's death, the company's founder and sole choreographer, the inevitable problem of how to continue had to be faced. At first, the company recruited artistic directors from within

their own ranks and continued to perform Bausch pieces exclusively. But slowly the repertoire has become like a museum collection. In 2018, a German critic wrote that *Die sieben Todsünden (The Seven Deadly Sins, 1976)* had become a historical document.

New ideas were needed, and Binder — previously the artistic director of GöteborgsOperans Danskompani and the Tanztheater at Komische Oper Berlin — was hired with a five-year contract.

During her first — and as it seems at least for now, only — season, she commissioned two evening-length pieces, *Neues Stück I (New Piece I)*, by Greek artist and choreographer Dimitris Papaioannou, and *Neues Stück II*, by Norwegian choreographer, director and playwright Alan Lucien Øyen.

A German critic wrote of Papaioannou's piece (which I didn't see): "It could have been by Pina Bausch; instead, it turned out as the Wuppertal

Horror Show, which should not have been allowed to happen.”

In Øyen’s three-hour piece, which I saw, the performers talked a lot about loss and death while moving the set, a 1950s interior, around. The fragmented story, which exhausted itself after two hours, was full of references to Bausch’s works, but had very little dance. Why watch a Bausch almost-look-alike when you could see the original?

In June, I interviewed Binder for an article meant to be about the future of the Wuppertal company under her leadership. Neither a dancer nor a choreographer, she described herself as “a creator of concepts, a curator,” and with great eloquence talked about her plans for the future. She wanted to maintain Bausch’s 46 pieces in the repertoire and to develop new pieces by “crossing forms of different genres, implementing visual art forms, fine art forms, text and spoken words. We will develop new formats over the next seasons, not only for the big stage, but more cinematic forms, one-to-one theatre forms [performances in a room with one performer and one audience member, who is sometimes passive and sometimes plays a part in the action], etc. My ambition is also to create an internal research group with the dancers, which is not necessarily connected to presentation, but to creative making without a clear purpose.”

One of the arguments for firing Binder was that she had not presented a program for the 2018-2019 season. She maintains she did, in March 2018. But if it was as vague as what she sketched out in the interview, it is perhaps understandable that Dirk Hesse, the company’s financial director and Binder’s superior — an unusual constellation — did not find it adequate for a company of Tanztheater Wuppertal’s standing.

After the press release from the advisory board announcing Binder’s firing, it was revealed that the conflict had started months before and that Binder had been requested to terminate her contract several times, but had refused to do so. The consequences of the conflict are that Hesse, who has been financial director since 2011, leaves at the end of the year, and Binder has taken her case to a labour court. At the first hearing at the beginning of September, the judge

decided that the two parties, Tanztheater Pina Bausch and Binder, should find an agreement with the help of a mediator over the course of two weeks. Binder rejected the proposal, because, as she said in a statement, Tanztheater Pina Bausch had categorically rejected her reinstatement as artistic director beforehand. The next hearing is scheduled for December 13.

The city of Wuppertal and the state of North Rhine–Westphalia have reaffirmed their continued support not only of the company, but also of the establishment of the Pina Bausch Center. The present debacle could be the turning point for the company. There is one faction that wants to keep the Bausch legacy repertoire as the company’s main focus. Currently, the pieces are under copyright and can only be revived, not reinterpreted. But there are critical voices that believe the pieces from the 1970s and 1980s reflect a past era, especially in the way they deal with gender. And there are some who are longing for a company that would renew the tanztheater genre.

For now, it is business as usual. Management has presented a program of Bausch remounts for the 2018-2019 season that began in September, and the company will tour with the two new commissions to London and Paris.

No matter who takes over the directorship, it will be difficult. Tanztheater Wuppertal is still synonymous with Pina Bausch, and the company is as controversial as ever. People either love her and the company or hate her and the company. When I left the performance of *Neues Stück II*, a couple said loudly, “It was terrible, we are never coming back.” Another said, “Change take times, we need to be patient.”

Yet Pina Bausch’s presence in Wuppertal remains notable. The little black poodle at the reception at the hotel where I stayed had performed in one of Bausch’s pieces, and the hotel’s proprietor was a strong advocate of Bausch. She ranted over the bad reviews and made me promise, before I left, that I would write something nice, because, as she said, “Pina deserves it.” ^{DI}

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All living, sentient beings move. Growing plants reach and twist toward the sunlight. Cats and dogs display a behaviour called pandiculation, an urge, usually upon waking, to yawn, stretch and move. Humans feel that same instinct to lengthen stiff muscles, jiggle joints and get blood flowing. We see this spontaneous appetite for movement most vividly in young children, who tend to be keen participants in creative movement classes.

The work of Anne Green Gilbert at Seattle's Creative Dance Center offers a conceptual basis for teaching creative movement to young children. Gilbert believes that rather than teaching steps or routines, classes should be built on the foundational elements underpinning all movement, such as rhythm, being on-balance/off-balance, direction, levels, energy and shapes. These building blocks can provide preparation for ballet training, developing a strong foundation for those who want to go on to tackle complex ballet sequences.

The concept of rhythm is key. The heartbeat is our first and most primal rhythm, and the heart's job as a pump sending blood through the body is vital to physical functioning. This can be demonstrated by having students run very fast around the room, then asking them to lie still and place their hand over their heart to feel the strong, fast beat.

Immediately after running, a slower bouncy walk can be introduced to slow the heartbeat down, with students visualizing the blood rhythm going to the feet, then feeling it in wiggling hips and shaking shoulders. Lying down again to find the heartbeat, the slower pace will be apparent.

Rhythm in the form of the repeating beat can be found in the chirping of birds, rain dripping and hands clapping. This idea can be expanded through playing an echo game, where the teacher claps and stomps out catchy rhythmic phrases or beats, which the children

INSIDE ED

Creative Movement as a Foundation for Ballet

BY DINA McDERMOTT

echo. If there is a child who seems especially confident, they could become the leader, creating their own rhythms for the class to repeat.

This repeating beat can be linked to musical metre by having the class discuss and dance 3/4 waltz, 4/4 march and 2/4 polka rhythms, exploring various movement possibilities such as sliding, skipping, marching and swinging.

Using percussion instruments, half the class can be the orchestra producing the changing rhythms, and half the class can dance, then roles can be switched. Some children feel the beat better by dancing it out, others by creating a pulse with small tambourines, castanets and maracas.

The previous movements can be combined into increasingly complex patterns in the same way that, throughout any later ballet training, students will be called upon to build increasingly complex dance combinations. To deepen the understanding of rhythm, young students can practise skipping in a circle, emphasizing a particular rhythm, and then adding oppositionally swinging arms.

To introduce technical details in a low-key way, the detailed mechanics of the skip can be broken down into a step-hop, along with the idea of being graceful by using quiet "cat feet."

In most classes, much of what the children do is as a group, but by having them skip in a circle one at a time, there is a chance for individualized attention, and also the experience of dancing on their own. Initially, some may feel apprehensive, but dancing solo builds confidence, a necessary trait for those who may one day want to perform.

Always, movement should be linked with emotion: dance is an art form that connects thinking, feeling and expression. At the end of one class that explored rhythm, I asked the students what skipping had felt like. Joy, happiness and freedom were some of the apt responses. *DI*

Dina McDermott has served as a faculty member at Pacific Northwest Ballet School in Seattle, Washington, since 2001, teaching creative movement for four to six-year-olds.

GLOBAL REPORTS

The turn of the season from summer to fall was marked once again in high style by the Vancouver International Flamenco Festival. Headliner Sara Calero opened the six evenings of performance with her work *Petisa Loca* (*Little Crazy Girl*), performed at the Playhouse theatre with singer Loreto Arnaiz and guitarist José Almarcha. Inspired by the immigrant experiences of Calero's family, *Petisa Loca* featured songs and poetry spoken by Arnaiz in Spanish. But it was Calero's jaunty leaps and skips, supple backbends and percussive flamenco feet that really carried this engaging work, featuring a range of Spanish dance styles.

The festival's closing performance, at the

haired Ancer, who is more measured in her movement these days, but still feisty.

The other dancers contributed palmas (rhythmic clapping), with the musical team providing a feast of sound that infused the whole evening. Besides the delicate filigree of strings from Kolstee, the musicians included Alfredo Millán on guitar, Ulises Martínez on violin, Gloria Solera on flute and the singer José Díaz "El Cachito," who showed absolute commitment to each very different dancer.

The second duet came from Mexico's Marién Luévano and Spain's Mariano Cruceta, fuelled by their younger, more passionate excess. During a long and fascinating solo, Luévano wielded her fringed shawl like it was part of her; at times, it



Vancouver

BY KAIJA PEPPER

intimate Annex theatre, was by Flamenco Rosario, the organization that produces the event each year. *Dialogue Extended* had a loose story to hold it together — something about the relationships between artistic couples, which was just enough to frame the artistry of the three dancer/choreographers and five musicians.

Flamenco Rosario's directors — Rosario Ancer and Victor Kolstee — were the mature, long-married duo at the heart of the piece. They broke out into the first duet, a pared-down, precise flamenco — she dances, he plays the guitar. And yet, it wasn't really a duet, because the whole ensemble was there for the elegant, grey-

became wings with which she soared. Martínez (her real-life partner) had a turn centre stage playing his violin beside her, with his music seeming to almost literally support her lunges to the floor or to push her through a whirl of turns. Then, as with Ancer, suddenly the whole team was contributing to the dance, and the audience, too, became an essential part of the whole, murmuring and shouting their approval.

Cruceta's solo showed him off as a quirky, eccentric devourer of space, often crabbed and stalking the stage, hunching into the rhythms of his dance. Under a mop of brown curls, his face was often hidden; he danced from within, sometimes

accompanied only by the ethereal flute of Solera (his real-life partner).

Dialogue Extended was about the community of flamenco artists gathered together that night, and about all of us witnessing their actions. Flamenco is like that; it reaches out to the audience and — through olés and other shouts of approval and solidarity — members of the audience reach out to flamenco.

Contemporary theatrical dance is often more ambitious in terms of theme and more formally separated in terms of audience relationship. That was the case with *Never Still*, which premiered at the Firehall Arts Centre on September 26. Created by Vanessa Goodman in collaboration with the dancers — Shion Skye Carter, Stéphanie Cyr, Bynh Ho, Alexa Mardon and Lexi Vajda — the publicity referred to social, environmental and biological themes. This suggested a relevant and timely artistic response in this era of massive climate concerns, but the hour-long work was more generally a poetic depiction of water, which the program note describes as "never truly still" and "a beautiful metaphor for dance."

Key to the staging were visuals by Vancouver multimedia artist Loscil (Scott Morgan), projected throughout on a large upstage screen. The constantly moving images ranged from dreamy drifting clouds and geometrical shapes, to more complicated montages featuring flashing lights layered on top of indiscernible shapes, to floating bodies filmed from an underwater point of view. It was hard to not keep watching this fascinating, ever-morphing canvas, especially since the quintet of dancer/creators, directed by Goodman, were less visible in the murky grey of the atmospheric stage space.

Costumed in oversized white T-shirts, baggy shorts and socks, these young dancers moved calmly, as if pushing through the weight of water, or as if focused on the interior feeling of their slowly unfolding, angular shapes. During Vajda's opening solo to Loscil's electronic soundscape (he is also a composer), the others were partially hidden under the crinkly white floor covering that eventually rolled mysteriously upstage. It's a great bit of theatrics, courtesy of the bodies lying underneath, and typical of the inventive direction of Goodman, whose company, Action at a Distance, produced *Never Still*. ⁰¹



BY HOLLY HARRIS

The Winnipeg Fringe Festival, the second largest of its kind in North America, has provided an invaluable showcase for both local and touring dance artists, while introducing new audiences to the art form itself, throughout its 31-year history. This year's 12-day event in July featured three different dance productions as well as a sneak peek at another that crossed the Atlantic for its international premiere at the Edinburgh Festival Fringe, widely known as the largest arts festival in the world, and trailblazing granddaddy for its eclectic Canadian offspring.

The Body Orchestra, a collective of independent dance artists who are mostly Vancouver-based, presented a mixed bill, *Conduit*, featuring three contemporary works choreographed during creative residencies at Simon Fraser University's School for the Contemporary Arts and the Shadbolt Centre for the Arts by the company's co-artistic directors, Jennifer Aoki and Jenn Edwards. The 60-minute production, performed by a seven-member ensemble at the Royal Manitoba Theatre Centre's John Hirsch Mainstage Theatre, included terrific original music by Jakob Liljenwall and James Coomber, with dramatic lighting by Jonathan Kim. Each of the short, evocative pieces was abstract in nature, yet conjured potent imagery inspired by TV news, Greek cinema, orchestral conductors and even Donald Trump.

Aoki's *Viewer Discretion* begs the question, "Do we control technology, or does it control us?" and included a compelling solo by Erin Lequereux, bristling with street-punk energy. The two remaining works were by Edwards: *Other Creatures*

dives into human communication (or lack thereof), while the title work, *Conduit*, features gestural movement vocabulary derived from a conductor's arm movements, including an eye-popping section in which an "orchestra" of six dancers follow the lead of their maestra, Samantha Presley, with their flailing, thrashing bodies.

Winnipeg's Jolene Bailie's mixed bill, *Game On*, presented by Gearshifting Performance Works, offered six retrospective works at the Royal Manitoba Theatre Centre's Tom Hendry Warehouse — with Bailie making a rare cameo appearance alongside her six-member ensemble.

Bailie fans know her penchant for the absurd, with *Lost* and *Mini Vignettes on Life and Love* taking viewers into surrealist landscapes. Her less-is-more solo, *Alex Colville and I* (excerpted from her 2014 full-length show *Eat All You Want/ The Top?*), features the lithe artist narrating her own encounter with the late Canadian master painter while balancing a horse's grooming brush on her forehead.

Game On, performed by Carol-Ann Bohrn, Neilla Hawley and Helene Le Moullec Mancini dressed like cheerleaders, becomes a high-energy romp through a colourful traffic-pylon playground, including bounding leaps and dizzying floor rolls.

One highlight was *Altered Aspects* with Bohrn, Le Moullec Mancini and Aaron Paul in a graphic explosion of angular choreography. But the 60-minute show's most potent work proved to be *Feedback*, in which a seated Bohrn spews a litany of cutthroat criticisms to a stoically dancing Shawn Maclaine — culled from actual rehearsal experiences of brutal honesty in the often take-down world of art-making.

Ming Hon's *Chase Scenes* premiered in August at the Edinburgh fringe as one of five productions sponsored through CanadaHub. The work, featuring Hilary Anne Crist, Alexandra Elliott and Hon in a breathlessly paced, 60-minute production inspired by "our collective nightmare of being chased and the manifestation of this in film culture and real-life experience," had a local sneak peek presentation earlier in July at Winnipeg's Artspace Building.

A series of 60 "chase scenes," including such titles as *Late to the Gate*, *Jungle* and *The Horror!*, seamlessly integrated jaymez's live feed projections with Kayla Jeanson's original pre-recorded video footage as the three women "cut to the chase," taking turns re-creating various scenarios from comical to nightmarish. Kudos to these fiercely committed performers for their tightly synchronized movement and ability to manoeuvre perilous technical challenges that left scarcely room to breathe. However, the show's intensity, punctuated by copious screams and coupled with the blink-of-an-eye nature of each scene, became exhausting.

Finally, Weather Parade Dance Theatre, founded in 2015 by Ali Robson and Natasha Torres-Garner, presented *I Trace You, You Trace Me*, in August. It also quickly became a clarion call to action for intergenerational collaborations.

The 45-minute show featured 16 performers aged five to 55, including Robson and Torres-Garner's own children. The University of Winnipeg's Asper Theatre for Performing Arts morphed into an enormous playground where the children tumbled, traced shapes on large sheets of paper, and tossed off cartwheels and somersaults, joined by the adults, as an exploration of "play." Local bassist Ashley Au's original score and lighting designer Eric Bossé added texture to the otherwise minimal stage design.

Poignantly, a series of duets between the kids and their respective adult partners woven throughout created a wonderfully egalitarian sense of generational continuum, with the performers' respect for each other palpable. The final duet by two young children provided pure gold at the end as they navigated space wholly in the moment, moving many in the audience to tears with their raw, untempered creativity and innocent trust. *DI*

Johanna Riley and Luna Salatorner in Weather Parade Dance Theatre's *I Trace You, You Trace Me*
Photo: Mark Dela Cruz

A theatrical experience does not require a theatre. Outdoor performances heartily embrace the inevitable intrusions that come with open public places. In that vein, veteran Montreal choreographer Louise Bédard staged her new work for two male-female couples, *VU-Vibrations Urbaines*, on the pavement of a downtown pedestrian walkway flanked mainly by restaurants. A rectangular wooden frame served as the main prop around which the quartet moved to a throbbing soundscape from outdoor speakers. Typical of Bédard, the work developed in sections with movement patterns so varied and unpredictable they appeared improvised. Sometimes a pair hooked up and moved in parallel motion, high kicking or outstretching arms, only to split and go independent ways.

Despite its aleatory feel, the work had a guiding spirit, which was most evident when the spontaneity of street traffic, dogs barking, pedestrians walking and skateboarders skimming by acted as a significant counterpoint to the choreographed movement. The choreographer no doubt imagined the interaction of non-performing pedestrians and dancers as a kind of *pas de deux*, with both contributing to the “urban vibrations” of the work’s title. It was not even clear when the work began. The dancers simply set up their “stage” and one by one melded into the work with the nonchalance of people passing by. Arguably, the boundary between artist and performer disappeared entirely, though the ultimate meshing of the two would have had pedestrians actively interacting with the dancers.

About 30 spectators observed at any one time, and the most rapt audience members were small children with no concern for theatrical traditions or conventions. Adult theatregoers who held onto their conventional notions of theatre might have felt affronted by the distractions, but those who embraced them as part of the show’s aesthetic might well have felt a pleasant moment of freedom, like a butterfly shedding its cocoon.

American-born choreographer Roderick George, a former Forsythe dancer, founded his small Berlin-based group, kNOname Artist, in 2015, two years after a stint as an emerging choreographer in Montreal’s Springboard summer dance

program. His double bill, *Dust* (2016) and *Fleshless Beast* (2017), opened the 2018 edition of the 11-day Quartiers DanSES festival. George likes constant motion and both works hardly had a moment’s pause, especially *Dust*, which kept its all-male quartet leaping and twirling balletically, their hands and arms positioned as delicately as a ballerina interpreting Giselle. The impression was of dancers preening, which suggests that voguing counts with ballet and hip hop among George’s influences. *Fleshless Beast* employed a wider variety of movement rhythms and subtler gestures in which limbs were in constant play. George’s rich movement vocabulary included many delightful parts, though on initial viewing they did not quite add up to a whole.

National Ballet of Canada principal dancer Guillaume Côté has striven hard in recent years to establish some serious choreographic credentials, staging, for example, an evening-length *Petit Prince* and collaborating with world-famous Quebec stage director Robert Lepage on *Frame by Frame*. At the Festival des Arts de Saint-Sauveur near Montreal where Côté is artistic director, he presented the world premiere of *Hamlet Redux*, a severely abridged telling of Shakespeare’s tragedy for six members of Côté’s home company. The set was hardly more than a nondescript table and costumes were minimal, with Ben Rudisin as King Claudius often bare-chested, apparently to emphasize his sex appeal for Chelsy Meiss as Queen Gertrude. Their mutual physical interest was palpable in a long duet whose

physicality stood in contrast to the work’s second, more lyrical duet between Greta Hodgkinson as Ophelia and South African-born Siphesihle November, making a splendid local debut in the title role. A corps member since 2017 after finishing studies at the National Ballet School, November is already a mature artist whose every movement breathes individuality and commands attention.

Both main duets showed enough changes of rhythmic flow and choreographic invention to create dramatic interest. What was missing, especially in such a familiar psychological drama, was a buildup to introduce the context in which the duets took place. It was a dramatic error, for example, to have Hamlet positioned in such a way during the Claudius/Gertrude duet that his painful outrage could not be seen. His anguish, after all, gives meaning to all subsequent actions.

Elsewhere, Côté introduced a contrasting pair in Kota Sato, as a clown figure who opened the work in rather bewildering fashion to the sounds of a popular song, and Jenna Savella, as a dark figure of conscience haunting Hamlet.

Hamlet’s confrontation with his mother, Gertrude, was brutally effective and hinted that Côté is keen to investigate dark emotions. The pair’s physical violence had the kind of truthfulness that stage violence often lacks. Traditionalists might object, however, to Hamlet’s brandishing a gun to kill Claudius and ultimately himself. Something tells me this staging was preliminary to a longer, more comprehensive Côté *Hamlet*. ▫

Montreal & St. Sauveur

BY VICTOR SWOBODA



The Mark Morris Dance Group continued this summer to be part of Lincoln Center's Mostly Mozart Festival, which again offered, in the words of the festival's artistic director Jane Moss, "landmark international productions in music, theatre and dance, as well as an enhanced commitment to the music of our time."

Morris' triple bill was made up of two older dances — *Love Song Waltzes* (1989) to Brahms' *Liebeslieder Walzer, Op. 52* and *I Don't Want to Love* (1996) to Monteverdi madrigals — and a festival commission premiere, *The Trout*, to Schubert's 1891 *Piano Quintet in A major*. The music, known as the *Trout Quintet*, was nicknamed after the 1817 Schubert song *Die Forelle* that gives the chamber work the theme for the fourth of its five movements. All the music, as might be expected from a music festival, was performed live, which is standard for the Mark Morris Dance Group.

Love Song Waltzes has its cast of 12 in dark-hued costuming (the designer was uncredited) in blacks and reds, cut like casual clothing, while *I Don't Want to Love* had its cast of seven in Isaac Mizrahi's stylish, all-white, often sexy costuming. Both works filled the stage and animated their distinct scores with felicitous moves, with the former featuring four singers and two pianists and the latter, four singers and four instrumentalists.

The paired dance works made similar demands on the audience's concentration. Although the communal rapport among the six men and six women of the Brahms dance was contrasted with the individual focus of the three men and three women in the Monteverdi, the visual and kinetic impact of their dance theatrics yielded something of a sameness, especially when performed without an intermission in between.

After the program's lone intermission, Morris brought a subtly different dimension of dance-theatre with *The Trout*. Maile Okamura has dressed the cast of 11 in a range of colours, with the five women's A-line skirt dresses in translucent shades that suggest the spectral array of hues associated with an actual rainbow trout. With the six men in solid silvery grey pants and sleeveless tops, the

sleek tones of a trout pervaded the five-movement dance suite.

The action started after the music had already begun; it comes in on the strains of strings, almost as if a fishing line has been released. The full cast passed on and off the stage with moves indicative of traffic-pattern timing that take the dancers out of view almost as soon as they are brought into our focus.

Eventually, and subtly, one of the men, Noah Vinson, delicately stood out and apart. His arrivals and disappearances are reminiscent of the lyrics in Schubert's song that describe the trout dashing "everywhere like an arrow" and how it "weaved here and there." And so

of the previous movement rooted in Schubert's *Trout* melody as shaped into six variations. Morris conjures a full-stage arrangement in which Vinson, his back to the audience, slyly waves toward his fellow dancers in the distance. Finally, we see the rainbow-hued ensemble as if on a shore, now with their backs to the audience as they regard with seeming fascination and perhaps wistful regret the fleeting departure of Vinson, streaking across the back of the stage as if carried by the current of a stream.

Approximately a month after Morris showed off his newest creation, one of his precursors in American modern dance, 88-year-old Paul Taylor, breathed



BY ROBERT GRESKOVIC

does Vinson. Here, he becomes but one part of Morris' dancemaking involving the ensemble. There, he works separately from the group and its sub-groups.

In an intriguing series of trios in which one dancer slips away to reshape the group as a duo, Vinson is a prominent facilitator whose moves artfully effect the change. The staging has the deftness of freely swimming fish in a stream, showing Morris at his most authoritative and adept.

If there was any wavering of my attention during the dance's nearly 45-minute duration, it was during the extended finale following the choreographic close

his last. By the time Morris was born in 1956, Taylor was on his way to achieving fame as a master choreographer. Among the moves that Morris includes in his Schubert dance, one struck me as similar to something seen at times in Taylor's choreography. It's a calm, open-handed, palm-down gesture that makes the dancer appear to be led as if by some divining rod. The gesture is one Morris has used before, but it's also one that Taylor deployed strikingly in his dances. Whether coincidental invention or an homage to a predecessor's art, it will continue to detail *The Trout* with a delicately haunting touch. DI

London



BY SANJOY ROY

It so happened that I saw a lot of outdoor, site-specific, community-based performances over the summer, much of which emphasized the feel-good and the celebratory. Sending the audience home happy and presenting the community in a positive way is an understandable goal. Yet Hofesh Shechter's *East Wall* at the Tower of London, billed as a celebration of the history and diversity of the place and its people, made no such concessions. Instead, it was demanding, provocative, often ambivalent, sometimes shocking — and brilliant.

Directed by Shechter, the project paired four choreographers — Joseph Toonga, Duwane Taylor, Becky Namgauds and James Finnemore — with two local youth groups apiece, threading their creations together with work by Shechter's own youth company into an exhilarating outdoor gig, backed by a live band and a local gospel choir.

To start, a brass band of ceremonial guardsmen in full livery marched across the space, leaving a lone civilian lying helpless, as if trampled. The ambivalence — tourist attraction compounded with militarist pomp and cruel consequence — was typical of the sections that followed. We saw a society fracture into factions; a classroom revolution replicating the follow-my-leader hierarchies of the marching band; a hive of courtly activity fronted by a woman who might equally be imperious queen or reluctant figurehead; and a wave of bodies toppling and then immersing a line of upright figures, like individuals swept away in a human tide.

An extended sequence by the superlative Shechter II youth company spliced aristocratic mannerisms and clownish capers with simulations of shocking violence (necks broken, guts skewered, brains blasted), all nonchalantly nailed to the beat. Tapping the contradictory, many-storied spirit of London itself, *East Wall* combined community with conflict, vitality with brutality and civilization with its discontents — an amazing achievement.

The weave of stories, languages and voices is a hallmark of the work of Belgian choreographer Sidi Larbi Cherkaoui, and certainly showed in a revival of *Play* (2010) at the Southbank Centre. Though billed as a duet between contemporary dancer Cherkaoui and classical Indian dancer Shantala Shivalingappa, it was more of an

ensemble piece for the dancers and a band of musicians whose globally diverse styles knit enchantingly together.

That sense of contrast and encounter ran throughout the work. Cherkaoui shadowed Shivalingappa's darting shapes and rhythmic precision, like a fuzzy echo of her formal exactitude. Then she became the follower, trailing his tumbleweed rolls and tangled limbs. We saw them play a game of chess, with hands deftly manoeuvring for position. The dancers donned Asian puppet masks to act out a little family drama, and Cherkaoui became a kind of puppet-master himself, stringing along Shivalingappa's plaintive gestures. The scenes also included a lovely clapping game, a saccharine Disney song and a piano being played by more and more hands. In fact, hands seemed key to this decidedly patchwork piece: dextrous, playful, both communicative and manipulative, and imparting to everything a human touch.

Back in 2016, Cherkaoui was one of the choreographers commissioned by superstar ballerina Natalia Osipova for her faltering foray into contemporary dance performance and programming. This year, she returned to Sadler's Wells for a surer-footed but somewhat staid excursion, with a series of short duets and solos in her misnamed Pure Dance program. The best pieces were the two where she stayed closest to her home ground, and paired up with American Ballet Theatre's noble David Hallberg: the lovely, lyrical pas de deux from Antony Tudor's *The Leaves are Fading*, and Alexei

Ratmansky's *Valse Triste* to Sibelius, a brilliantly taut duet combining recklessness with restraint.

Less successful were Yuka Oishi's *Ave Maria* — a breath-filled, moon-eyed solo, to Schubert — and Roy Assaf's *Six Years Later*, which tracked Osipova and Jason Kittelberger through the ups, downs and roundabouts of a past affair, accompanied by the *Moonlight Sonata* (for the romance) and Marmalade's 1969 pop hit *Reflections of My Life* (for the remembrance); Ethan Hawke and Julie Delpy they were not.

Substantially better was Kim Brandstrup's *In Absentia*, with Hallberg's brooding presence casting ominous shadows in a room uncertainly lit by a screen, but it remained just the sketch of a work. Iván Pérez's *Flutter* had Osipova and the superb contemporary dancer Jonathan Goddard skittering forward and back in tremulous runs and, if it too felt more like the start of something than a finished piece, it held much promise.

In dance-going, sometimes a wild card trumps all else. In *Dark Field Analysis* by Swedish/Dutch choreographer Jefta van Dinter, two men (Juan Pablo Cámara and Roger Sala Reyner), each wearing a microphone and nothing else, took us on a trippy descent into a corpuscular world of amoebic twitches and primordial crawls — drenched by black shadows, fitfully illuminated by neon, and embedded in a matrix of ambient electronica and guttural vocalizations. We emerged blinking into the London night, wondering where we had been. Unexpected, bewildering and, in the end, weirdly brilliant. DI

Only 60 kilometres separate Bolzano from Rovereto, both located at the foot of the Dolomite Alps. Bolzano, a larger town, is lively, full of sparkling colours, with parks, water, mountains, palaces and markets all around. Various cultural influences — Indigenous Latin culture, German and Italian — add dynamic energy. Rovereto is a quiet town, so Italian that in the First World War many patriots lost their lives defending Italy's freedom. An important museum devoted to the war is one of its attractions, although in recent years the Museum of Modern and Contemporary Art, or MART, has become a destination for European art-lovers.

Despite their differences, a common denominator in these towns is dance. In the second part of July, the Bolzano Danza Festival invades local stages, streets and museums, while in Rovereto, Italy's oldest contemporary dance festival, Oriente Occidente, takes place every September.

Bolzano Danza shifted perspectives (physically) and viewpoints (intellectually) in experiments with different ways of conceiving dance. The influence of the early 1960s generation of American postmodern creators was strong. For example, *Veduta* (Views) by Italian Michele Di Stefano recalled an early experiment by Lucinda Childs, who gave instructions through a transistor radio to colleagues watching from studio windows as she performed in urban traffic. In *Veduta*, spectators guided into a building are humorously misled by the dialogue heard through wireless headsets — it seems that a fugitive is rushing through the Bolzano streets, who we follow to the big hall of the palace, to the principal town square and so on. *Mission Impossible*-type movie music sharpened the illusion of geography.

Another perspective was offered by Italian Alessandro Sciarroni, whose unstoppable whirling on the spot (lasting 50 minutes or more) in *Don't be frightened of turning the page* brought us closer to understanding mystical ecstasy or the hypnotic magic of perpetual motion, a feeling helped by the enchanting circular stone wine cellar where the show took place.

Bolzano Danza had hits with two very different shows. In *10,000 Gestures*,



Bolzano & Rovereto

BY SILVIA POLETTI

French choreographer Boris Charmatz experimented with the idea of having each dancer compose their own score of 10,000 original movements, with no repetitions. What helped the artists to not repeat themselves was the different emphasis, tempo and direction they took, as well as their emotional intent and attack. This motley crew, in a hodgepodge selection of costumes, seemed to be anarchically expressing itself, each member isolated in his or her own set of gestures. Yet, as the piece progressed, with Mozart's *Requiem* playing in the background, one could clearly see the vision of a true choreographer, who breaks down the idea of composition, but has the bigger picture in mind. This comes through in the way Charmatz controls the waves of movement and intersperses them with still, weighty images, and how he measures out the emotional tension and regulates the groups.

A totally different piece — and the other hit — was the light-hearted mixed bill by Canadian Eric Gauthier's Stuttgart-based company, which presented a wide range of styles from Ohad Naharin, Marco Goecke,

Virginie Brunelle and Gauthier himself. Gauthier's piece, created with a little help from Andonis Foniadakis, was *Electric Life*, which was dedicated to Montreal's Louise Lecavalier, a dancer who had impressed Gauthier in his youth for her incredible stamina and power, energy and dynamics. He recreated those here, including her famous whirling turns and dazzling jumps performed with devouring appetite by the company's women.

Rovereto opened the 38th edition of its Oriente Occidente Dance Festival with three world premieres. Swedish choreographer and videomaker Pontus Lidberg created a dreamy atmosphere in *Siren*, thanks to a foggy light design wrapping the stage, with seven men and an exotic beauty dressed in green — the Siren of the title — searching for human contact. Its agreeable, clear dance vocabulary had a romantic touch that evoked neoclassical ballet memories (in the duet for the man and the Siren) and gave a clear choreographic telling of the narrative.

Not so for the two Italian premieres, whose choreographers' starting points for their creations were two pillars of art: Shakespeare's *A Midsummer Night's Dream* for Davide Valrosso's *Sogno* (Dream) and 1881 Italian ballet classic *Ballo Excelsior* for Salvo Lombardo's *Excelsior*. The problem for both is that the references need to be somehow evident in the choreography in order for the audience to understand their new dramatic vision. Although gracious and fresh — thanks to the young dancers of Balletto di Roma — Valrosso's *Sogno* remained superficial, and was limited to showing fluid human chains moving up and down the stage and shaping different combinations of partnerships.

Lombardo used the extravagant and historic *Ballo Excelsior* that celebrated human progress and discoveries to underline the oppression over a great part of humanity by a few — a heated subject, considering current world events. Unfortunately, in the new *Excelsior*, performed by Chiasma company, there was a poverty of choreographic language and simplicities such as having an Indian performer wear U.K. flag underwear. There needs to be a better balance between the choreographer's intentions and the ability to find an efficient expressive vocabulary able to communicate them clearly to the audience. *DI*

The great Swedish filmmaker Ingmar Bergman would have celebrated being 100 years old this year; he died in 2007 at 89. His films are well known, but he worked just as much in theatre and television, and was director of the Royal Dramatic Theatre in Stockholm for many years.

In several projects, Bergman worked with the American choreographer Donya Feuer, who lived in Stockholm for some time, and also with Ek, especially in his theatre productions. He also used to drop in on rehearsals when Birgit Cullberg was in the process of creating a new ballet for her company. She would ask for his opinions, which he very frankly gave, which could result in the choreography being radically rearranged.

For this centenary occasion, three of Sweden's best-known choreographers — Johan Inger, Alexander Ekman and Mats Ek — got together to create an homage. The mixed bill titled *Dancing with Bergman* premiered at the Norwegian Opera House in Oslo at the end of June, before touring to Paris, Monte Carlo and Stockholm.

Inger chose to pick up on a dance film, *4 Karim*, which Bergman and Feuer created for a TV series. The four women characters in both the TV show and the ballet are clearly family, and they live in a room with the walls closing in on them. The eldest, maybe the mother, is dressed in black and works very hard to keep the others, perhaps her daughters, in check. It is like an echo of the stories in many of Bergman's films.

Ekman followed with a solo, *Thoughts of Bergman*, which he danced. In a voiceover he puts forward the question once asked by Bergman: What is dance? Bergman's answer: All movement without purpose. Ekman has a lot of energy and at one moment he jumped down from the stage for a long dance with a woman from the audience.

In Ek's *Memory*, Ek performed with his wife Anna Laguna, who was once a star of Cullberg Ballet. At age 73 and 63, respectively, the two have exceptional stage presence and know their physical limitations. Ek also tells a family story, this one about a marital relationship, with common household items brought on and off the stage as the marriage unfolds.

During the evening, clips from films made by Bergman were shown, together with snapshots and interviews, altogether creating a lovely homage.

Jo Strømgren has run his own company for the last 20 years, but is now in danger of losing basic government funding due to a new rule that cuts off such support after 12 years. This means that one of the biggest exports of art in this country may have to fold, a scandalous situation.

Strømgren is also house choreographer for Norwegian National Ballet, for whom he recently restaged a work created in 2011 for Gothenburg Opera, *Utkanten* (*The Outskirts*). He also made a new piece, *Sult* (*Hunger*), based on the novel of the same name by the Norwegian author Knut Hamsun.

Oslo

BY FREDRIK RÜTTER



The Outskirts is about people living in a small isolated town in Sweden where the inhabitants watch each other closely and everybody knows everything about each other. The town is turned upside down when a dead Catholic is found in the main public square, which results in the inhabitants' secrets being revealed. The whole story becomes quite an absurd one, with the dancers doing a great job in portraying the different characters.

Hamsun's novel, *Hunger*, is about a starving artist, whose life is very much that of the writer himself. In Strømgren's ballet, Silas Henriksen danced the main role with an exceptionally strong

presence: you could practically hear his empty stomach growling from hunger. Disconnected from society, the artist walks through the streets, hardly aware of anything around him. The beautifully dressed bourgeoisie of the city of Oslo (in the time of the novel named Kristiania), danced by the company, do not take any notice of him. This evening was perhaps not Strømgren's greatest, and yet the performance was strong and the audience were clearly appreciative.

Alan Lucien Øyen, also a house choreographer with Norwegian National Ballet, was invited by Tanztheater Wuppertal Pina Bausch to create the second new piece ever made for the company after Pina Bausch died in 2009. It premiered in Wuppertal in June, and the company came to Oslo with it straight after.

In Øyen's *Neues Stück II* (*New Piece II*), which lasted three hours, large revolving walls were moved around continuously, creating new rooms. The storyline was not easy to follow, but seemed to be about the one thing we can be sure of: that death will reach us all sooner or later. Øyen typically uses a lot of text, and in *Neues Stück II* there is about 85 percent text and 15 percent dancing.

The many solos and duets are sometimes in high speed, in contrast to the slow pulse that is the tempo of *Neues Stück II*. There are also a lot of suicides and deaths before this dark work arrives at the last great funeral with which it ends. *DI*



Copenhagen

BY ANNE-MARIE ELMBY

Denmark's warm and sunny summer was to the benefit of Verdensballetten (World Ballet), which aims to bring some of the finest ballet dancers, musicians and singers to untraditional outdoor venues around the country. For the 11th time, Danish opera singer Jens-Christian Wandt assembled dancers from London's Royal Ballet and Berlin State Ballet. One group in July and a slightly different one in August gave nine performances, which took place in a Copenhagen park, at manor houses around the country and even on a stage built on the beach with the North Sea as a backdrop. They attracted large audiences, some of whom had never experienced live ballet.

Federico Bonelli and Lauren Cuthbertson made time stand still in the *Swan Lake* white pas de deux and, in the black pas de deux, he was defenceless against her radiating power. Later, Yuhui Choe and Nehemiah Kish danced the latter as well as the Sanctus movement from Kenneth Macmillan's *Requiem* to Gabriel Fauré's mass, created to commemorate John Cranko.

Iana Salenko and Marian Walter filled Raimondo Rebeck's *Elegy of the Hearts* with a unique sensibility, and her technical capacity sparkled in the Rose Adagio from *Sleeping Beauty*. Elizabeth Harrod and Paul Kay entertained with a charming pas de deux from Ashton's *The Two Pigeons*. Kay also obliged with a fascinating solo with sharp, angular moves from Wayne

to create a work for Michael Nunn and Billy Trevitt's all-male company, the Talent.

Later in August, McKenzie and Walentin, who together with cellist Jacob la Cour make up Trio Vitruvi, launched a new initiative, Kammerballetten (the Chamber Ballet) with seven dancers from the Royal Danish Ballet. Their premiere performance took place in the intimate atmosphere of Takkelloftet, a small stage in Copenhagen.

To Prokofiev's piano work *Visions Fugitives*, Adam Lüders created a fine piece that was clearly stylistically influenced by his time as principal with New York City Ballet under George Balanchine. It allowed the four dancers to stand out individually as well as combine in a playful quartet. Tobias Praetorius choreographed *Bach Solo Duet* for Liam Redhead, who became the corporeal visualization of the Bach chorale.

Finnish-British Kristian Lever's *Unravel* to Ravel's *Pavane* was a convincing physical illustration of a couple that relentlessly vacillated between attraction and defiance, embodied with intense emotion by Alba Nadal and Praetorius. Lever's *Coping* to Rachmaninov's *Piano Trio No.1* pivoted around a woman, the expressive Stephanie Chen Gundorph, and her attempt to overcome a personal tragedy, while the other dancers seemed to represent both the abstract thoughts bombarding her mind and the concrete happenings around her.

In 2016 and 2017, 24-year-old Lever visited Copenhagen as a dancer with John Neumeier's National Youth Ballet based

in Hamburg and has since choreographed works for dancers he met. Now, as a freelance choreographer, his obvious creative talent has brought upcoming assignments for several companies and festivals.

Danish Dance Theatre held its traditional Copenhagen Summer Dance festival at a new venue, Ofelia Place, on the pier next to the Royal Playhouse with the inner harbour creating a spectacular background. New artistic director Pontus Lidberg invited six guest dancers from the Cuban company Acosta Danza, founded in 2015 by acclaimed dancer Carlos Acosta. Sunburned, muscular Carlos Luis Blanco from Acosta Danza was featured as nature's child in Flemish-Moroccan choreographer Sidi Larbi Cherkaoui's *Faun*, with Debussy's music recalling Nijinsky's original work. With the entry of Laura Tretó's nymph, Nitin Sawhney's floating music took over for a while and gave their playful yet sensual union a timeless turn.

Danish Dance Theatre contributed Andalusian Marcos Morau's *Waltz*, created for the company in 2017. In glittering black unitards that at the start covered their heads and hands, the dancers moved like a dehumanized group of future life forms. Classical waltz fragments of a forgotten past blended into the electronic soundscape created by Morau and Mikkel Larsen.

Their second contribution was Stephen Shropshire's *Lamento della Ninfa* (2014) in which the female dancer, when lifted by her two partners, looked as if she was flying through the blue evening sky.

Both companies' dancers joined together in an excerpt from Lidberg's *Paysage, Soudain, la nuit (Landscape, Suddenly, the Night)*, choreographed in 2017 in Havana to Leo Brouwer and Stefan Levin's *Paisaje Cubano con Rumba (Cuban Landscape with Rumba)*, a joyful piece that paid tribute to the Cubans and their love of connecting through movement.

For a classical ballet item, Lidberg invited a personal friend, Alban Lendorf, who dotingly lifted and embraced Marina Minoiu in the first love pas de deux from Kenneth MacMillan's *Manon*. It was good to see Lendorf back onstage after he had an operation last season. Sadly for the Danes, he has now bid a final farewell to the Royal Danish Ballet to fully devote his time as a principal with American Ballet Theatre. We hope for an occasional guest appearance, if time and repertoire allow it. *DI*

McGregor's *Chroma* to Joby Talbot's dynamic score, executed with an intensity that confirmed why he is often a part of McGregor's creative work.

Pianist Alexander McKenzie and violinist Niklas Walentin accompanied several of the dances, including a new Gershwin *Summertime* by Kristen McNally, clearly inspired by the love between Choe and Kish, who celebrated their honeymoon on this tour. McNally is a principal character artist of the Royal Ballet and for several years she has created pieces for her colleagues there. In 2017, she was the first female choreographer

This year marked a milestone for Singapore Dance Theatre, which began more than three decades ago with two Singaporeans who wanted to set up a professional troupe in their birth country. Soo Khim Goh, the Australian Ballet School's first Asian graduate, was principal of Singapore Ballet Academy; Anthony Then, an alumnus of the Rambert Ballet School in England, had performed with companies in Britain and Germany. With assistance from the government and a few donors, the troupe was formed in 1987 with Goh and Then as co-artistic directors. Seven dancers were recruited and, despite having to rehearse in a leaky studio with loose floorboards, the fledgling group pulled off its maiden show in 1988.

After Then retired in 1995, Goh led Singapore Dance Theatre alone until she was succeeded by Swedish-American ballet master Janek Schergen in 2008. Schergen had been connected with the company from its inception, when he had staged Choo San Goh's *Beginnings* (1983) for its debut, and came often to mount other pieces by the choreographer (who was Soo Khim Goh's younger brother). Since taking over the reins, Schergen has seen the troupe grow to include 32 full-time dancers — not counting eight apprentices and trainees — and move to a new home on the top storey of a shopping mall in town.

Besides commissioning original creations from local and overseas choreographers, Schergen has also acquired additional Balanchine classics and has given them a more regular place in the company's programs. But it is the works of Choo San Goh that remain a cornerstone of Singapore Dance Theatre's repertoire. So the troupe had good cause to feature a few of them during its 30th-anniversary gala in July, and to offer an all-Goh triple bill for half of its outdoor season in September. Held at the Esplanade Theatre, the gala sandwiched a world premiere between a pair of revivals and a company premiere.

Double Contrasts (1978) is one of 14 dances that Goh made for Washington Ballet, where he was resident choreographer from 1976 to his death in 1987. Set to French composer Francis Poulenc's *Concerto for Two Pianos and Orchestra*, it well represents the sleek neoclassical vein

of Goh's oeuvre. Two units of six performers each — one dressed in black and the other in white — criss-crossed the stage against a plain blue backdrop under a sparkling constellation of dangling ornaments, the dancers' serrated gestures and quickly shifting patterns responding to the music's percussive passages and surging rhythms.

If the women here seemed to share just the barest hint of intimacy with the men, that suggestion was taken further in the pas de deux excerpted from *Configurations* (1981). Goh initially created the whole piece, which Mikhail Baryshnikov had commissioned for himself and American Ballet Theatre, for a cast of 14 to American composer Samuel Barber's *Concerto for Piano and Orchestra*. In

of 32 dancers — occasionally joining their bodies to build intricate structures — reflected the cascading lyricism of its music, American composer Philip Glass' *Four Movements for Two Pianos*.

In the company premiere of *SYNC*, which Dutch choreographer Nils Christie first created for Washington Ballet in 1996, an enigmatic score by Italian composer Ludovico Einaudi drove 27 performers into hard angles and sharp turns tempered by softer moments; sometimes they watched one another like curious bystanders. Hanging at the back was a metal lighting truss that served as a barre and a climbing frame to support the men's acrobatic stunts. Finally, the dancers rolled from side to side into kneeling lunges as the curtain descended, like a reassurance

Singapore



BY MALCOLM TAY

its central duet, the chief couple carved wistful shapes together but faced away from each other by the end, like lovers coming to terms with parting. Principal artists Kenya Nakamura and Chihiro Uchida performed admirably in the roles originated by Baryshnikov and Marianna Tcherkassky.

For the gala, Australian choreographer Tim Harbour was asked to make a showcase for the entire troupe. The result was *Linea Adora*, which was inspired by lines as key elements in ballet. Indeed, lines pervaded almost every aspect of the work, from the design of its deep-toned costumes by Australian dancewear brand Keto to the moving horizontal beam of light in its uncredited backdrop projection. The myriad comings and goings

that Singapore Dance Theatre's journey continues.

Meanwhile, local group Chowk Productions managed to present a new full-evening piece at the Esplanade Theatre Studio even though it was denied state funding last year. *Pallavi with Stillness* was the final installment of artistic director Raka Maitra's trilogy on different facets of the pallavi, the pure-dance segment of an odissi performance.

Exploring the movement of the torso in relation to the rest of the body, it captured every transition and detail as Maitra and four other performers took apart and reassembled the pallavi in slow motion. It threatened to sag at times, but this pared-down look at odissi was mesmerizing nonetheless. *DI*

Melbourne



BY JORDAN BETH VINCENT

For longtime patrons of the Australian Ballet, there has only ever been one *Spartacus*. Back in 1990, principal artist Steven Heathcote's performance in the ballet was the height of drama and masculinity — his image (powerfully muscular and wearing a leather loincloth and harness) used to promote the company's tour to New York. Though officially retired, Heathcote continues to appear regularly in character roles with the Australian Ballet and is also the company's ballet master and regional touring associate. Even though the *Spartacus* of Heathcote's era (choreographed by László Seregi and first performed by the Australian Ballet in 1978) has not been seen since 2002, it is still talked about.

The premiere of a new *Spartacus*, therefore, has sparked a great deal of comparison between Heathcote and the new lead, Kevin Jackson. Jackson began with the company in 2003, was promoted to principal artist in 2010 and has consistently provided excellent performances in a range of different works — in the title role in John Neumeier's *Nijinsky*, for example.

Like Heathcote in 1990, Jackson is at the height of his career artistically and

physically. In both cases, the company has understood the importance of the image of their leading man in *Spartacus*, and it is hard to go far in Melbourne without seeing Jackson on the side of a bus or building captured in a deep lunge on demi-pointe, head tipped back and fists clenched.

This *Spartacus* was choreographed by Australian Lucas Jervies. Jervies, who danced with the Australian Ballet, is not entirely untested as a choreographer (credits include productions for Sydney-based companies Belvoir St Theatre and Griffin Theatre Company as well as for Louisville Ballet in the U.S.) but he has been given an extremely large platform with this production, which is as epic as the story itself.

We begin in Thrace, where Spartacus is in a line of slaves being sold at auction under the curious gaze of Crassus and his fellow residents at the villa. Spartacus is taken from his wife, Flavia (Robyn Hendricks), and sent to train as a gladiator. In the ring, he is forced to kill his best friend (Jake Mangakahia) — a moment of horror that sparks a revolution. Eventually, Spartacus and his fellow gladiator-slaves are captured and crucified. Flavia is left to mourn and to share the story of her husband.

This is a great deal of narrative to fit into 90 minutes. Aram Khachaturian's score was cut down by nearly half for this production, which results in a very condensed ballet. This may be one reason why much of the nuance in the supporting characters is lost; however, Jervies works to draw out the complexities in our hero. Even Flavia, Spartacus' love, exists mostly to give Spartacus the motivation to fight, to rebel and to show mercy.

Another reason for unevenness in character development may be a choreographic one. Jervies uses key gestures to differentiate groups of characters, as when, in the first act, the dancers portraying Crassus' cronies repeatedly raise an index finger. This same gesture is reinterpreted by Spartacus and the other slaves when they raise a hand over their head with the index finger extended, and then knock their own hand down to the hip with the other arm. What never quite happens, however, is a real exploration, expansion and development of the gestures.

As well, it is far more interesting to be a male dancer in the world of *Spartacus*, with a number of missed opportunities to develop the female characters.

The material for the slave women,

Robyn Hendricks and Kevin Jackson in Australian Ballet's *Spartacus*
Photo: Jeff Busby

which is often performed in unison and with an uplifted ballet vocabulary, does not feel like it belongs in this production but rather is there to fill time. Whereas Jervies attempts to draw out the struggles and frustration for the gladiator-slaves through movement that is driven by character and narrative, the material for the women misses an opportunity to elucidate their own challenges as slave-servants in the misogynistic and patriarchal world of Crassus and his cronies.

It is clear that the battles are where Jervies has applied his serious efforts. Working with fight director Nigel Poulton, Jervies' fight scenes eschew weapons for wrestling and fisticuffs. Often, it is the moments of stillness where interesting shapes are created between the bodies of two dancers and that give a sense of the power dynamics.

Jackson and the rest of the male dancers have trained for this, and it is visible in the confidence with which they

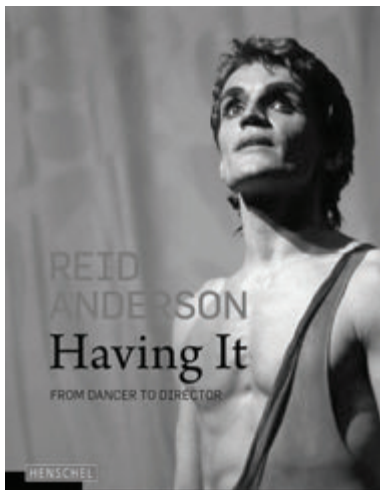
undertake what is fundamentally violent partnering work. The dancers even use sound effects — grunts and the sound of a fist making contact with another body — to highlight the harshness of this world. This makes for an interesting contrast in the movement Jervies has crafted for the love duets, which are romantic and sweeping, but also quite traditional in vocabulary and structure. Although the Australian Ballet has referenced the #metoo movement in their publicity as a frame for this ballet, it is very much a work by — and for — dancing men.

Jervies has drawn together a strong creative team. The first image of the ballet — during which Jerome Kaplan's exquisite set is revealed — is striking. Beyond a tableau of toga-wearing and gold-adorned patricians rises an enormous statue of a human fist, with the index finger raised to the sky, the image that inspired Jervies' gestural vocabulary. When Spartacus and the gladiators

revolt, they pull this statue down so that the finger points directly at the audience, as though challenging us for our complicity.

There is a key theatrical moment like this in every act. In the second act, Jervies has created a debauched bathtub dance, where men and women frolic (alone and together) in enormous steaming bathtubs. In the final act, Spartacus and his men are crucified. From atop individual grey pillars, they stand, blood dripping down their bodies to the floor. Here, Benjamin Cisterne's lighting design acts as a kind of wash over the bodies onstage.

As it was for Heathcote all those years ago, Spartacus is already an important vehicle for Jackson. He is excellently cast, as is Hendricks as Flavia and Amy Harris as Tertulla. It will be interesting to see how this production matures over time, as well as how Spartacus' narrative will resonate with a contemporary Australian audience. *DI*



Excerpt from
 REID ANDERSON — HAVING IT. FROM DANCER TO DIRECTOR
 By Angela Reinhardt and Gary Smith
 Henschel Publishing House, 2017
 www.seemann-henschel.de

Searching for “it” — Anderson’s dancers
 by Angela Reinhardt

“ Just as he would give his choreographers an extra chance, Reid [Anderson, Stuttgart Ballet artistic director] preferred to offer his dancers more than one opportunity; he was very patient when he believed in someone: “John Cranko [former director and choreographer at Stuttgart Ballet] expected a great deal, but he was capable of waiting — if he thought that waiting was the best course in order to achieve what he ultimately wanted. Support is so important — it is so easy, after a fabulous performance, to go up to someone and say: ‘You were great.’ But if a performance was not so hot, if they have had problems, emotional or physical, then it’s more difficult to say something. That’s when it is really important, because dancers very rarely forget anything. Some of them will say to me even now: ‘Remember what you said to me ten years ago’ ...”

Reid planned careers, he wanted his dancers to constantly grow. Instead of casting the same danseur noble as a prince year after year or reserving a dramatic character ballerina for the Cranko works, he would give them roles that were not on the face of it suited to them; he would try them out in something modern, in other fields, different dance styles. Jason Reilly is convinced: “I would never have had this career with another director. In any other company they would have pigeonholed me — as Tybalt, Hilarion and so on, those macho types, never as a prince. Reid is very, very open; he likes challenging dancers and I think it’s just in his nature to be curious about the outcome.” Reilly danced roles in Stuttgart that he probably would not have been given elsewhere — princes in the classics, Count Albrecht in *Giselle*: “The most important thing was that I suddenly realized I actually could dance these roles that I had never believed I was capable of! After that, I began to work in a completely different way. I suddenly had a different goal. It had an enormous effect on my self-perception and my approach to work.”

“A dancer does not just earn his career, the director must give it to them!” explains British dancer David Moore, one of the youngest Stuttgart principal dancers. ”

Quotable

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GRAND FINALE

Reid Anderson leaves Stuttgart Ballet

BY GARY SMITH

Each event on Detrich's program topped what had come before. By the time we got to the finale, with the entire company of Stuttgart dancers stepping out from the wings in *A Chorus Line* costumes, performing that iconic show tune *One*, there was no stopping the applause. When the ticker tape and the multi-coloured balloons fell from the flies, with sparkling pieces of Mylar sending reflected sparkles across the stage and into the house, you knew you had landed in one of the greatest ballet love-ins of all time.

Each member of the company presented Anderson with a long-stemmed red rose. Former Stuttgart ballerina Marcia Haydée threw a whole armful of them in the air as Anderson lifted her over his head. She set herself down, sliding into a deep bow, followed by Anderson who did the same thing. Their warmth and camaraderie was reminiscent of days when they danced together in MacMillan's *Requiem* and Cranko's *Onegin*.

When Detrich walked onstage to honour the man of the moment, his arms full of white roses, the two men embraced and Anderson did a little dance step. The audience held up signs saying "Danke Reid," and the party continued as celebrities and other fans trotted over to Plenum restaurant where the wine flowed well into the night.

I sat in a corner and watched the goings on. I thought about how I had maintained contact with Anderson over the years, having met him in 1984, when he came to Toronto to set John Cranko's *Onegin* on the National Ballet of Canada. I wrote a piece about

him for the National Ballet's monthly magazine and we remained in touch.

When Anderson took over the National Ballet of Canada as artistic director in 1986, I watched him take a young company and make it dance as if on fire, writing about what I saw for several magazines and the *Hamilton Spectator* newspaper. Soon after he took the leadership of Stuttgart Ballet, he invited me to come take a look. And, since then, I've been doing just that several times a year to keep in touch with this world-class company and its compelling classical and contemporary repertoire.

I was touched when Anderson asked me to collaborate on the book, *Reid Anderson — Having It*, which Stuttgart Ballet was planning to issue about his life and career. Angela Reinhardt, based in Germany, wrote about his time in Stuttgart, while I wrote about his growing up in British Columbia and then working in Vancouver and Toronto.

It was Anderson who chose the title for the book, inspired by something the late Stuttgart choreographer and artistic director John Cranko once said: "You either have it, or you don't. But you can't get it."

I understood immediately what this meant. It expresses what the artistic director of a ballet company must summon from his heart: warmth, concern and responsibility, of course. But there's something else, too: tough love. In addition to seeking superb repertoire, the director must find what is in the heart of each dancer and help them release it onstage.

Over lunch during the Stuttgart celebrations, I asked Reid Anderson what he would do after the final curtain came down.

"You know," he said, "I always look forward, never back. I'll always smell the sweat and the rosin of the ballet. But, after the final bow, I'll go up to my office, look at the packed crates, the shelves without their books and the places where pictures were on the wall. I'll sit for a quiet moment, look around, then stand up, switch out the lights and close the door."

Indeed, Mr. Anderson. You were graceful in your leave taking, just as you were when you danced onstage. *DI*

They do things right at Stuttgart Ballet. When it was time for Reid Anderson to say goodbye to the German company he had helmed for 22 years, the celebrations in his honour went on for 10 days.

Nightly performances of works commissioned or championed by Anderson revealed his eclectic taste and intelligent vision of dance. They also presented some of the finest dancers in his Stuttgart stable: dramatic Alicia Amatriain, powerful Jason Reilly and a feral Friedemann Vogel.

Cranko classics that Anderson had danced in his early days with the company, such as *Onegin* and *Initials R.B.M.E.*, were performed. More contemporary offerings included Christian Spuck's *Lulu* and an exciting evening featuring the Fantastic Five — Marco Goecke, Katarzyna Kozielska, Louis Stiens, Roman Novitzky and Fabio Adorisio — who had been championed by Anderson and gave the celebrations a forward look. Another program, *Party Pieces*, was comprised of snippets from many of his personal favourite works over the last two decades. Finally, on the last evening, Stuttgart Ballet's new artistic director, Tamas Detrich, presented a five-hour farewell gala.

Reviews



Nashville Ballet

Vasterling, Balanchine and Kylián / Mixed Bill

Nashville Ballet artistic director Paul Vasterling's *Appalachian Spring*, a reinterpretation of the iconic Martha Graham/Aaron Copland work, and Jiri Kylián's comedic *Sechs Tänze* (*Six Dances*) highlighted the company's debut at the Chautauqua Institution in New York State this past August.

But the mixed bill, at the Institution's Amphitheater in collaboration with the Chautauqua Symphony Orchestra, began with Vasterling's flashy *The Ben Folds Project: Concerto* (2014). The 25-minute neoclassical ballet in three movements was set to multi-platinum-selling singer-songwriter Ben Folds' *Concerto for Piano and Orchestra*, which was performed superbly by pianist Joel Ayau.

The largest of the ballets on the program, with a cast of 21, it began with eight male/

female couples in all black costumes engaged in elegant and energetic partner dancing that had the feel of a classic Hollywood movie production number. Inspired by, and in tandem with, the pace and mood of Folds' music, Vasterling's choreography featured dancer Owen Thorne as a charismatic leading man who danced with a string of attentive female partners in short pas de deux. For each one, Vasterling framed the couple with varying groupings of corps de ballet dancers who formed beautiful moving tableaux behind them.

The second movement and its music shifted gears visually and sonically as dancer Kayla Rouser, in a white leotard, took over the spotlight from Thorne as the central figure. Two male dancers in teal leotards and pants lifted Rouser

into twisting and turning movements, flying her about the stage. Also framed by tableaux of corps dancers, Rouser exuded power and grace in her quietly commanding performance that left you wanting more. The ballet's final section took another stylistic turn as Folds' music turned jazzy and the choreography followed suit to nicely wrap up the entertaining program opener.

Next came a 10-minute excerpt from George Balanchine's 1954 Americana ballet *Western Symphony*, danced to Hershy Kay's orchestrations of classic American folk songs. Evoking a theatrical view of the Old West, complete with cowboys and saloon dance hall girls, the ballet featured period costuming and movement within a classical framework. It was performed solidly by upper-level students from the

Chautauqua School of Dance in the corps roles alongside Nashville Ballet lead couple Julia Eisen and Thorne.

The Americana theme continued in Vasterling's *Appalachian Spring* (2017). Set to the suite version of Copland's Pulitzer Prize-winning composition made famous in Graham's 1944 ballet of the same name, Vasterling created a wonderfully crafted and heartfelt ballet that was distinctive from, yet paid homage to, Graham's original.

Employing a mix of neo-classical ballet infused with movements associated with Graham's modern dance technique, Vasterling themed the work around the notion of "the other," reflected in the personalities of eight characters.

Katie Vasilopoulos was a mother figure to those eight and also represented the larger ideals of hope, freedom and tolerance once associated with the United States. The 25-minute ballet began with Vasilopoulos' hopeful solo, full of spins and leaps, to the quiet opening section of Copland's score that conjured up an image of a new day dawning around her. While she was dancing, the corps of five men and three women, costumed in mid-19th century prairie-inspired costumes and carrying Shaker-style ladder-back chairs, moved on to the stage to encircle her. As the ballet unfolded, Vasterling featured each of the corps dancers in small, meaningful solos and duets that revealed characters who were exuberant in their hopes, awkward in their differences and, in the case of two men, longed for a forbidden love.

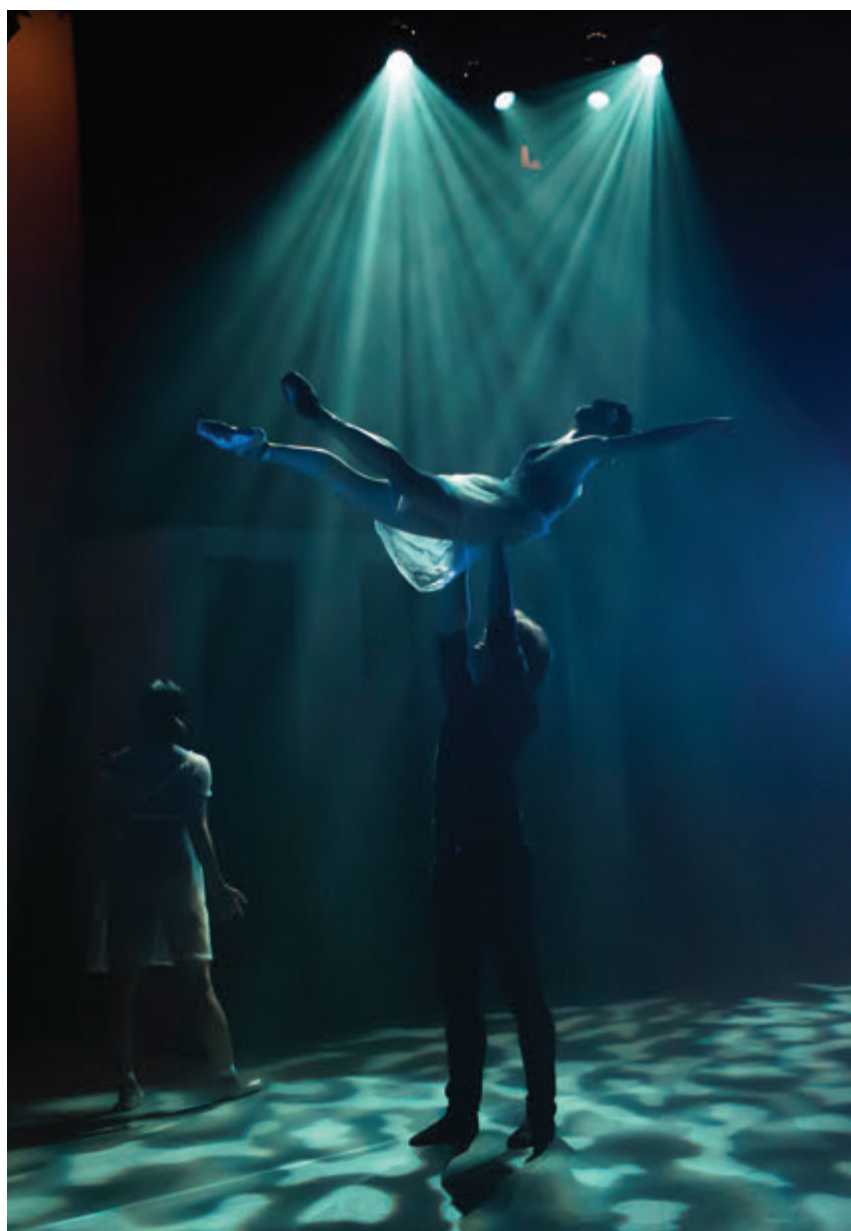
In the end, the ballet proved a worthy reinterpretation of Copland's music and a contemporary alternative to Graham's original, delivering a uniquely American message of unbounded optimism for the future.

Americana gave way to European farce for Kylián's modern masterwork *Sechs Tänze*, which ended the evening. Premiered in 1986 (the same year Nashville Ballet was founded) and set to Mozart's *Six German Dances*, the dancers' costumes and mannerisms reflected the Rococo period in which Mozart lived, and that the ballet was inspired by, albeit taken to outlandish extremes.

Four shirtless men in white powdered wigs and four women in towering teased hair, all with white face clown makeup, added to the spectacle of Kylián's zany and somewhat risqué contemporary dance work full of slapstick humour and animated facial expressions. Highlighting the comedy were several laughter-inducing scenes in which flamboyant male dancers donned gown-like rolling black dress forms (the same ones that would reappear in Kylián's 1991 masterpiece *Petit Mort*) and a spunky Mollie Sansone, à la Charlie Chaplin, boxed with several unseen figures whose arms and clenched fists were all that were visible from behind a curtain.

Sechs Tänze's comedic thrill ride concluded with the dancers shaking out clouds of wig powder as a shower of soap bubbles rained down on them from above. The audience rose to give them a well-deserved standing ovation.

— STEVE SUCATO



Ballet Ireland

Ludovic Ondiviela / *Giselle*

Scotland's annual Edinburgh Festival Fringe consists of hundreds of performances that range from comedy and improvisation to dance and musical theatre. This year, a unique event was a performance of a full-length ballet — Ballet Ireland's *Giselle*. With choreography by

ex-Royal Ballet dancer Ludovic Ondiviela, it takes a modern and fresh approach to the classic work.

Ballet Ireland, a small company of 19 dancers that presents commissioned works and classical revivals, was established in 1998. Directed today by Anne Maher, it

typically presents two shows a year at home in Dublin, which it then tours throughout Ireland in smaller venues.

Ondiviela's *Giselle* was made for these smaller venues, touring Ireland in 2017, and making it a good fit with the Fringe. Dance Base Studio 1, where it was performed in Edinburgh, is a small black box/studio theatre, with wings partitioned with cloth hung from the flies, and an audience capacity of about 50, so it is an intimate space.

The set by Maree Kearns consisted of large stone grey blocks of varying heights and widths that were moved around the stage by the performers to create different scenes, most notably the catacomb-esque location for the second act. These blocks created a beginning and an end to an otherwise unstructured space and, in the absence of a proscenium arch, provided a frame of sorts.

The action on this stark stage began with the whole first act narrative turned on its head, with the perspective mostly changed from that of Giselle to the secondary characters, Hilarion (Seu Kim) and to a lesser extent Bathilde (engagingly danced by Ana Enriquez-Garcia). The movement material here was fast paced, with inflections from the original choreography, as well as modern ballet, contact improvisation and contemporary/pop references.

In the opening of the first act, Bathilde becomes a murderer, killing Giselle in a fit of jealous rage after catching her in an embrace with Albrecht. Hilarion betrays her to the police. The ensuing police station and morgue scenes were a little muddled, and the movement material was the weakest in the ballet. With little relevant to the narrative's forward momentum, the dance looked like filler in largely mime-orientated action.

The second act was more successful. Ondiviela's wilis are both men and women, and are zombie-like, the movement material echoing Michael Jackson's *Thriller* at times. Here Ondiviela blurs gender stereotypes by giving the men the same material as the women and gender-neutral costuming. He lightens the female revenge theme, focusing the audience's attention

on Giselle's unwillingness to turn her friends into wilis. Hilarion, while visiting the grave, becomes a victim of the wilis as they surround him and drag him down to their murky underworld as Giselle pleads for his life to be spared. She is unsuccessful, and he comes back as a zombie-wili.

The black-and-white horror movie style lighting that designer Eoin Lennon, based on designs by Paul Keogan, employed here is most effective. The flowing white gauze draped over dancers' bodies and faces created a haunting afterglow of movement as they moved through the eerie graveyard.

The story continues in a more traditional vein, with Albrecht almost succumbing to a similar fate as Hilarion but for the rising of the sun, along with Giselle's love, helping to spare his life.

The most poignant moments came in the second act with some refined and controlled dancing from the principals and the only extended extract from Adolphe Adam's original music — the passionately danced pas de deux for Albrecht (Rodolfo Saraiva) and Giselle (Ryoko Yagyū), a breathtakingly tragic moment. Here Ondiviela shows his strength with invention while also infusing the movement material with echoes of the original 1841 choreography by Jean Coralli and Jules Perrot.

Tom Lane and Rob Moloney have distilled the music down to fragments of Adam's familiar score through an electronic deconstruction treatment. It is like hearing the music through an echo prism, distorted yet familiar. The first act is a little stagnant in musical terms, but in the second act it gains momentum with the inclusion of larger portions of the original score, which

illuminates the structure in a more immediate way.

In Ondiviela's reworking of the first act, the fundamental narrative issue of having the female characters' fate controlled by the male characters is not addressed. The second act proves the most effective: the dancers look confident and convinced of their roles in part due to more finely wrought movement material as well as stronger characterizations. They tell a story in a sincere way and transcend their own characters — a worthy achievement for any choreographer and company.

— DAVID WALLACE

Hubbard Street Dance Chicago

Duato, Mineko Williams, Cerrudo / Mixed Bill

As part of its 40th anniversary tour, Hubbard Street Dance Chicago came to Quebec's Festival des Arts de Saint-Sauveur with a sophisticated, upbeat and varied program. The company ethos, under the artistic leadership of Glenn Edgerton (a former principal dancer at Joffrey Ballet and then executive artistic director at Nederlands Dans Theater), is to bring the spirit and the love of dance to an eclectic repertoire. The Saint-Sauveur mixed bill was

clearly designed to soothe and stimulate the minds of audience members on a hot summer's evening.

Known for its exuberant and innovative repertoire, and its virtuosic dancers, the repertory company has made its name in the Windy City by presenting acquired dance works as well as commissions. Various genres including jazz, modern, ballet and theatrical styles by renowned choreographers, including Twyla Tharp, Ohad Naharin, William Forsythe and more recently Crystal Pite, are on the roster, and a next generation of dancemakers are given important platforms.

Two of the dancemakers featured in the Saint-Sauveur program also happen to have been former dancers with the company: Robyn Mineko Williams, who was selected as an emerging choreographer for Springboard Danse Montréal in 2013, and Alejandro Cerrudo, originally from Madrid, who serves as Hubbard Street's resident choreographer and to date has made 15 pieces for the company.

The evening opened with a piece by Spanish-born Nacho Duato, a crowd favourite, who matches contemporary ballet with pulsating musicality in his soulful, earthy *Jardí Tancat* (Catalonian for Closed Garden), created in 1983. It features songs based on Catalonian folk tales, composed and sung by the Majorcan singer-songwriter Maria del Mar Bonet with a stirring melancholy. The folk songs and Duato's dance capture the story of the people who till the soil, burdened by drought, yet enduring difficult lives with spirit, love and forbearance. It's in this kind of choreography, with its solos, duets and choral



sections, where, as I've seen on other companies, dancers' technical expertise, musicality, sensuality and magnetic energy can blossom.

The six Hubbard Street dancers were capable interpreters, but never quite ignited with the expansive and explosive nuance of Duato's genius. More specifically, the challenge in this expressive dance, set in an enclosure of vertical sticks (Duato also created the set and costumes), is to embody the weight of the piece, that pull to the earth, while still maintaining the fluid quality of the composition. *Jardí Tanca's* choreography demands pushing an extension through flexed feet to an nth degree, and working the percussive punctuation, with crooked arms and sudden starts and stops, to counterpoint the roundness and the glorious lifts.

In *Cloudline* (2017), Mineko Williams featured seven dancers, dressed in street clothes (designed by Branimira Ivanova), in a seemingly unconnected series of vignettes highlighting walking, a circle run, some lovely adagio lifts and an energetic solo by Elliot Hammans. The piece makes use of a musical montage, including Jherek Bischoff, Sufjan Stevens, and Julie London singing Arthur Kent and Sylvia Dee's old country-pop song, *The End of the World*, to create different levels of feeling and emotion. The eye-catching highlight of *Cloudline* was the impressive use of billowing lengths of silk, manipulated by the cast.

Cerrudo's work has received accolades for its dynamism, fluidity and sensuality. Saint-Sauveur audiences saw a one-two

punch of a pair of his short works, presented one after the other.

His well-packaged *Pacopepluto* (2011), set to three popular Dean Martin crooner hits, sees three men (Hammans, David Schultz and Michael Gross) suggestively clothed in stylized flesh-coloured dance belts (by Rebecca M. Shouse). Designed as a fun romp in essentially three solos, the piece shows off the guys' physicality and has them busting out in a series of leaps, runs and jumps. Cerrudo stirs the mix with a mounting dose of coy burlesque bump and grind. He stays away from being too musical, but gets the rhythm of songs, and knows how to pepper his moves in synch with the lyrics ("How I like to hear the organ," was a key ba-dum line). Not surprisingly, the audience went wild.

The evening's closer, Cerrudo's *Lickety-Split* (2006), was

developed at one of Hubbard Street's choreographic workshops. It perfectly embraces the warm human qualities of the company's appealing dancers and imparts their love of dance.

Performed to the melancholic and poetic music of folk singer-songwriter Devendra Banhart, and created for three couples, Cerrudo is working with the catalytic potentialities of unrushed partnering, with one dancer "listening" to the other, exploring the sensual, fluid movement that's begun in a kind of organic mimetic connection. The choreographer builds on movement equally steeped in quiet, playful flirtatiousness and the tug between sensual and sometimes shy engagement, tapping into the dancers' individual strengths, camaraderie and dynamism.

— PHILIP SZPORER

Gauthier Dance

Goecke, Brunelle, Waldmann, Gauthier
and Foniadakis / Mixed Bill

Grandes Dames, an inventive program presented by Gauthier Dance, offered an evening of celebration last July at Theatrehaus Stuttgart. The two premieres by women, and two works created by men in homage to female icons of dance, were electric in their passionate energy. Politically charged, sometimes frightening, these dances say things about the frustrating society we live in, suggesting the way controls impact on our lives.

Pina Bausch, whose Tanztheater Wuppertal once startled and threatened audiences, is one of the iconic women celebrated in this program. She wasn't always so popular; watching a Bausch program at the old Ryerson Theatre in Toronto 30 years ago, I was aware of audience members leaving in waves. At the end, two of us remained in the theatre. Fast forward to 10 years ago in London, at the iconic Sadler's Wells, where I stood with a full house that screamed the place down, watching the same once revolutionary notions of dance.

Marco Goecke's *Infant Spirit*, featuring the fevered, twitchy footwork of dancer Rosario Guerra, celebrated Bausch's passion in an homage to her muscular movement inventions and her creative spirit.

Both Goecke and Bausch grew up in Wuppertal, Germany, and in many ways, Bausch gave Goecke inspiration for his own inventive dance vocabulary.

The beating hands, the shaking legs, the whiplash turns and flailing motions in most of his work suggest dark frustrations. Also, as in many Goecke works, this solo might well be danced by a woman instead of a man. Born from Bausch, it is dark and insistent, not dependent on gender, just powerful muscular dance, fashioned for a dancer of great power and passion.

French-Canadian choreographer Virginie Brunelle's style took us in another direction, suggesting vulnerability and the need to love and be loved. *Beating*, a work for eight dancers, was filled with deliberately repetitive movement: bodies hurtled together, stretched apart, flew into space, then returned to terra firma, spent and still.

Powerful dancer Theophilus Vesely became a central metaphor for a shy lover. When he connected with Barbara Melo Friere, they danced a stunning duet of soaring lifts and sudden falls to the ground, suggesting the way the human heart can beat faster and faster through passion, then suddenly rest.

Based on the rhythms of the heart, the movement in *Beating* was sometimes wild, sometimes gentle. Danced to rhapsodic music that included Franz Liszt and Henryk Górecki, this work suggested a moving, sometimes erotic image of desire.

We Love Horses proved to be a disturbing work by Helena Waldmann, a German freelance choreographer and



stage director whose political dances are developed and toured globally. In *We Love Horses*, a powerful woman (Anneleen Dedrog) wearing stilt-like boots and clad in black leather, cracked a whip over the bottoms of terrified horses, played by five dancers wearing false rumps. Made to dance, to stretch, to reach on teetering hoofs, they were degraded as they danced for their vicious dominatrix.

Waldmann suggests in her program note that she's commenting on the way freedom is eroded by governments imposing controls on citizens. Perhaps so, but you can make from this piece a more literal observation. I will never watch performing animals again without thinking of Waldmann's terrifying look at the kind of cruelty

that forces them to dance.

Finally, to end the two-hour evening, came *Electric Life*, a piece about emancipation that was co-choreographed by Eric Gauthier, the artistic director of Gauthier Dance, and Andonis Foniadakis. Aggressive and in your face, it was designed in homage to Louise Lecavalier, once the platinum blonde Amazon queen in Édouard Lock's La La La Human Steps company, and now the head of her own Montreal-based Fou Glorieux.

Eleven dancers invaded the frenzy of the too-loud music, by David Bowie, who Lecavalier backed up as a dancer on some of his concert tours. The dancers brandished LED tubes that helped define a performance space and send disturbing flashes of light

Gauthier Dance's Nora Brown and Anna Süheyla Harms in Eric Gauthier and Andonis Foniadakis' *Electric Life*
Photo: Regina Brocke

Batsheva — The Young Ensemble

Ohad Naharin / *Naharin's Virus*



In 2002, Batsheva Dance Company brought *Naharin's Virus* to New York. Last July, the dancers of Batsheva's Young Ensemble — every bit as gutsy and virtuosic as their main company counterparts — reprised it at the Joyce Theater. The choreography by artistic director Ohad Naharin is timeless, but the accompanying verbal diatribe, taken from a 1966 anti-theatrical manifesto by Austrian enfant terrible Peter Handke and woven throughout the hour-long dance, has not aged well.

Offending the Audience is the English title of Handke's play. In *Virus*, his words are delivered by a male dancer standing at a microphone on a platform high above the stage. He opened with a litany of things that the evening would not be ("You will see no spectacle," "Your curiosity will not be satisfied," and so on) and ended with a stream of insults aimed at the audience, whom he denounced as chicken shits, traitors to your country, defeatists, catatonics, abortionists, educated gas bags, congressmen, tax evaders, pussy grabbers, architects of the future and much, much more. Some of these labels sounded suspiciously current, but they failed to provoke an audience long hardened by the rants of politicians who would rather mud-wrestle on Twitter than tend to the business of running a country.

The speaker appeared in a

business suit and tie, which turned out to be stiffened by a concealed frame from which he would periodically slip out to join the ensemble onstage, leaving the costume to stand on its own. Perhaps the empty, petrified suit looming above the dancers was meant to signify the inhuman forces of capitalism.

In contrast, the ensemble was outfitted in possibly the drabest costume ever created for the stage. This consisted of a camel-coloured shorty unitard, with sleeves that encased the dancers' hands like gloves, and baggy black wool tights. From mid-thigh, the dancers' legs seemed to disappear against the slate black walls of the set — the effect was that of creatures with long, undulating torsos and arms, bobbing around in a dark sea.

In this sackcloth, the Young Ensemble looked nothing less than radiant. Naharin has always celebrated the diverse gifts of his dancers, and their individuality shone in his nervy, often explosive, yet strangely tender movement vocabulary.

The early movement was executed in a slow motion that together with an eerie soundscape called to mind the hypnotic space-walking scenes from *2001: A Space Odyssey*. A woman drew a chalk line along the slate wall, tracing the outline of her head and arms as she serpentine languorously. A man approached and seemed to

spark an erotic interest — but what she really wanted was to manoeuvre him against the wall so she could trace his body lines, too. The gentle wit of this interaction could not mask a sense of unease: were these dancers intent on leaving a two-dimensional trace of their existence in case they suddenly perished?

All the dancers eventually took turns drawing and scribbling on the wall in a frenzy. Against a backdrop of squiggles, they inscribed the word PLASTELINA in giant lettering — perhaps a deliberate mangling of the word Palestine.

Naharin has made known his sympathy for Palestinian causes — even as the Tel Aviv-based company itself has come under fire from anti-Israel organizations for accepting funding from the Israeli government and for touring the world as official cultural ambassadors. But if there's a political intention underlying *Virus*, it feels secondary to the exploration of otherness in a monolithic society.

Written fragments visible amid the graffiti included "Arabic is legitimate," "Fix me" and other intriguing messages in various languages. Coupled with the dancers' voices — sometimes heard on tape in poignant or chilling musings, sometimes live in aggressive, warlike chants — these morsels of language collectively packed a far greater punch than Handke's tedious verbal hammering.

A highlight was the stark, dispassionate female solo that accompanied a troubling recorded confession, which opened with "My mother she wanted a boy"; this was underscored by Samuel Barber's pensive *Adagio for*

into the audience. As the music became wilder and wilder, so did the choreography. Pulsating strobe lights added even more dislocating distractions that disturbed equilibrium. Dancer Anna Süheyla Harms stood out, suggesting Lecavalier's erotic presence as she whipped her long blonde hair in wild passion, building the dance to a strong conclusion.

All power to Gauthier Dance for presenting this mixed bill that recognizes such inspiring titans of dance as Bausch and Lecavalier. Add Waldmann, a strong political voice, and Brunelle, who is making waves in Quebec, and you have quite the program. *Grandes Dames*, indeed.

— GARY SMITH

Strings and the faint but insistent rhythm made by another dancer jabbing the wall with chalk.

When they tired of scribbling, the dancers took running leaps in an attempt to scale the wall, but only succeeded in dangling off the edge. Gathered in a chorus line, they stomped and shook their fists in a pounding unison, then froze as one after another broke into a frenzied convulsion. The intensity of the movement verged on flagellation, the dancers kicking up chalk dust.

Habib Alla Jamal's bracing arrangements of Arab folk music provided more welcome respite from Handke,

as the dancers barrelled in and out of momentary encounters, both comic and disquieting. Their faces remained largely impassive yet through their movement we sensed exhilaration, angst, exhaustion.

In the end, the agitations subsided, and the dancers swiveled sedately in echoes of folk dance, their streaks of individuality stifled. It was an anti-theatrical moment — as if Naharin, channelling Handke, had robbed us of a denouement. But the audience was wise to Handke's game and showered the performers with proper theatrical acclamation.

— CARLA ESCODA

Cinema Series

The Royal Ballet in Liam Scarlett's *Swan Lake*

Live streams of stage performances to movie screens are offered today by several leading dance companies. For the uninitiated, these events offer, in essence, a front-row seat to experience companies, dancers and works you may never have the opportunity to see in the flesh.

For us here on Canada's west coast, they are technically not live, but tape-delayed or even shown some days or weeks after the actual performance. However, they somehow retain their "live" aura and you can almost believe you are really at the show. Instead of program notes, during intermission there are rehearsal clips and backstage interviews with choreographers, dancers and other collaborators.

The Royal Ballet regularly streams performances to movie theatres across the U.K. and around the world, and, in August, Canadians had the chance to see *Swan Lake*. Not just any *Swan Lake*, but the premiere of Liam Scarlett's new production, which was greeted with tremendous critical and audience acclaim when it opened in May.

This is the company's first new *Swan Lake* since Anthony Dowell's production in 1987, so the stakes for Scarlett — still only in his early 30s — could hardly have been higher.

In an on-screen interview, he expresses the desire to create "a *Swan Lake* for a new generation" — something big and opulent, and distinctively

Royal Ballet. He has taken a deeply respectful approach, basing his production on the 1895 Petipa/Ivanov version that many are familiar with. Leaving iconic sections such as Act II largely alone, he has smoothly blended in his own choreography to create a seamless whole.

Scarlett's partnership with his longtime collaborator, veteran designer and artist John Macfarlane, is central to the production's success. The sets and costumes are simply magnificent, rooted in the story's arc and Tchaikovsky's peerless score, and are integral to the ballet's impact.

The action takes place in a small monarchical state in the 1890s. Act I shows a sweeping park vista outside the castle gates, which transforms magically into the moonlit lake. After three decades in Yolanda Sonnabend's calf-length skirts, the swans are back in exquisitely beautiful short tutus by Macfarlane. The Act III ballroom is dazzlingly impressive, a masterpiece of scale and grandeur complete with sweeping stairs, drapes and chandeliers. Macfarlane achieves another stunning coup de théâtre when Siegfried's betrayal is revealed as black swans swarm onto the stage.

There are new dramatic elements that create additional depth. A prologue shows von Rothbart seizing the crown Odette is wearing before turning her into a swan. In the very next scene,



Batsheva — The Young Ensemble in Ohad Naharin's *Naharin's Virus*
Photo: Ascaf



The Royal Ballet's Vadim Muntagirov (Prince Siegfried) and Marianela Nuñez (Odile) in Liam Scarlett's *Swan Lake*
Photo: Bill Cooper

he reappears as the Queen's advisor, a sinister Rasputin-esque figure who perhaps now has designs on another crown, providing an interesting dynamic and context for his machinations with Odile. Benno has a larger role, and his partners in the Act I pas de trois are Siegfried's sisters. The Act III princesses are ambitious and determined to snare an advantageous match — there's no coy fluttering of fans here.

The only part that did not entirely ring true was the ending. After a glorious Act IV, Siegfried retrieves Odette's lifeless body — now transformed back into a young woman — out of the lake, while Odette's swan spirit appears at the back of the stage. There is a logic to

Siegfried's survival — it's the ultimate foiling of von Rothbart's plan — but the action lacked the subtlety of the rest of the ballet. I have always felt the music drives toward the death and final union of the lovers, and the feminist in me cannot help grumbling when it is the heroine, again, who pays the price while the hero lives to fight another day.

As the leads, Marianela Nuñez and Vadim Muntagirov were sublime. Her Odette was an old soul, more world-weary and wary than his young, decent and slightly naive prince. Nuñez's Odile was impossibly glamorous, seductive and so delicately nuanced that we believe Siegfried really was fooled. The pas de trois

was splendidly danced by principals Alexander Campbell, Francesca Hayward and Akane Takada; Takada's jump was a wonder to behold. The corps de ballet was on fabulous form, moving and breathing as one.

The camerawork was also outstanding, panning out for ensembles and focusing in on solos and pas de deux at exactly the right moments. Overhead shots of the swans highlighted the intricate floor patterns of the choreography. The degree of closeup possible on film

shared the detailed acting of the dancers: every swan feeling the anguish of their queen or the catty eye-rolling of the princesses as they were upstaged by the flashy interloper Odile.

The two intermissions included illuminating interviews with Scarlett, Macfarlane (rather endearingly shown wielding a paintbrush backstage to make some last-minute adjustments) and the dancers, making this a satisfying and inspiring experience.

— HEATHER BRAY

UPCOMING CINEMA BROADCASTS: BOLSHOI BALLET

Don Quixote, December 2, 8; *The Nutcracker*, December 23, 24; *La Bayadère*, January 20; *Sleeping Beauty*, March 10, 16; *The Golden Age*, April 7; *Carmen Suite* and *Petrushka*, May 19. Check your local listings.

Wolf Howling at the Moon



Photo: Nakkita Trimble, courtesy of Bill Reid Gallery

GALLERY SPACE

Curtis Watts, pictured here, is one of the leaders of the Gitmaxmak'ay Prince Rupert Nisga'a Dance group. When we perform, we wear our best regalia. The concept of ts'iksna'aks (tattoos) as a form of permanent regalia is reawakening in our nation. Curtis has said that he will no longer wear his leggings in performance, as his ts'iksna'aks, which I created using a traditional hand-poked process, have now become his permanent leggings. Curtis has matching designs facing inward on each shin, one of which is visible here as he takes the final pose from the end of a dance in which he embodies a wolf howling at the moon.

— NAKKITA TRIMBLE, NISGA'A NATION

Nakkita Trimble is a Nisga'a tattoo artist and dancer, based in Prince Rupert, B.C., who is passionate about reawakening her nation's traditional tattooing art form. This practice was used to uphold beliefs, stories, laws and protocol, tying individuals to the feast hall, their chiefs, their communities, their land, stories and songs. www.nakkitatrimble.com

This photo is featured in the Bill Reid Gallery of Northwest Coast Art's exhibition, *Body Language: Reawakening Cultural Tattooing of the Northwest*, in Vancouver until January 2019.

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