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International neighbourliness appears to be in short supply politically these days, which is impacting artists who want to cross borders to perform. Rather than fluid places of creative and economic exchange, borders are increasingly unfriendly barriers. A few recent examples involve dance artists.

In May, the San Francisco International Arts Festival reported that two performing groups programmed to appear at the festival were, at the last moment, denied work visas to enter the United States. One of those was Compagnie Virginie Brunelle, a Montreal dance company booked to make its U.S. premiere. A festival press release calls the visa refusals part of “an industry-wide crisis.”

In June, Toronto’s Contact Dance International Film Festival set up crowd funding to hire a lawyer when Guru Suraj Kumar, a dance artist from Chennai, was denied a visa to enter Canada. Kumar had been invited to teach and to receive a Silver Award for one of his films on the festival’s lineup. Finally, on his third application — supported by immigration lawyers, the festival and many others — Kumar received his Canadian visa.

Kaitlin McCarthy, in her Seattle report, describes another visa refusal, this time involving a dancer scheduled to perform as part of On the Boards performance season. In a press release, On the Boards cautiously states they chose not to disclose the artist’s name “to save him future travel complications.”

Canada’s *Dance International* prides itself on its support for dance around the world. Of course, we have close ties with local and national artists and companies, but positioning them within a worldview adds context to their work and depth to our lineup. And a reality check: most of us engage more broadly with art and ideas than would be possible if we followed strictly nationalist agendas.

I welcome you once more to enjoy our coverage of dance without borders. There is so much good work out there that deserves notice, and we’re pleased to feature some of it in these pages. I wouldn’t dream of hunkering down behind a wall, and believe that you wouldn’t either. *DI*

KAIIJA PEPPER
editor@danceinternational.org

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Taylor Dilley and Alexandre Hamel in Le Patin Libre's *Threshold*
Photo: Olivier Brajon

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Photo: Karolina Kuras

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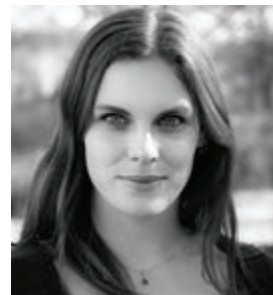
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Rebels on

An insider's view of Le Patin Libre
and its new ensemble

BY JENN EDWARDS



Jenn Edwards
Photo: Osama Rasheed



Le Patin Libre's Samory Ba, Alexandre Hamel, Taylor Dilley, Jasmin Boivin and Pascale Jodoin in *Threshold*
Photo: Romain Guilbault

Ice

When I left competitive figure skating at age 18, I thought I was done with the ice. I wasn't interested in being a coach or in dressing up as a Disney character on skates. In my mind, it was all or nothing — land all my triple jumps and become an international competitor, or do something else. Sadly, in the fiercely competitive culture of figure skating, most young athletes are conditioned to think this way. So I went to university and turned my focus to contemporary dance, putting a decade of intense training behind me, feeling rather guilty for my parents' huge financial investment into my skating.

More than 10 years later, when I learned about contemporary skating company Le Patin Libre, I knew immediately that I wanted to be a part of it. As luck would have it, when the troupe came to Vancouver in 2017 to present *Vertical Influences*, they were also quietly auditioning skaters for a new ensemble show.

Le Patin Libre was formed in 2005 by artistic director Alexandre Hamel. He and a group of high-level ex-figure skaters spent a few years performing on outdoor rinks, ponds and rivers, slowly evolving away from the pastiche-heavy approach to performance on which much figure skating operates. They also started organizing and performing at more rebellious skating nights, complete with fire dancing, DJs and booze. By 2009, they began touring throughout the United Kingdom and France, self-producing shows and often using platforms like the Edinburgh Festival Fringe to show their work. By 2011, their current lineup had assembled: Hamel, Pascale Jodoin, Taylor Dilley, Jasmin Boivin and Samory Ba.

These five skating artists became a unit, living a nomadic lifestyle, travelling from residency to residency, and dividing up administrative tasks to produce shows independently. Then, in 2014, their show *Vertical Influences*, commissioned



by Dance Umbrella, premiered in London. The stripped-down double bill (the first part is titled *Influences*; the second, *Vertical*) received a five-star review from the *Guardian*, marking their arrival on the performing-arts world stage. Since then it has been presented more than 130 times.

For their follow-up show, they collaborated with dramaturge Ruth Little to further refine their approach to performance, resulting in an elegant, cohesive and moving piece called *Threshold*. Lyndsey Winship captures its intrigue in her *Guardian* review: “Their feet trace intricate patterns on the ice, but often it’s the simplest moments that are the most arresting, as the five skaters very beautifully just slide backwards and forwards, hypnotic as a swinging pocket watch.”

Le Patin Libre is involved in a kind of movement exploration that hasn’t been done before. They invite audiences down to ice level, to see the act of skating with fresh eyes and rediscover the wonder of flying through space with little to no friction under one’s feet. They’re not interested in putting contemporary dance on ice, but in doing with skating what 20th-century modern art movements have done with other mediums, from dance to painting to sculpture. They are stripping away story and representation to leave the medium itself on full display. And when you get right down to it, the only special thing about skating is its potential for locomotion through space (“déplacement” is the apt word in French) without movement in the body. In other words, for glide.

The ability to glide makes so many poetic instances in performance possible. The absence of physical friction also removes friction from the minds of audience members. It removes a barrier to meaning. The images are pure.

For instance, in *Threshold* there is an abstracted moment of trauma, made visible with a sudden shift in light and sound. The five skaters react in five different ways, but all are suspended in time, spinning effortlessly down on the ice on one hip or gliding slowly on two feet, evoking an awestruck, cataleptic physical state.

The setting adds another layer of magic; sitting on carpets directly on the ice, audiences can feel the vast depth of an arena, highlighting the speed, the sound and the stakes of the action in front of them.

After holding auditions in Amsterdam, Paris, Vancouver and Massachusetts in 2016 and 2017, Le Patin Libre gathered its new ensemble, which presently numbers 15, including myself, for the first time in Montreal last April. When they were in residence at St. Louis Arena to premiere *Threshold*, they had us join them, using the time in between shows and workshops with the public to try out choreographic ideas.

In March 2019, we reassembled for another residency, hosted by the city of Baie-Saint-Paul, Quebec. We stayed at Maison Mère — a converted convent that has short-term residences, a co-working space for artists and other freelance workers, a café and conference rooms — and rehearsed at a municipal rink around the corner.

While in Baie-Saint-Paul, I asked Hamel what the company had looked for when auditioning new skaters. “First, skating virtuosity — people who have extreme ease with any style of skating,” he said. “And, then, intelligence. We wanted people who seem clever and creative, because lots of the show is not authoritarian. It’s not a choreographer saying exactly what must be done. Each individual has to figure out what they have to do within a frame.”

The ability to glide makes so many poetic instances in performance possible.

When asked if it was intentional for the cast to be from all over the world, he replied, “You guys are rare. People who have this figure skating virtuosity tend to organize their lives in a way that is not compatible with world touring and investment in creation projects. Luckily, we tour a lot and were able to audition everywhere.”

The new cast hails from both ends of Canada, and from the United States, Czech Republic, Sweden, the U.K., Poland, France and Belgium. Some of us competed as figure skaters and then became contemporary dancers. There are four freestylers, who perform breakdance-like moves on hockey skates, having taught themselves to skate during public sessions in Europe. Between us we have studied literature, law, business, physics, chemistry, languages and art history. Some are also figure skating coaches, choreographers, performers in traditional ice shows, and instructors of dance, yoga and even downhill skiing in the Pyrenees. Despite differences in origin and language, we feel a strong connection as a group because our lives are organized around values we all share: movement, freedom and creativity.

Speaking on the importance of embarking upon a large-scale work, Hamel explains, “Having a larger group dissolves the differences between each person. When you are just five, the audience still sees individuals. The more people you have, the easier it becomes to see the group as one thing moving through space.”

The new show will explore flocking, as with the way birds and fish congregate and move together. “Humans on a small scale are incapable of doing that, because their movement in space is incremental, one step after the other,” says Hamel. While humans can achieve the illusion of flocking in massive events like Olympic opening ceremonies or North Korean military displays, the contexts of these performances tend to be at odds with the art world. “But us, we can do it because our *déplacement* is not incremental, so the flocking actually works at a smaller scale. It’s a unique contribution, and I feel it’s our job to dig deeper there.”

The show will include a substantial amount of improvisation within a framework. During our second residency, we spent hours upon hours flocking and jamming together, implementing structures and then deconstructing them, adding on rules and then taking them away. After

rehearsals, we would discuss the fine line we were discovering; if you add too much structure you kill the energy of a jam, but once you remove the rules, the jam has become richer for the experience of limitations. It’s really about putting in hours on the ice together, getting to know each other’s patterns, in a wide variety of movement scenarios, on a deep subconscious level so we don’t collide. Or when we inevitably do collide, how do we work with that, and turn the connection into something that can live inside of the dance? Ultimately we are striving for the level of connection that exists between the core five skaters, but on a greater scale and in a much shorter timeframe.

Hamel, along with Jodoin and Ba who are also choreographers on the project, is not interested in choreographing perfection, in knowing what every single moment of the show will be. Instead, he is prioritizing a collective complexity of movement that cannot be replicated in exactly the same way for every performance. The choreography builds movement in the same way a flock of birds does, operating on a set of principles that are understood by each individual to create movement on a larger scale.

Because of the desired complexity, the choreographic information needed is huge. Hamel explains, “There is much less choreographic information in a parade of 10,000 soldiers, because the goal is a square, geometric formation. A parade needs only one brain,” he says, “whereas our work, to function properly, needs those 15 brains.”

They are also interested in bringing in external collaborators for this new work, although no decisions on this front have been finalized yet. “Our most successful projects have been the ones where we had an external eye helping to organize the experience for the spectators,” says Hamel. While the majority of choreographic authorship will lie with Hamel, Jodoin and Ba, they are open to bringing in contemporary and urban dance artists, dramaturges or directors to help craft the arc of the new show.

With two research residencies complete, and substantial funding secured from Ottawa’s National Arts Centre, *Le Patin Libre* is on track to premiere the new work, with a cast of 15 skaters, in 2020. The core five continue to tour both *Threshold* and *Vertical Influences*, while the rest of us have re-entered our own lives for now, eagerly awaiting our next chance to skate together. ^{vi}

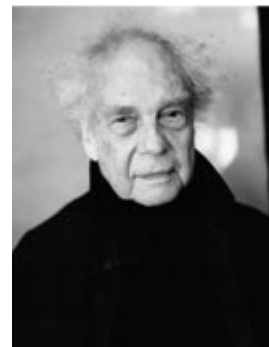
Night of 100 Solos

Celebrating the spirit of Merce Cunningham





by Gerard Davis



Merce Cunningham
Photo: Mark Seliger

Merce Cunningham was born in 1919, in the small U.S. city of Centralia, Washington. One hundred years later, his influence is such that centenary celebrations were marked around the world, none bigger and more complex than the trio of *Night of 100 Solos* shows held in London, New York and Los Angeles on April 16, 2019, on what would have been Cunningham's 100th birthday.

Organized by the Merce Cunningham Trust, the idea was that each of the three venues would, in turn, present 100 of his solos (extracted from many works; 54 in London's case) in 90 minutes in front of a paying audience while also being streamed live. The commemorations were appropriately ambitious for a man whose career defined him as one of the great, and most controversial, figures of 20th-century dance.

Cunningham initially made his mark as a soloist with the Martha Graham Dance Company, but it was after he founded his own group in 1953 that he began the body of work for which he is best remembered. Along with his life partner, the radical composer John Cage, he brought the avant-garde into dance (collaborating with artists including Robert Rauschenberg, Jasper Johns and Andy Warhol and, in later years, with musicians such as Radiohead) and introduced revolutionary practices such as combining

choreography and music independently of, and without relation to, each other.

He also famously pioneered the idea of chance operations, in which he let dice determine choreographic elements such as rhythm, timing and number of dancers. His work isn't always easy to watch — it's invariably even more difficult to listen to — and even today prompts walkouts from unprepared audience members, but it's meticulous in its construction and technical requirements.

He died in 2009, having left instructions for his company to disband in 2011 at the end of a two-year tour. His legacy was left in the hands of the trust he set up in 2000 to safeguard his work for future generations; in all, he created 180 dances and over 700 events (performances that took place in locations beyond the theatre, such as museums, art galleries and even a beach). By putting existing pieces of dance into a new context — as Cunningham

Jonathan Goddard and Daniel Squire in rehearsal for
Merce Cunningham Trust's *Night of 100 Solos*
Photo: Stephen Wright

himself did — *Night of 100 Solos* deliberately put itself in the category of an event, thereby honouring his output and simultaneously pushing it forward.

Daniel Squire, a British ex-Cunningham dancer who stages Cunningham's works around the world, was in charge of the show's London leg. A few weeks before the one-night only event at the Barbican Centre — a venue where Cunningham's company had performed regularly — I met up with him in a small Italian café in London's upmarket High Street Kensington district. Softly spoken and looking surprisingly relaxed considering the immediacy of his deadline, he told me how he'd studied at the Royal Ballet and Rambert schools before landing his first professional job with the Michael Clark Company, known for its punk-inspired aesthetic.

After Clark's company folded, witnessing a performance of the Merce Cunningham Dance Company at Sadler's Wells completely changed the then 20-year-old's life. "One of the things that struck me about the dancers," he says, "is that I could see they had a very clear idea about what they were attempting, but they were quite open as to how

their own in the original work, it could just be someone engaged in an activity no one else was involved with."

Twenty-five dancers of all ages from British and European companies such as the Royal Ballet, Rambert, Ballet de Lorraine and Candoco Dance Company were chosen for the London performance. "We had to pick dancers willing to accept their dancing might look ugly," Squire laughs. Many of them had never performed Cunningham before so to help acquaint them, Squire re-created something of the atmosphere he'd experienced when he first went to New York.

"Merce, or whoever was teaching the class, would never spoon feed people — you'd learn just as much from watching the more experienced dancers problem-solving around you. For *100 Solos*, we held a two-week residency at Studio Wayne McGregor, which is where the dancers learned most of their solos. But rather than learning in a pristine one-on-one environment, we'd have four or five solos all being taught at once in the same studio, which meant there was a cacophony of other rhythms and instructions going on. Hopefully, that will feed the atmosphere onstage because

Along with his life partner, the radical composer John Cage, Merce Cunningham brought the avant-garde into dance.

successful that might be. At times it was exquisitely pretty and at times it was very messy, and the shifts between one and the other were unpredictable. That fascinated me."

Squire took a chance and flew to New York to take classes at the Cunningham Studio. He was soon offered a job as an understudy and, two years later, made it into the main company where he remained for 11 years, until shortly before Cunningham's death.

"Working with the company was all about prioritizing and self-reliance," he says. "Merce was the same; if he was feeling grouchy, if he'd had a health scare or even when John Cage died, he'd still come in and work. That sort of attitude and resilience didn't just change my dancing, it altered my entire outlook on life."

To get *Night of 100 Solos* underway, a team from all three venues, including Patricia Lent and Jean Freebury (New York stagers) and Andrea Weber and Dylan Crossman (L.A.), determined what constituted a solo in this context. "We were each familiar with rep from different eras so we made suggestions and pulled solos from that list," Squire reveals. "It didn't have to be a solo where someone was on

they'll have to be completely alert to their surroundings when an unexpected dancer comes flying past them!"

Richard Hamilton's 2005 *Shadows cast by readymades* video projection was ready to go, while the music, by Christian Wolff, was being composed entirely separately to the choreography. At the time of the interview, with only two solos left to teach with his associate stagers, ex-Cunningham dancers Ashley Chen and Cheryl Therrien, the practicalities of fitting 100 solos into 90 minutes was taking up most of Squire's attention. "We've created a timeline and used some chance procedures — with certain practical restraints — to determine which solo is danced by which dancer and when. For the performance, we'll have cues from video clocks in the wings, cues from what's happening onstage and then there'll be certain times to reset, so the next dancer will go on no matter what. I have a lot of figuring out to do ahead of the first rehearsal, so we may get there and find mayhem ensues."

In the end, all his hard work paid off and the London section of *Night of 100 Solos* passed off smoothly and to critical acclaim. The *Guardian's* Lyndsey Winship called



Asha Thomas in Merce Cunningham Trust's *Night of 100 Solos*

All photos: Stephen Wright



Top: Luke Ahmet in Merce Cunningham Trust's *Night of 100 Solos*



Bottom: Catherine LeGrand and Beatriz Stix-Brunell in Merce Cunningham Trust's *Night of 100 Solos*

it “a Cunningham experience through and through,” and Debra Craine, writing in the *Times*, felt that the rarity of seeing Cunningham staged nowadays was part of what made the “one-off special event so, well, special.” Inevitably, the solos overlapped each other, thereby forming a collage: not a new work, obviously, but an effective re-contextualizing of existing dance that harnessed many of Cunningham’s creative processes in its assemblage.

“Well done to Daniel for sorting it all out,” says Scottish Ballet’s Sophie Martin, one of the dancers, when I speak to her on the phone a week after the performance. “We didn’t rehearse as a group until two days before the show, but he came in with everyone’s name on a list stating when and where they should come in and it basically worked. Sometimes you had to change your spacing a little to avoid other dancers, but overall he visualized it brilliantly.”

French-born Martin studied at the Paris Conservatoire and although she once took Cunningham technique class twice a week for a year, that was two decades ago and, like many others in the show, she’d never performed Cunningham onstage before.

“At first, I was worried it was going to be too hard for me but being around different people, not just onstage but also seeing how they rehearsed and how they dealt with the technique, was really nice. The relationship with the music was something I’d never really experienced before — we didn’t rehearse our solos with music and even in the dress rehearsals the music was different each time.”

When I asked Martin what she most valued about the whole process, her answer succinctly sums up the risky and ambitious project and many of the ideals of Cunningham himself. “I learned that sometimes it’s OK not to succeed,” she says. “It was very important for the Cunningham people that the integrity of the movement was there, but if it didn’t work, that was fine. *Night of 100 Solos* was more about the journey than the final product.” ⁰¹

Researching the design elements of Merce Cunningham's dances

by Robert Greskovic

To help kick off the centenary of Merce Cunningham's birth, the Jerome Robbins Dance Division at the New York Public Library for the Performing Arts held a symposium featuring presentations on the art and life of Merce Cunningham by its 2018 dance research fellows

I was fortunate to be one of those fellows, in a group that included culture historian Claire Bishop, costume designers Harriet Jung and Reid Bartelme, and dancer/choreographers Preeti Vasudevan and Netta Yerushalmy. My focus was the visual design elements of Cunningham's dances, in a presentation titled *The Dancers and Their Stage Stripped Bare, More or Less, for the Dances of Merce Cunningham* (a play on conceptual artist Marcel Duchamp's *The Bride Stripped Bare by Her Bachelors, Even*).

My study riffed on the facts that Cunningham's taste aimed at stage pictures that showed his dancers costumed for maximum visibility in a space that had minimal reduction of its performing area.

I focused on design for two reasons. First, the movement aspects of Cunningham's work are already, quite naturally, much attended to, while the visual art aspects — costuming, lighting and, at times, décor — are less addressed. The other reason was my own visual arts background, which had led me to dance in the first place. Starting with my first view of Cunningham's work in 1970, through four decades of watching his dances, it was often the visual art surroundings that helped set each work in my memory.

Of Cunningham's 180 works, my research focused on 76 of them, ranging from 1942's *Credo in Us*, with costumes by Charlotte Trowbridge, a one-time dancer and artist favoured at the time by Martha Graham, to 2009's *Nearly Ninety*. The latter had an elaborate setting by Benedetta Tagliabue, illuminated with colour and video by Franc Aleu and lighting by Brian MacDevitt, with costume designs by Romeo Gigli that involved detail changes as the dance progressed.



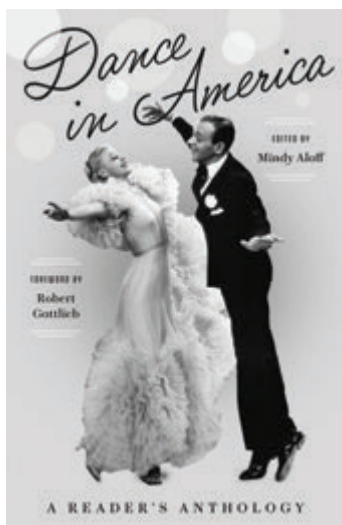
Credo in Us was a somewhat humble work, co-created with Jean Erdman, Cunningham's dance partner for the performances. Drawings and photos show it to be in the vein of the modern dance of its era, with Cunningham in shirt and pants, and Erdman in long, full skirt.

Nearly Ninety was a grand capstone creation — Cunningham's last work — that involved 13 of the company's dancers without the performing presence of the maestro himself. The action for its unitard-costumed cast played out on and around Tagliabue's freestanding metallic structure that stood 22 feet high. Some Cunningham watchers, nostalgic perhaps for the simpler times of the dancemaker's formative years, found *Nearly Ninety* something of a Tower of Babel; I was not among them. What fascinated me was Cunningham's abiding interest in experiment, in this instance, the fact that his choreography would be performed on the stage as well as on different levels of the towering set.

The prominence of visual design elements prompted a renewed perspective on the connections sometimes made between Cunningham's later 20th-century repertoire and that of Serge Diaghilev's Ballets Russes, which thrived in the early 20th century. In Diaghilev's realm, designers and librettists led the way that choreographers were meant to follow, and he put the names of choreographers last in line when crediting the ballets.

Cunningham noted the designers last. Their efforts took a back seat in the big picture of his dance theatre. In the case of *Nearly Ninety*, Cunningham found a way to show a dance made without his prior familiarity with the independently designed set, and to let the end result play out at the premiere to the surprise of all, the choreographer himself included. ^{DI}

Quotable



Excerpt from
 DANCE IN AMERICA: A READER'S ANTHOLOGY
 Edited by Mindy Aloff
 Foreword by Robert Gottlieb
 Library of America
 www.loa.org

From *Tribute to Balanchine*, 1998
 by Mikhail Baryshnikov

“Balanchine always talked about his ballets as if they were something only for the moment, for *now* — his familiar word. He never built a shrine to his work, or even to the profession of choreography. I remember when I was a dancer at New York City Ballet, he asked me several times if I wanted to choreograph. No, I told him, I was there to work on his ballets, not to make ballets of my own. “Dear,” he said, “it’s not so hard. Simpler than you think. Nothing much, really. Just go and do, and don’t think so much about it.” That’s easy for you to say, I thought. But no, he said, “Just, if you like some piece of music, go and do. Just make something interesting.”

That was his criterion: interesting. He really, seriously, thought of dance as entertainment. In his mind he was the ballet-master-in-chief-of-entertainment. More than anything, he hated whatever was boring ... in music, in dance, and in films, too. He looked for interesting taste in food, interesting smell in perfume, interesting hairdo on a young woman, interesting way to twist the human body. He was a man who was interested, period. That’s the way New York City Ballet was constituted, as he was. His ballets and his dancers were supposed to be interesting, and this was all he cared about. He claimed he had no thought for the future of his ballets. He was fond of the phrase “Après moi, le déluge.””



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Top: Donlon Dance Collective Berlin in Marguerite Donlon's *Strokes Through the Tail*
Photo: Todd Rosenberg, courtesy of Dance Salad Festival

Left: Meritxell Aumedes in Ballett des Saarländisches Staatstheater's production of Marguerite Donlon's *Le Sacre du Printemps*
Photo: Maria-Helena Buckley

Right: Liliana Barros in Ballett des Saarländisches Staatstheater's production of Marguerite Donlon's *Soma*
Photo: Maria-Helena Buckley

IN CONVERSATION

Maggie Foyer talks to Irish-born, German-based choreographer and director Marguerite Donlon

The career of Marguerite Donlon, director of Donlon Dance Collective Berlin and the new ballet director at Theater Hagen in Germany, has been a gallop through unconventional routes. When we recently spoke in Houston, Texas, during Dance Salad Festival, Donlon told me how she had come late to ballet. Yet, at 19, she was able to secure a specially created dancer apprentice position with London's Festival Ballet (the precursor to English National Ballet), where she was given a job as dresser to support herself while she waited for a full-time dance contract.

Donlon, whose rich Irish brogue and quirky expressions could give her a second career as a shanachie, an Irish storyteller, admitted, "It was a tricky situation. I was working with dancers trained at the Royal Ballet School and the Paris Opera. If asked where I'd trained, I'd say 'Halifax, in Yorkshire' (which most of them hadn't heard of), 'and before that, in a cowshed in Ireland,' so it wasn't easy."



Then José Limón's *The Moor's Pavane* was taken into the Festival Ballet repertoire.

"This wonderful woman from the Limón company came to do the casting. Peter Schaufuss was cast as the Moor, Johnny Eliassen was Iago, Lynn Seymour was Emilia and I was Desdemona. This was a scandal because Desdemona should have been one of the ballerinas, and some people still weren't sure if I was a dresser or a dancer."

In 1990, Donlon moved to Berlin, where Schaufuss was now director of Deutsche Oper Berlin. "I came in as a soloist and without the history of being the dresser. That was when I started creating."

Choreography, Donlon says, was something she was always drawn to. "As a girl, I did Irish dancing, but I questioned the straight arms. So I added arms and used different music, starting to make little stories."

At school in Longford, Ireland, at the Convent of Mercy, there were no dance classes, but Donlon gathered some friends and created a dance on an Irish story. "I entered it in a competition, the Slógadh, and made it to the All Ireland finals. One of the posh Dublin schools got first place, but we got second. It was a miracle," she says.

"There wasn't a theatre in Longford then, but culture was very important in my family, and my Mum used to help out at the local talent shows. Then this wonderful teacher, Anica Dawson, came to Ireland from South Africa, married an Irish farmer and started teaching ballet in a cowshed. She put an ad in the local paper for children aged four to nine. I rang her, but she said, at 15, I was too old. I begged and in the end she agreed to let me attend."

After the first year, Dawson told her parents that she was talented and needed to go to a proper school. Dorothy Stevens, a visiting Royal Academy examiner, offered to take her on.

"That's when I went to Halifax, to live with this woman and six cats. She made it clear the cats came first, but I owe her everything," Donlon says.

"It was very hard as a teenager starting in Grade 1 with six-year-olds, but I knew it was my only chance. She was tough, telling me I'd never be good enough. In my second year, we had a confrontation. I said, 'Look, Dorothy, I know you mean well but I need somebody to tell me I'm not so terribly bad.' 'Oh my dear, I didn't know,' she said, adding, 'That was how I was trained.' I learned so much from her in those three years."

Still a student, Donlon attended a Festival Ballet workshop in nearby Bradford, and was invited to join company classes. She followed the company to London, working as a dresser during the Christmas season.

In 1991, she presented her first choreography on a joint platform open to dancers from the three Berlin ballet companies: Deutsche Oper (where she was a dancer, and whose own choreographic platform was for men only), Ballet of the Berlin Staatsoper and

Komische Oper Ballet. Donlon trawled the city's Irish pubs looking for Irish musicians and found a bodhran player. The bodhran is the traditional Irish drum sometimes called the heartbeat of Ireland. He and his band joined in and her work, *Celtic Touch*, was a resounding success.

In a unique soundtrack for her piece, *The Last Lifeboat*, Donlon used the looped words, sighs and breath from an interview she conducted with her great aunt, who'd survived the sinking of the Titanic.

Rather than narrative, what interests Donlon is emotion and energy. "I create a body of movement, like an alphabet, and together [with the dancers] we build words. Then it depends how you put them together, at what speed and where you put a comma or a full stop," she says.

"I give a lot of thought and reflection beforehand, and I write and draw. In the studio, I put all that aside and start moving. I'm turned on by the dancers and not the dance. I talk to them about the energy between people and what it feels like. I talk about the movement, the detail that is left behind in the space and the colours that paint the movement."

After the early success of *Celtic Touch*, Donlon knew she still needed to learn a lot and was fortunate to work with many great choreographers at Deutsche Oper. "Jirí Kylián, from NDT [Nederlands Dans Theater] really sparked something in me," she says. "I loved how he managed to bring the best out of people and he has this beautiful manner. I felt like that's how I want to get things out of people. I always loved dancing, for me time just stood still onstage. But, in 2001, at 34, I signed my contract as director at Saarbrücken State Theatre and remained until 2013, also giving my energy to choreographing."

Being a woman choreographer was never an issue for Donlon. "Ireland is quite a matriarchal country," she explains. "Women have a strong position there, and I wasn't engrained with this 'I'm just a woman so that's not my place.'"

This was evidenced in her *Giselle: Reloaded*, nominated for the Prix Benois in 2007, which was set in Ireland. "I didn't want Giselle to be a victim," says Donlon. "There is that moment when she is just about to kill herself and the rest that happens is a dream. Then she comes back to that moment and decides, 'No, I'm not going to kill myself for Albrecht.' That was my way of empowering the woman."

The contribution of her husband, Claas Willeke, whom she met when he was studying jazz in Berlin, was central to her work. "He became a professor of electronics and music theory, and I went on to choreography and directorship. We had this fantastic relationship as composer and choreographer. He also had a very good eye. For me he was kindly critical, the best dramaturg I could ever have. He would simply ask the right questions, leaving me to figure the answers out."

Willeke's death in a 2013 motor accident was a devastating loss: husband, artistic partner and father to their young daughter, all gone. Six months later, finding the studio a safe place, she returned, extending *Shadow*, an earlier work. "I was working with Claas' music and with Sam Auinger,



his colleague. At first, I felt I couldn't do it, then I heard Claas say, 'You will do this. This is what will keep you alive.'"

Donlon's next opportunity came with Minutemade for Dance at Gärtnerplatz in Munich, where she was one of four choreographers given one week each, in turn, to create a new work on the company. Each work had to pick up from the endpoint of the previous week's choreography. Returning to her roots, the result was the high comedy of *Made in Love*, set to a score combining traditional Celtic music with electronic.

Donlon only gave the music to the dancers a few days before the performance. "I knew if I put the Irish music on, they would start being 'skedowdie dowdie' and I didn't want that. Just at the end I said, 'OK, try it now to this.'"

Continued from page 21

The work was featured at the 2016 Houston Dance Salad Festival, where Donlon returned this year with *Strokes Through the Tail*, a work for one female and five male dancers.

Choreographed for Donlon Dance Collective, *Strokes Through the Tail* echoes the subtle wit and virtuosity of its Mozart musical setting while displaying Donlon's mastery of comedy, playing on modern themes of cross dressing in contemporary ballet style. Additionally, the work was chosen by Bolshoi ballerina, Svetlana Zakharova, as part of her Amore program, which toured internationally.

"When I put a piece onstage, in a way it represents life, and in every day there's a moment to smile. I know that working with comedy opens people and then you can deliver something even stronger. I guess also being Irish, I can't take things that seriously, otherwise I really would be in the ground. Comedy is a lot harder than drama and it has to feel right, you can't force it," she says.

"The only thing I ever want to be is truly happy, and to feel that I am pushing my limit; not anybody else's image of my limit, but my limit in that moment in time." ❖



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The poster for the Victoria Academy of Ballet 2019/2020 Season features a photograph of two dancers in a contemporary ballet style. One dancer is in a pink dress, and the other is in a white dress. The text on the poster includes the academy's name, program details for Professional Training and Bridge Post-Secondary, and a list of winners of the YAGP Seattle Outstanding School of the Year Award from 2016 to 2019. Logos for the British Columbia Education Quality Assurance (EQA) and the International Students Welcome program are also present.

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Photo: David Cooper

The poster for The School of Dance features a black and white photograph of two dancers in a dynamic, expressive pose. The text on the poster includes the word "CONTEMPORARY" in large red letters, followed by "DYNAMIC EXPRESSIVE REFINED POWERFUL" in large white letters. The school's name, "The School of Dance", is written vertically on the right side. Contact information and the school's website are provided at the bottom.

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Manuel Liñán in his *Baile de autor*
Photo: Javier Fergo

MANUEL LIÑÁN

Being himself in a bata de cola

BY JUSTINE BAYOD ESPOZ

At the 2014 Jerez Festival, Belén Maya premiered *Los Invitados (The Guests)*, a star-studded evening featuring several guest appearances by renowned flamenco artists. Afterward, the most talked about was Manuel Liñán, who presented a solo and a duet (with Maya) dressed in a bata de cola (trained skirt) and mantón (shawl). The joy and naturalness of his dancing with these traditionally female accoutrements surprised and enthralled the audience.

Ever since, Liñán has not been bashful about including his beloved bata de cola and mantón in his shows. They have become a signature of his dance style and an acclaimed part of his work, even among the most orthodox of flamenco audiences.

It's not that this gender fluidity or experimentation didn't exist in flamenco prior to 2014, but as Liñán explains it,

often when men wear female flamenco garb "it's tied to a character or a specific dramaturgy. When I did it with Belén Maya, I did it with my own identity. There was no script, no character, no dramaturgy, it was just Manuel Liñán dressed in a bata de cola and mantón."

Liñán's inclusion of female costuming is an entirely personal artistic choice that is not intended to "break rules or provoke controversy." As an established artist, Liñán has the privilege of wearing whatever he likes, explaining that typically female costuming "gives me another aesthetic, another way of telling a story. Sometimes it brings out feminine aspects and sometimes it makes me more masculine. It broadens my body's expression."

On February 8, 2019, Liñán took his boldest step yet when it comes to challenging gender identity in flamenco dance with the premiere of *¡Viva!* at

Madrid's Teatros del Canal. In his newest production, Liñán explores the feminine flamenco universe from the masculine point of view by inviting seven male dancers, including himself, to discover their own femininity by performing entirely in drag.

"I wanted to show that [drag] isn't always comical, it's not always amusing, it's not always done simply to please an audience. It has a dramatic foundation that is neither masculine nor feminine, but resides in all humans," explains Liñán.

He also clarifies, "We're not imitating women. And we're not talking about a general concept of womanhood, because there are many kinds of women. We are presenting our own woman, the one we each independently identify with, the one we want to characterize, dress and dance."

Liñán's work oscillates between large-format, high-concept group works, such as *¡Viva!*, and more intimate performances, such as the pared-down yet magical and enthralling *Baile de autor (Auteur's Dance)*.

"In *Baile de autor*, I felt like working solely with flamenco's essential elements and taking myself to the very limits of my creative capacity," says Liñán, who describes the piece as a dance fantasy.

In the show, Liñán is accompanied only by a guitarist and singer, whom his magician-like character manipulates and plays with to create a simple yet nuanced world that surprises and dazzles repeatedly, especially when Liñán dons his bata de cola and mantón. ^{DI}

Baile de autor makes its Canadian premiere in September 2019 at the Vancouver Playhouse as part of the Vancouver International Flamenco Festival.

BY MICHAEL CRABB



Karen Kain, the One, the Only

50 years of passion
and persuasion at the
National Ballet of Canada

When Karen Kain joined the National Ballet of Canada in the summer of 1969, her boss, founding artistic director Celia Franca, occupied a small corner office on the second floor of Toronto's historic St. Lawrence Hall with views of a city park and St. James Cathedral.

There were about 40 dancers, about the same number there had been a decade earlier, complemented by an artistic, production and administrative staff of similar scale. Even for such a modestly sized classical ballet company — albeit Canada's largest — architect William Thomas' 1850 Renaissance Revival style building afforded only cramped and inadequate quarters for a company on the brink of dramatic expansion. Yet, this was to be Kain's home base for most of her stage career.

Fifty years on and now at the pinnacle of the company she entered as a shy 18-year-old, Kain occupies a far more spacious office in the 8,825-square-metre Walter Carson Centre, the first home the National Ballet has ever owned, which lies over several floors within Arthur Erickson's harbour-side King's Landing condominium building.



Top left: The National Ballet of Canada's Karen Kain and Rex Harrington in James Kudelka's *The Actress*
Photo: Lydia Pawelak

Top right: Rudolf Nureyev and Karen Kain in the National Ballet of Canada's *The Sleeping Beauty*
Photo: Barry Philip

Bottom: Karen Kain in the National Ballet of Canada's *Swan Lake*
Photo: Andrew Oxenham

The new premises, completed in 1995, lack the cosy charm of St. Lawrence Hall, are a lengthy hike from the city centre and could pass for Siberia in the depths of winter, but they are emblematic of the company's evolution from a tight-knit family of troopers to a large and complex organization.

Kain's office window offers a splendid view of Toronto's Gardiner Expressway. A family of squirrels that much to Kain's delight built a nest amidst the vines that once clung to the window have been banished by maintenance staff. From this uncluttered, minimally furnished office, Kain has ruled since 2005 over a company of almost 70 dancers plus 10 apprentices — although she might bristle at the choice of verb. "Miss Franca" ruled; Kain sees herself as the leader of what she describes as "a huge enterprise."

"Celia was terrifying," Kain recalls. "I was scared of her. We simply accepted her decisions. Young people are very different now, and we have to listen, but decisions still have to be made. They may not always like those decisions, but I do my best to help them understand why they are made. It promotes honesty."

The contours of Kain's long and brilliant performing career constitute a major chapter of Canadian ballet history and, as she would have it, owe as much to being in the right place at the right time as to her own extraordinary artistic gifts.

Born in Hamilton, Ontario, and raised in nearby Ancaster in a middle-class family, Kain was a small child when she decided she wanted to be a ballerina. According to a 1971 company biography, she made the momentous decision at

age nine, choosing dance because she thought the costumes were pretty. By the time her autobiography was published in 1994, the standard version had it that Kain was smitten after her parents took her to see Franca dance *Giselle* at the old Palace Theatre in Hamilton in March 1959. However, the record shows that the National Ballet was touring in the United States at the time although it had presented *Giselle* in Hamilton the previous December and again in February at Toronto's Royal Alexandra Theatre. Kain presumably saw one of these performances.

Local classes followed this epiphany. By age 11, Kain had earned a place at Canada's National Ballet School, from which she graduated straight into the company.

In those days, the National Ballet routinely undertook gruelling bus-and-truck tours across North America, giving more than 100 performances a season. Relentless touring increases the toll of injuries, but also opens opportunities for junior dancers. It was thus that Kain got an early career break dancing *Odette/Odile* in *Swan Lake*, earning rapid promotion to principal rank. Then, after arriving to stage his production of *The Sleeping Beauty* in 1972, Rudolf Nureyev tapped Kain to dance Aurora and cast her and Frank Augustyn, two years her junior, for the show-stealing Bluebird pas de deux.

Kain had the good sense to relinquish major full-length roles before anyone suggested it, but gladly took on new ones, even supporting roles, whenever they were offered, which was often. The notion of a National Ballet without Karen Kain seemed almost unthinkable, but, in 1996, she announced she would be retiring at the end of the season with an extended, seven-week cross-Canada tour produced independently by Garth Drabinsky. Her official farewell performance was the following October in Winnipeg, the city where her parents were raised.

It took another year for Kain to reconcile herself to a post-ballerina existence. She performed with NDT 3, Nederlands Dans Theater's company for over-40s, until a torn ligament in her right foot convinced her it was time to reinvent herself.

Earlier, when then artistic director Reid Anderson had announced his resignation in 1995, James Kudelka suggested to Kain that they apply for the position as a team. She had demurred, in part because she still wanted to dance and, as she later explained, because she felt Kudelka did not need her in order to get the job, which proved correct. In the fall of 1998, however, she was ready to accept Kudelka's invitation to join the National Ballet's senior management team as artistic associate.

The contours of Kain's long and brilliant performing career constitute a major chapter of Canadian ballet history.

"Rudolf really moved me up the chain," says Kain.

The following year, against formidable odds, she and Augustyn won the prize for best pas de deux at the Moscow International Ballet Competition. Kain brought home the silver medal. It catapulted their partnership into the headlines. Nureyev continued to mentor the young dancers. Meanwhile, the National Ballet discovered the pair was box-office magic. That they were an off-stage couple — a fact known to insiders and suspected by fans — enhanced their allure. Both became magazine-cover celebrities. They were appointed officers of the Order of Canada in their mid-20s.

For Kain, the 1970s were a whirlwind of company performances, international galas and extended guest appearances, which by the end of the decade left her physically and emotionally drained, questioning her talent and wondering why she had ever become a dancer. Her personal relationship with Augustyn ended.

Kain emerged from this crisis a stronger woman and arguably a better artist. Her range was extraordinary, from the great Russian classics to such comedic roles as Lise in *La Fille mal gardée* and Swanilda in *Coppélia*. And Kain fed eagerly off new choreography. In 1983, she married Canadian actor Ross Petty.

It seemed obvious to many that Kain was being groomed to take over. Kain insists she was oblivious to this. For one thing, there was no saying how long Kudelka would remain. Also, their time working together was, as Kain describes it, "sometimes difficult." Kudelka's depression cast a pall over the company. Kain did her best to be supportive and scored a personal triumph when she supervised a revival of the neglected Nureyev *Sleeping Beauty*, but the fact that she agreed to become chair of the Canada Council for the Arts in September 2004 suggests Kain was not anticipating what occurred the following May.

Kudelka had threatened to resign several times during his nine-year directorship and finally the board of directors took him at his word. There is nothing that says the National Ballet must conduct a major search to fill its top artistic position and, in 2005, it would have been idiotic to do so. To everyone but Kain herself, it appeared a foregone conclusion that the job was hers. All she had to do was accept.

"When I started in 2005, I set three major goals, to raise the level of dancing, diversify the repertoire and get the National Ballet touring internationally again," she says. "It's been a team effort, of course, but I believe we've gone a long way toward achieving these goals. We have established a momentum."

For the National Ballet as an institution, the pressing issue is what happens when Karen Kain, who has accomplished what she set out to do, decides she's had enough.

This is an understatement. A self-confessed perfectionist and “stickler for standards,” Kain has been relentless in pushing her dancers to excel.

Programming is always a balancing act. Dancers need to be inspired. Audiences must be lured. It all costs money, of which there is never enough. Ignoring this complexity, it's easy to quibble with programming decisions. Kain admits she's had her hits and misses — “some bumps along the way” — but, overall, apart from reviving well-established classics, she has presented audiences with a satisfying, often challenging array of choreography, new to the company or specifically made for it.

Compared with massively state-funded European troupes, the National Ballet's heavy reliance on self-generated revenue — public funding accounts for less than 20 per cent of the total budget — puts a damper on risk-taking. Yet, Kain has walked that gauntlet, programming mixed bills of all-new Canadian work and nurturing the careers of in-house choreographers Guillaume Côté and Robert Binet.

In a major 2011 coup, she commissioned A-list choreographer Alexei Ratmansky to create a new *Romeo and Juliet*, using this as a calling card to attract foreign presenters. Having shown Christopher Wheeldon, another A-lister, how well her company dances, Kain parlayed her strong relationships with other international troupes to become a co-producer with Britain's Royal Ballet of his *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland* in 2011 and *The Winter's Tale* four years later.

Kain's upcoming 50th anniversary season leans toward the risky with three mixed bills — always a tough sell — that include several company premieres and commissioned works from Crystal Pite and Binet. Balancing these are revivals of *Giselle* and *Romeo and Juliet* and finally, next June, the premiere of a new *Swan Lake*, staged by Kain herself. It will replace Kudelka's controversial 1999 production, the one with the gang rape, last performed in 2017.

Kain says the new production is inspired by Erik Bruhn's, made for the National Ballet in 1967. “What I loved about Erik's version was its emotional momentum. That's the part I'd like to replicate. I want it to be moving.”

Kain understands from personal experience the natural eagerness of dancers to be seen in major foreign centres and while lack of funding has forced her to cut back on national touring, she has been able to rally the support of private donors to replant the National Ballet on the international scene: London, Paris, Moscow, St. Petersburg, New York, Los Angeles and Washington D.C.

To accomplish all this, Kain has deployed her natural charm, passion and persuasive powers to motivate new and existing donors to loosen their purse strings. She has been a veritable money magnet.

When Kain began her directorship she inherited a \$1.14 million accumulated deficit and her first season budget, trimmed back from original projections, was \$21.7 million. The company's endowment fund stood at \$12.9 million. The most recently posted financials show an operating budget of \$35.5 million. The endowment has grown to \$74.6 million. Some of that growth is accountable to Soaring, a broader, multi-year capital campaign that by early summer had reached its \$100 million target, helped toward the finish line by a matching-donation commitment from the incorrigibly philanthropic Jerry and Joan Lozinski.

For the National Ballet as an institution, the pressing issue is what happens when Karen Kain, who has accomplished what she set out to do, decides she's had enough.

“I can certainly imagine life without this level of responsibility,” says Kain, “and I look forward to spending more time with my husband. The board of directors knows I have a timetable.”

When Kain retired as a ballerina, she responded to the lamentations of her fans with a pragmatic “Nobody is irreplaceable.” She was right and wrong. Other ballerinas have taken her place and have danced superbly, but none has become a star in the way Kain was. It's not for their want of trying or for Kain's earnest efforts on their behalf. With a few exceptions, she's resisted opportunities to return to the stage in character roles. “I've had my turn,” she once observed. “It's their time now.”

It's just that times have changed and in that sense there can never be another Karen Kain. The Ballet Boom that helped propel her to fame is now a distant echo. We live in an age that values vacuous celebrity more than substantive achievement, an age in which the excoriating effects of social media — albeit an invaluable marketing tool — have stripped the ballet world of its air of mystery and glamour. Kain, however, has retained it. She is one-of-a-kind and cannot be replicated.

When she does finally step aside as the longest-serving artistic director since Celia Franca, it will not only mark the conclusion of a remarkable career, but in many respects the symbolic end of an important era in the history of the National Ballet of Canada. *DI*

Translations

A research project for blind
and partially sighted viewers

Researching the
potential of dance

BY NAOMI BRAND

In 2016, while waiting in line for a show, VocalEye Descriptive Arts Society executive director Steph Kirkland and I started chatting. We quickly tumbled into an exciting conversation about live description, the blind community and the possibilities (and impossibilities) of describing dance.

Our brief conversation sparked a curiosity I hadn't experienced in a long time and questions I couldn't let go of: how would you make a dance for the non-visual senses? How could dance be made accessible to audiences of blind or partially sighted people? How can dance be "translated" into language, touch or sound?

At one point, the same movement was described as “I spread my arms and legs out onto the floor” and also as “I melt like peanut butter on toast,” to very different impact.

The answer to these questions was *Translations*, an immersive performance for small audiences created by All Bodies Dance Project and VocalEye over the 2018-2019 season. Working alongside us was Collin van Uchelen and other artistic consultants from the blind community, as we experimented with different tools, techniques and approaches to describing dance. We explored language, touch and sound as the means of communicating our choreography, in the process shifting our dance-making away from the dominant visual sense toward other ways of sensing and perceiving movement.

The project was a good fit with All Bodies Dance Project, which I have been co-leading since its founding in 2014. Our company, which is made up of artists with and without disabilities, focuses on community-engaged work outside of the typical dance scene and seeks to challenge notions of the “normal” body. We’ve developed a process where we look for what is generative about our differences and use those to create choreography.

As a dancer, I believe that all moving bodies impart a kind of kinaesthetic empathy. The intangible exchange of energy between moving and witnessing bodies in real time is what makes the art form so impactful. It’s a beautiful and grandiose idea that I imagine resonates with many dance artists, but, in creating *Translations*, that belief was truly put to the test. If you take the visual away from dance, what is left? What are we performing when we aren’t being watched? What do we miss and what is revealed?

Translations begins in the theatre lobby where each audience member is paired one-to-one with a guide/performer. Sighted audience members are invited to close their eyes and keep them closed throughout the show in order to experience the dance from a non-visual perspective — not as a way to replicate the experience of blindness, but rather as an opportunity to focus on the information about the moving body being delivered through other senses.

One by one, each audience member is guided into the performance space to their place in the circle of seats arranged in the centre of the room. The performers, who are both wheelchair users and standing dancers, wear black with accents of neon yellow so they can see one another in the dimly lit space. The dancing takes place both inside and outside the circle, both in front of and behind the audience.

The piece unfolds through numerous sections that employ different descriptive techniques, for example, a portion of the piece is described through touch on each audience members’

back, while another section involves different approaches to the dancers’ own verbal description. The concluding section relies solely on the sounds created by their moving bodies.

The project began from the idea that the description and the dance would be created together, one in service of the other. In some of our first research sessions, we were overwhelmed by the infinite number of things that could be described about a moving body. Beyond all the possible adjectives and action words, we found ourselves grappling with questions such as: do we describe the person’s clothing? Their skin colour? Their size? Their mobility device?

How do our descriptions account for the whole person and not just their appearance? What about their identity, ethnic background, history or personality? Without the scaffolding of a theatrical character or scripted lines to hang a description on, we were left to make choices about what we value most about the dances and dancers.

Live description is intended to evoke an image in the listener’s imagination, but descriptive language relies on shared cultural understanding. This typically assumes a narrow image of who and what a dancer is, most often a young, white, thin and able-bodied woman. The same goes for notions of what dance looks like, which typically involves images of virtuosic extensions, athletic leaps and graceful turns. All Bodies Dance Project is made up of dancers with very different bodies, mobility tools and ways of understanding space. The lack of cultural images of wheelchair users and standing dancers moving together in physical contact made description all the more challenging.

We explored both metaphorical and objective language, or, as Steph Kirkland calls these two styles, “Bjork and Sherlock.” At one point in the piece, the same movement was described as “I spread my arms and legs out onto the floor” and also as “I melt like peanut butter on toast,” to very different impact.

We didn’t aim for accuracy when creating our descriptions. It isn’t important that the listener be able to see the dancers’ exact movements or precise shapes in their imaginations. Rather, it was about layering the language with the sound of the body moving, the breath of the dancer and the movement of the air to create a new understanding of the dance.

The audience received information in layers, for example, a phrase of movement might be repeated but described through different modalities each time in order to create a “full” picture of the dance that has multiple sensorial entry points.

Continued on page 34

Intimacy and Interdependence

Toward a new status quo

BY STEPH KIRKLAND

VocalEye specializes in making theatre performances more accessible, through live description, for people who are blind and partially sighted. Since the debut of this service in Vancouver in 2009, VocalEye has expanded its practice to include fireworks, the Pride Parade, visual art and, most recently, dance.

The traditional approach to live description features an outside observer who creates a script that translates important visual information into vivid verbal descriptions. The describer strives to guide the listener and to serve the work without “explaining” it. VocalEye first collaborated with All Bodies Dance Project for a performance called *Do Make Show*, using traditional verbal description techniques. What we discovered,

The traditional role of the “describer as witness” had been transformed into “performer as guide.” The guides were all dance professionals, making a different kind of dance in their new role. Their first action as dancer-guides, once the audience was seated, was to draw a circle on the back of the person they were partnered with. This circle was like a map, indicating the location of the dance and orienting the viewer to this new idea of space, using both touch and their voices to indicate: “You are here.”

The performing dancers introduced themselves one by one, stating their name and then simply travelling around the circle behind the audience, letting their bodies speak through weight, rhythm, footfalls and, for those in wheelchairs, spinning wheels. Connections were made and relationships discovered between voices and bodies as they moved through space following the same path around the outside of the circle. This allowed listeners to experience variation and pattern within a repetitive motif as the space was defined and carved around them.

Then, a single dancer entered the circle and described their movements, introducing a simple vocabulary of physical efforts that were simultaneously “drawn” on the back of the audience members by their guides. The voice of the dancer communicated their identity, their location in space and, through the sound of their breath, the effort the movement required.

Drawing on the back is a technique VocalEye developed to augment verbal content when describing fireworks and visual

Drawing on the back is a technique VocalEye developed to augment verbal content when describing fireworks and visual art.

however, was that words alone were not sufficient in conjuring the visceral response that watching dance evokes.

Finding a way to achieve this sympathetic response was one of many challenges we embraced in our next research project together, *Translations*. Our provocative year-long exploration resulted in the creation of a dance performance that was specifically designed with and for people who are blind and partially sighted. Sighted people who attended were invited to keep their eyes closed throughout, and had to adapt to a new status quo where the relationship between audience and performer was radically altered.

Before the show, each audience member was paired with a dancer who had been trained in “sighted guide” techniques. Following a brief orientation, audience members were guided into the dimly lit space of the black-box theatre and seated in a circle of 12 evenly spaced chairs.

For those who were sighted, this was perhaps their first experience of the intimacy and interdependence of the guide and the guided. These performance conventions, a familiar part of live description for the blind, made them the centre of their own experience, an audience of one, where they could observe their own powers of attention and imagination and ultimately access dance through that form of “seeing” that happens with the mind, not the eye.

art. In the context of dance, the technique helped to convey the effort, shape, rhythm and dynamics of the movement. The verbal content and the physical contact worked together to engage the imagination and elicit a sympathetic visceral response in the audience.

Solos were followed by a series of duets in which subjective and objective viewpoints came together as one dancer moved, simultaneously describing what they were doing, while the other watched and then took a turn to describe what they saw. If the dancer chose a factual, literal description, the observer would complement this with a more poetic, narrative description, and vice versa. This was just one of the many layers of information we researched with this project. Another was tone of voice, which could be used to reflect a more neutral or more expressive engagement with the description.

As the choreography expanded to include more dancers and to occupy more space, identities and then language itself disappeared. A complex crescendo of movement led, in the end, to an inevitable stillness and silence. A moment of shared humanity was evoked through our common bonds of body and breath. ^{DI}

Steph Kirkland is founder and executive director of VocalEye Descriptive Arts Society in Vancouver.

The Experience

At the ring of a bell, I am led into the darkness, my hand guided to the back of a chair in silence. I sit, listening. The bell rings again, followed by footsteps, two sets, coming closer and stopping. I hear someone sit. With each ring, the sounds of footsteps recur. I hear others enter the space, pair by pair, and take their seats. I consider the nature of the venue and my location in it as the sounds fade away into the darkness.

I hear a voice: "I am Naomi, a standing dancer." Her footsteps arc toward me and pass behind my seat, moving briskly away in what seems like a large circle. The sounds stop where they began and another voice comes from a different location: "I am Harmanie, a dancer in a manual wheelchair." I follow her sound as she rolls away from me and wheels around the perimeter of the circle in which I am seated. Another dancer, Danielle, identifies herself and travels the circle, her footsteps falling with gentle precision. I gaze into the sound as she moves around us.

I begin to sense the shape of the space and realize we are all — audience members and performers — on the same stage together. Hearing the voices and names of the dancers reveals their identities in the darkness; the characteristic sounds of their movements serve as unique sonic signatures. The moving sounds illuminate the dance, connecting me with the performers even though I do not see them.

Then, Naomi's voice again: "I am here," she says, her words coming from the area in front of me. She begins to dance and I hear her move as she says, "My arms slash, slash! Down, down ...". The words are embodied, integrated with the natural sounds of her movements. My guide, Daisy, is touching my back, translating the dance into tactile form. Her hands swipe outward along my spine, showing me the energetic movements of the dance as it is performed. Through the feel of the tactile translations on my skin and the words and sounds of the dancer on the floor, I begin to "see" the dance.

-Collin van Uchelen

Seeing, and Not Seeing, the Dance

Shaping *Translations*

BY COLLIN VAN UCHELEN

As a person who has helped create techniques for describing fireworks to people who are blind, I appreciate the challenge of translating dynamic and complex movements into an accessible form. So I welcomed the invitation to work with All Bodies Dance and VocalEye on *Translations*, a dance performance designed to be experienced without using vision to see it. The piece would be shaped by people who, like me, are blind or partially blind, as well as by the dancers.

I know a bit about dance, both as an audience member and from my own experiences in ballroom, Latin and ballet, before losing my sight. Also, I had worked with VocalEye previously, when executive director Steph Kirkland and I designed a tactile approach for describing firework displays for people with vision loss. Using a technique we called Fingerworks for Fireworks, a sighted describer translated the overall look of fireworks with their fingertips by tracing the motions and patterns on the back of a blind spectator. This previous work informed the tactile approach we created for describing dance in *Translations*.

We experimented with several modes of translation, including precise verbal descriptions of movements, metaphorical/poetic representations, moving vocalizations, tactile sensations, and the natural sounds of the dancers' breath and movement. Many of these were embodied, coming from the dancers themselves as they performed.

The descriptive techniques were refined over time and then layered by adding them one by one across successive iterations of a particular section. Finding the right combination and sequence of these layers was essential to avoid overwhelming the viewer with too much information. The different modes of translation provided varying perspectives, rendering the dance more "visible" with each recurring presentation. The process is similar to creating music by introducing different instruments sequentially in repeating phrases over time. The music takes shape incrementally as each voice reveals something more of the piece.



From my perspective as a blind viewer, I described what I was “seeing” about the piece during rehearsals, communicating how I was experiencing the dance through sound and touch. My perceptions helped identify what was being distorted or lost in translation. What I saw — and what I didn’t see — informed the refinement of the piece through cycles of performance, feedback, revision and so forth.

The structure of the piece and the tools used to translate it enabled me to see dance more fully than I knew was possible, providing an opportunity to confront the pervasive disconnections that I routinely experience as a result of going blind. *Translations* connected me to the dancers, guides, performance and setting in ways I have not experienced before. It set a new personal standard for my expectations about accessibility and inclusion in a largely sighted world. ⁰¹

Collin van Uchelen is a community psychology consultant in Vancouver.

Translations will be remounted in November 2019 as part of Dance in Vancouver.

In one section, the description was tactile, when the guides “dance” a choreographed sequence of hand actions on audience members’ backs in relation to a solo. Through these different tools, *Translations* aims to promote a kind of “sensory mobility” (a term we learned from one of our consultants, Carmen Papalia) in audience members and invite many different ways to enter into the dance.

Translations is intimate and vulnerable by design. The one-to-one relationship between performer and audience involved establishing consent and trust in order for everyone to feel safe while being guided and touched. For the dancers, dancing in the darkness was exposing in unexpected ways. The piece requires the performers to be transparent and generous in their dancing, to allow their bodies to be heard, to expose their breath and to open themselves up to being sensed by the audience. Performers are often trained to hide or reduce the sounds of their bodies breathing or travelling, but here it was important to amplify those so that we were made present. Without sound we disappeared into the darkness.

Through *Translations*, I have learned so much about dance, myself as an artist and my biases. What I initially thought was a project about creating dance for the absence of sight was, in fact, not about a lack. Instead, *Translations* has been about uncovering the abundance of information, sensation and potential that exists inside the performance experience. Along with many artists, I have been making dances with default notions of who the audience might be and how they might perceive a performance. That unconscious default spectator is probably someone like me, a non-disabled, sighted person who enjoys the privilege of being “typical.” These norms reinforce the idea that there is a right way to be an audience member, a right way to be a dancer and a right way to engage with the world. *Translations* shows this isn’t the case. ^{DI}

Naomi Brand is a dancer, choreographer, teacher and co-founder of All Bodies Dance Project in Vancouver.

MICHAEL CRABB'S

Notebook

Dance, for the most part, has always occupied a tenuous place in mainstream media. The continuing erosion of arts coverage in the endangered-species legacy media has only worsened the situation. Specialized dance publications are equally threatened and often lack the financial resources that would allow them to join the digital revolution that is transforming the way information is shared and consumed. It’s an existential threat that two veterans of the Canadian dance scene aim to combat.

Between them, Toronto’s Kathleen Smith and Montreal’s Philip Szporer have 60 years or more of experience in the dance milieu as — an incomplete list — journalists, critics, lecturers, curators, festival founder/directors, filmmakers and producers. As their new website dancepluswords.ca explains, the two longtime friends aim “to disseminate and facilitate conversations around dance and movement arts across Canada.” Smith and Szporer recognize the need to embrace the full potential of a digitally connected world. As a beginning, they have launched what they call the Wikipedia Dance Project.

Wikipedia has become the world’s largest free-access online general reference work. By 2014, it was clocking almost half a billion unique visitors per month. With almost six million articles, the English-language Wikipedia is the biggest, but globally there are more than 290 Wikipedias with a total of more than 40 million articles in 301 different languages.

From the start, Wikipedia’s co-founders, Jimmy Wales and Larry Sanger, wanted it to be an ad-free, not-for-profit resource based on open volunteer collaboration through a Wiki-based content editing system.

Despite initial scepticism, especially in academic circles, Wikipedia has gained editorial robustness and, along with it, increasing respect. Wikipedia is vigorously dynamic. Misinformation and errors exist, as in all encyclopaedias,



Kathleen Smith
Photo: Jennifer Watkins



Philip Szporer
Photo: Christopher Duggan

but Wikipedia’s collective open editing approach improves the likelihood of these being swiftly corrected.

Where Wikipedia differs from its traditional counterparts is in the way content is generated. No editorial board strategizes what should or should not be included nor decides who the contributors should be. The result, despite Wikipedia’s ambition to be inclusive and diverse, is unevenness in terms of representation of people, institutions and subject areas. The Canadian dance scene is a notable example.

You will search in vain for biographical entries of such currently active company artistic directors as Jean Grand-Maître, Bengt Jörgen, André Lewis or Daniel Léveillé; or significant past ones such as Anna Wyman, Brydon Paige and Gradimir Pankov. Miriam Adams, co-founder of Dance Collection Danse, has an entry, but her late husband/co-founder Lawrence Adams does not. Other entries for such major Canadian dance figures as Celia Franca, James Kudelka, Gweneth Lloyd, Arnold Spohr and Grant Strate are almost cursory.

In what is essentially a crowd-sourced collective endeavour, it is futile to point accusatory fingers, but it is a situation that can be remedied, which is what Smith and Szporer are doing.

Smith had been deeply impressed by Art+Feminism, which describes itself as a “do-it-yourself and do-it-with-others” campaign, founded in 2013, to improve



Photo: Courtesy of Karen Malkson

Allan Ulrich 1940–2019

Allan Ulrich, *Dance International's* longtime San Francisco correspondent, died on July 22 at the age of 78. Ulrich was born in New York City to a Canadian mother and American father. He attended McGill University in Montreal, where he received a BA in English, subsequently earning an MA in English from the University of California, Berkeley.

Ulrich was a veteran newspaper dance critic, first for the *San Francisco Examiner* and then for the *Chronicle*. Also a dedicated freelance writer, Ulrich tirelessly covered the Bay Area, contributing to the U.S. *Dance* and *Pointe* magazines, among others. He also worked as a music and opera critic.

The *Chronicle* obituary quotes San Francisco Symphony music director Michael Tilson Thomas, who said in a statement: "Allan Ulrich was a true partisan of the arts. He had enormous depth of knowledge and a perceptive recollection of scores of years of dance, concert music, opera, and theater. His writing reflected his enormous knowledge but also his great passion and enthusiasm for the performing arts and for the performers themselves. I always learned something from every conversation I had with him."

— KAIJA PEPPER

coverage of "cis and transgender women, non-binary folks, feminism and the arts on Wikipedia." Every year, since 2014, Art+Feminism has organized educational edit-a-thons around the world to create and improve thousands of Wikipedia articles. Smith attended one such session, convened at the Art Gallery of Ontario in March 2018. Smith's immediate thought was: "What if we did something like this for Canadian dance?"

With a proven model to follow, she and Szporer put together a proposal to hold similar sessions across the country. With support from the Canada Council for the Arts, they launched their Wikipedia Dance Project with a Montreal edit-a-thon on May 26, followed by others in Toronto and Vancouver in June, a repeat session in Toronto in August in connection with Yvonne Ng's biennial *Dance: Made in Canada Festival* — neither founder nor festival has a Wikipedia entry — and concluding this first round of edit-a-thons in St. John's later in August.

They were actively supported in this, respective to location, by La Bibliothèque de la danse Vincent-Warren, the National Ballet School Resource Centre, Vancouver's Dance Centre, Memorial University's Centre for Newfoundland Studies and Neighbourhood Dance Works.

"I don't think we could have pulled this project off without them," says Smith.

Each session starts with an introduction to what Wikipedia is and how it works, presented by a seasoned Wikipedia editor. Following this, participants are given the opportunity to learn by doing, making or revising articles with coaching from the experts.

A significant challenge was immediately evident. Wikipedia's protocols are relatively flexible, but the requirement for articles to include references to verifiable sources is non-negotiable. You can't just make stuff up.

"A page is not sturdy until you have at least three citations," says Smith.

But what if a reference is not easily verifiable because it was published in a non-digitally archived magazine or newspaper that no longer exists or whose editorial legitimacy is questionable?

There is work to be done on several fronts, but Szporer and Smith are encouraged by the positive response their initiative has generated.

"We don't want to be carrying the weight of this forever," cautions Smith. "We're not in it for ourselves. It's about empowering people. It is a collective endeavour for the general good."

"The point is to show that anybody can do this," says Szporer. "It's wide open in terms of scope."

"And this is only the beginning," adds Smith. ⁰¹

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Vertical Dance



Vancouver International Vertical Dance Summit performance on the Guinness Tower
Photo: Courtesy of Aeriosa

Aeriosa, a Vancouver-based vertical dance company led by Julia Taffe, hosted artistic performers from around the world to take part in choreographic labs, workshops and performances at the inaugural Vancouver International Vertical Dance Summit from June 9 to 15. Guest choreographers included Lindsey Butcher (U.K.), Amelia Rudolph (U.S.), Kate Lawrence (Wales), Marija Šćekić (Croatia), Fabrice Guillot (France) and Chantal McCormick (Ireland).

Vertical dance uses rock-climbing equipment to suspend dancers off the ground on a range of vertical surfaces. The ability to incorporate vertical as well as horizontal paths allows for innovations in choreography and enables exploration of space and movement in three dimensions.

The Century of Dance



Valeska Gert, ca. 1925
Photo: Courtesy of Akademie der Künste

The exhibition and installation *Das Jahrhundert des Tanzes (The Century of Dance)* brings together materials from German dance archives and international performances, focusing on the heritage of Isadora Duncan, Mary Wigman and Valeska Gert through to Anne Teresa De Keersmaeker and Xavier Le Roy. This retrospective of 20th-century modern dance shows how new images of the body, choreographic concepts and perception levels have

evolved since the beginning of the century. Opened on August 25, the exhibition runs to September 21 at the Akademie der Künste in Berlin.

Orders of Canada

Among the 57 new members of the Order of Canada are Mark Godden, for “creative contributions as a dancer and as a choreographer for many great Canadian dance companies”; Chan Hon Goh, for “excellence in ballet as a principal dancer, artistic director and cultural ambassador”; and Linda Rabin, for “sustained commitment to the world of choreography and as a leader of contemporary dance education for generations of dancers.”

Artistic Director on the Move

After more than a decade at the helm of Ballet BC, Emily Molnar will take on the artistic directorship of Nederlands Dans Theater in The Hague in August 2020. She will succeed Paul Lightfoot. According to the NDT press release, "Molnar follows her passion to nurture artists and choreographers, research the development of dance and artistic leadership, and explore and support the role of artists in society. NDT and the Supervisory Board confidently look forward to the start of Molnar's plans to usher in NDT's seventh decade." Molnar will remain with Ballet BC until June 2020.



Emily Molnar
Photo: Michael Slobodian

Artistic Director Farewells

Toronto Dance Theatre has announced the departure of artistic director Christopher House at the end of the 2019-2020 season, after what will be 26 years leading one of Canada's oldest and most respected contemporary troupes. House joined TDT as a performer in 1979 after graduating from York University's bachelor of fine arts dance program, where he had already begun to choreograph. He became TDT's resident choreographer in 1981. The farewell season will include a performance by House in the solo *I'll Crane for You* by American postmodern dance icon Deborah Hay.



Christopher House
Photo: David Leyes

The artistic director of the Australian Ballet, David McAllister, is stepping down after two decades in the role. McAllister will depart at the end of 2020, his 20th year at the helm. Of his decision to leave, McAllister said, "This has been a process that I have been working with the chair on for a couple of years and I am thrilled to be able to share the news more widely." McAllister has been a part of the Australian Ballet both as a student, dancer and artistic director for almost 40 years.

Terrence S. Orr, artistic director of Pittsburgh Ballet Theatre for 22 years, will retire next June after the company concludes its 50th anniversary season. Under his leadership, Orr expanded the repertoire with more than 20 new commissions and dozens of acquisitions, and provided a platform for emerging choreographers, including some from within the company. A California native, Orr began his dance career at San Francisco Ballet and went on to a celebrated career at American Ballet Theatre, rising from the corps de ballet to principal dancer.

In Flight/On Ice

For the first time in its history, the Jacob's Pillow Dance Festival included a performance by an ice-dancing troupe: Ice Dance International (IDI), who performed *In Flight* at the Pillow's outdoor Inside/Out stage in July. It was performed on a synthetic ice surface of interlocking polymer panels that mimics the properties of ice and can be skated on with professional metal blades.

Led by artistic director Douglas Webster, six members of Maine-based IDI performed three works inspired by flight (i.e., birds and space) and set to music by Ralph Vaughan Williams, Chet Baker and Max Richter.

Among IDI's international performers were six-time Great Britain Ice Dance Champion and two-time Olympian Sinead Kerr, eight-time international medalist and two-time Olympian from Turkey Alper Uçar, and Azerbaijan National Champion Nadine Ahmed Kerr.



Ice Dance International's Jonathon Hunt, Carly Donowick, Beata Handra and Joel Dear in Douglas Webster's *In the Light*
Photo: Diana Dumbadse

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INSIDE ED

Developing Performance Cues

BY STUART ANDERSON

Performers commonly face many challenges, including the pressure to perform well, with changes in quality generally caused by changes in mental control. Performance psychology is the study and application of mental skills and tools that lead to optimal performance and consistency in quality.

Research has validated several common traits among peak performers, such as:

- high self-confidence and expectation of success (which is not the same as arrogance)
- self-regulation of anxiety
- feeling in control
- total focus on the present task
- viewing difficult situations as challenging and exciting
- flexible attitude that enables learning from mistakes
- positive thoughts about performance.

Several tools can be used to develop these traits, including self-talk, attentional control techniques, imagery, visualization and positive pre-performance routines. These tools can be helpful for enhancing task-specific confidence, increasing resilience in difficult situations and enhancing perception of control over the performance outcome. The goal is for the performer to have the ability to self-regulate — which means they have developed the skills to adjust to situations, and to maintain focus and confidence.

One popular tool is the use of a cue word. This can be used in a variety of ways, including to facilitate technical skills, to re-set focus after a negative or positive event, or to affect mood or pre-performance mindset.

The selection of a cue word is often best chosen based upon how the word makes the performer feel, and a particular word may be more useful for some than others. Cues are usually a word whose quality mirrors the desired movement or outcome. For example, “glide” and “blast” are action-orientated cue words, facilitating different qualities.

Using a phrase may be helpful for relaxation, when action is less immediate — these are often called mantras and are commonly used as a type of meditative practice.

Increasing sensory input of the chosen tool creates a richer experience for the mind to emulate. For example, it can be helpful to pair cue words with a mental image, which can enrich the sensory experience of the cue. I often refer to this pairing as a “key.” Imagery can help stimulate the centres of the brain associated with specific movements. This could include an internal image of how movement would feel physically, such as the feeling of the stage floor. A dancer could pair the feeling of pushing off the stage to leap with a cue such as “blast” or “spring” to facilitate greater focus in the moment of delivery. However, it is advisable to avoid complexity of cognitive effort in a given moment. With practise, the cue may shift from being technically orientated to more evocative of the feeling a performer wants to experience while dancing the movement.

Sequences of images can also be visualized to (re-)create experiences in the mind, a process often termed visualization. This process is often best achieved by bringing attention to the details of sensory input in a specific scenario. If a dancer is building visualization skills, they might think of the complexity of the scene they are building as a muscle that needs to be built over time to best emulate the real experience — this is described as a mental rehearsal. It should often be done in real-time (the same as the real performance) and with the positive feeling of the ideal performance in mind.

Building a high-performance mindset requires developing self-regulation skills that enable dancers to be resilient, confident and focused. This can be further enhanced by working on the mind-body relationship, and developing practices that build on some of the ideas presented here. *DI*

Vancouver-based Stuart Anderson recently designed the Performance Psychology curriculum for the degree program at London’s Royal Ballet School. He is a past president of Healthy Dancer Canada. www.andersonperformanceclinic.com

GLOBAL REPORTS



BY KAIJA PEPPER

Over the last decade, several Arts Umbrella dance program graduates have turned up on the Ballet BC roster as apprentices or company members, which makes the program's year-end performances the place to go for talent spotting.

The May shows, held downtown at the Playhouse, also offer a good mix of choreographic talent, including pieces by established artists whose work is not otherwise often seen in Vancouver, if at all. Once again this year, a rare sighting of a piece by Swedish master Mats Ek (mounted by Rafael Sady) was on the bill, though disappointingly not on the opening evening I attended.

We were, however, treated to a closing piece, *Scene Study*, by a younger, Canadian master, Crystal Pite, who worked with what appeared to be all 59 senior members of the Arts Umbrella Dance Company. This is not the first time Vancouver-based Pite has been in the studio with Arts Umbrella's dancers; on this occasion, she was reportedly developing movement for her Paris Opera Ballet premiere in October.

The study began with a duet in the full-body synch style she has been developing, where attention to detail and timing is crucial. The movement is set in tight synchronicity to a recorded voice over. Then the action grows and the stage fills, quietly at first, culminating in a tsunami of bodies heaving together in close and precisely choreographed crescendos of movement, in which each individual is a crucial part of the power of the greater, breathtaking, whole.

The opening piece, *Midnight's Children*, created by Vancouver's Wen Wei Wang for the company in 2013, provided an opportunity for individuals to shine. Eight men in black found the dramatic pulse that propels the choreography, as well as nailing the attitude — this is one of those dark sexy pieces that young performers tend to relish, set to an electronic score by Ben Frost. Their urgent movement suggested something important was at stake.

Earlier, as part of the Dance Centre's lineup of free events on International Dance Day, April 29, *Dust*, by emerging artists Francesca Frewer and Erika Mitsuhashi was at the Faris Family

Studio. The solo was performed by Frewer, an engaging dancer who we've recently seen working with Company 605. *Dust* was beautifully staged, set within a fragile room constructed of white paper walls and floor, and enriched by Daniel O'Shea's new media projections and a score by electroacoustic musician Adam Asnan.

Dust only lacked a sense of momentum or pacing. In the program note, Frewer and Mitsuhashi state their "interest in formal experimentation and in exploring the function of dance in performance." Focused on these research questions, *Dust* hovered in an intellectual headspace and didn't quite take off theatrically.

Austrian Simon Mayer, a former member of the Vienna State Opera Ballet and also a singer and songwriter with his own band, Rising Halfmoon, reports that through folkdance he found a way "back to the pleasure of dancing." This allowed him to explore issues around history, society and, in his 2014 work *Sons of Sissy*, gender. *Sissy* is an old-fashioned slur referring to a cowardly or feminine man, though the title is also a



reference to Empress Elisabeth of Austria, who was nicknamed Sisi. Her only son, Crown Prince Rudolf, committed suicide (as is well-known to balletgoers who have seen Kenneth MacMillan's tragic *Mayerling*), but it is perhaps her reputation for fighting courtly protocol that is relevant here.

In *Sons of Sissy*, presented at the Faris Family Studio in April, Mayer was joined by Matteo Haitzmann, Patric Redl and Manuel Wagner in a delightful display of the schuhplattler (the traditional Bavarian dance performed in leather shorts, with its slapping of feet, thighs and knees); traditional and traditionally inspired music and song (performed live by the dancers using accordion, cello and two violins); and the male body, nude for a good part of the time.

The quartet of men are talented musicians, singers and dancers, whether clothed or nude, and *Sons of Sissy* is a feast of voices, music, bodies, breath, in which folk song and dance are sites of investigation but also of theatrical expression.

In Realwheels' *Act of Faith*, a thoughtful drama by playwright Janet Munsil that explores faith-based healing, director Rena Cohen made room for two brief interludes where dance neatly sets the scene. At the opening, choreographer

Carolina Bergonzoni orchestrated the cast, in wheelchairs, to swoop around the Vancouver East Cultural Centre stage, gracefully establishing their interconnected relationships. Later, a few simple but well-placed port de bras evoked a whole religious setting.

Finally, at the end of June, Matriarchs Uprising celebrated contemporary Indigenous female artists. Olivia C. Davies, an artist-in-residence at the Vancouver Dance Centre, programmed three evening double bills featuring solos by local and international artists. The work by the more experienced performers was both politically and aesthetically astute, creating a generous theatrical space that was a pleasure to share.

One of those established artists was Mariaa Randall, of the Bundjalung and Yaegl people in Australia. In her *Painting the Dance*, Randall used her own body, covered in paint, to create an abstract work of art on one wall of the 8EAST retail store and community meeting place. She claimed the space and our attention with grace and authority in a performance art ritual that made the body's gestures and steps concrete in the form of colourful swirls and jabs, handprints and footprints, on the black cardboard canvas covering one wall. It was a statement of presence that made you want to listen and find out more, as

indeed was possible in the artist's Q&A that followed.

The second night, Santee Smith, from the Kahnyen'kehàka (Mohawk) Nation, was also transformed, and transformative, in her performance of *Blood, Water, Earth*. Smith, the founding artistic director of Toronto's Kaha:wi Dance Theatre, is well-known as a skillful contemporary dancer and choreographer. In this superbly produced feminist statement, she boldly and beautifully stages various states of womanhood, described in the program note as "warrior, leader, mother, and huntress."

Supporting Smith was a top-notch team of designers, too many to name here, who provided vocals, music and costume. A key collaborator was Maori video artist Louise Potiki Bryant: her film provided bigger-than-life images of Smith on location in Aotearoa (New Zealand), striding through water and rocky caves in the same red dress she wore onstage. The film filled the back wall of the Faris Family black box theatre, the scale of its crisp cinematic images sometimes dominating attention, but never for long because Smith, though merely life size, moved with such fluid and certain power. Her considerable ballet training informs but does not derail the bigger project here, which demands a less studied expression that speaks about Indigenous and feminist identity.

Opening the evening was Michelle Olson, the artistic director of Vancouver-based Raven Spirit Dance, who is from the Tl'ondek Hwech'in First Nation in Yukon. In her 15-minute solo titled *Frost Exploding Trees Moon*, created with Floyd Favel some years ago, Olson embodies a woman travelling her trap line as she finds a place to set up camp for the night, represented by a few sticks with which she creates a shelter.

There is nothing glamorous in this portrait of an ordinary woman in a workaday dress and moccasins; instead, Olson etched each moment quietly and deeply in space as it might actually be lived out in the wilderness. *Frost Exploding Trees Moon* shone with its own physical truths that seemed free of urban self-consciousness. ❖

Arts Umbrella Dance Company's Jacob Williams and Juan Duarte in Wen Wei Wang's *Midnight's Children*
Photo: David Cooper

Q Dance's latest mixed bill was its first comprised exclusively of world premieres, all choreographed by artistic director Peter Quanz. The Ontario-born dance artist is continuing to carve out his career in Canada as well as China, where he has worked extensively for the last five years. In August, Wuxi Song and Dance Theatre premiered his full-length ballet *Lost* in Wuxi, China, and will tour the production across Canada and the U.S. this October. Quanz returns to China for two months in November to create a work for Harbin Ballet.

Back home in June, the four-performance run of premieres at Winnipeg's intimate Gas Station Arts Centre featured an expanded company, including returning Royal Winnipeg Ballet members Liam Caines, Philippe-Alexandre Jacques, Alanna McAdie and Yosuke Mino, joined by newly retired RWB principal Jo-Ann Sundermeier and soloist Josh Reynolds. The 55-minute show also featured contemporary dancer Kathleen Hiley, creating a fascinating mélange of classical-meets-contemporary choreographic styles.

One of Quanz's most compelling pas de deux, *Wistful*, set to Rachmaninoff's *Vocalise, Op. 34. No. 14*, became a searing parting gift for Sundermeier (one of QD's founding members) and Reynolds. The American husband-and-wife team returned to the U.S. immediately following the run to raise their daughter, Ayla, closer to family in New Orleans, as well as to join New Orleans Ballet Theatre.

The seven-minute duet performed in soft ballet slippers ranged from tender embraces and enthralling lifts, to tension-filled pushes and pulls away from each other that infused the work with vulnerability, becoming a testament to intimate human relationships. It showcased Sundermeier's pristine classical technique, pliable spine and spot-on musicality, with a final ecstatic image of the ballerina held aloft by her partner, her graceful arms arching like tree limbs into the darkness.

The program opened with ensemble piece *Sprezzatura* — translated from Italian as “studied carelessness” — set to a pastiche Baroque score, with six dancers, dressed in checkerboard jumpsuits and black-and-white slippers, leaping and spinning in a joyous combustion of kinetic movement.



Winnipeg

BY HOLLY HARRIS

Special mention goes to Caines and Jacques' powerhouse pas de deux, taut with tension, with each dancer taking turns carrying the other

on their back while crawling on all fours. This section's dark imagery, in which they push and heave their chests, became difficult to watch, however, and the entire work felt disjointed, despite some levity and emotional counterbalance provided by the men bounding about the stage like frantic Keystone Cops.

Earlier at the Gas Station Arts Centre, Gearshifting Performance Works wrapped up its season with the premiere of *Schemas 1-5*, choreographed by founding artistic director Jolene Bailie, who begins her appointment as artistic director of Winnipeg's Contemporary Dancers this fall.

The 55-minute show was performed to a collage score unfolding as a series of five “schemas” stamped with Bailie's trademark humour and ability to craft graphic visuals both bold and beautiful, as witnessed in her 2013 *Hybrid Human*. She has continued to mine those images with her latest creation, in many ways the flipside to *Hybrid Human*, in which the earlier dancers dressed in black body stockings and masks now appear in beige leotards, heightening the sense of witnessing living sculpture.

The show was most potent with its imagery of dancers covered in fluttering rose petals, or a rustling white tarp cast over the stage suggesting clouds, a snowy landscape or a burial shroud. However, its poeticism begins to devolve as larger ensembles break into smaller quartets, trios and duos that deflate the energy. And its decidedly absurd Last schema, with dancers yelling to punctuate stacks of falling dinner plates, felt obtuse and left this viewer stumped. ▮

Quanz interweaves a series of solos and smaller ensembles into his geometrical patterning, spotlighting his dancers' unique strengths and personalities: McAdie's intricate footwork, hops, skips, floor slides and quicksilver shifts of direction; Mino's bounding leaps that pop like a champagne cork and his palpable joy performing with his real-life partner McAdie; and Sundermeier and Reynolds' simpatico artistry manifested in suspended lifts and molten partnering, grounded in Quanz's signature “wiggles.” A male pas de trois highlighted the rugged athleticism of Jacques, Caines and Reynolds, juxtaposed with sculptural poses evoking the choreographer's 2011 *Rodin/Claudel* for Les Grands Ballets Canadiens de Montréal. The dancers embodied the score's tightly knit polyphonic lines as music made visible.

The final offering, *Musings*, inspired by solo accordion and double bass recordings Quanz discovered in a vintage CD shop, is structured primarily as two solos for Hiley, dressed in a blood-red dress, augmented by ensembles featuring Caines, Jacques and Mino, in pedestrian dark trousers and white shirts. *Musings* showcased the dramatic sensibility of the barefooted Hiley, who performed Quanz's contemporary dance vernacular, including body isolations, gnarly hands that twist like Spanish floreo, wide sweeps across the stage, percussive kicks and tumbleweed rolls, with the passion of a woman possessed. Seeing the three ballet dancers merge with the modern artist for their final quartet was icing on the cake.

Toronto



BY MICHAEL CRABB

James Kudelka was prompted to choreograph *Four Old Legs* by his desire to perform with an admired dancer he has known for years, Evelyn Hart. As the project unfurled, Kudelka chose instead to cast the much younger Zhenya Cerneacov, who had been working as Kudelka's rehearsal stand-in, as Hart's partner.

The hour-long work, presented by Laurence Lemieux's Citadel + Compagnie, is a series of pas de deux, danced to a playlist of music of personal significance to Kudelka. The songs function literally, abstractly and poetically as markers in the history of a long relationship. The choreography transports this long-term couple on a time-travelling journey that is personal in detail yet universal in implication. Some of its most telling moments are minimally choreographed, relying on potent gestures that suffuse the piece with a kind of melancholy tempered by emotional resilience.

In terms of new, locally produced work, it was the highpoint in a winter/spring season marked by a number of revivals, among them Peggy Baker's *unmoored* and Christopher House's *Marienbad*. There was, however, a welcome influx of dance from away.

Ballet BC arrived for its first stand-alone Toronto engagement in years, to dance in the perfectly scaled 870-seat Bluma Appel Theatre. A triple bill comprising Medhi Walerski's *Petite Cérémonie*, artistic director Emily Molnar's *To this day* and Crystal Pite's *Solo Echo* was a useful reminder of what a strong and viscerally compelling ensemble Ballet BC has become under Molnar's leadership.

From overseas, Eifman Ballet returned to deliver Toronto's fourth dose of the 73-year-old Russian choreographer's over-the-top psycho-drama in the form of *Tchaikovsky. PRO and CONTRA*, a revised version of Eifman's account of the troubled life of his favourite composer. There's no denying that the company's hyper-athletic dancers, in combination with Eifman's flair for grand theatrical effects, has the impact of an adrenalin shot.

Eifman's loose-with-the-facts contention is that Tchaikovsky was tortured by his homosexuality, which explains his often angst-ridden music. Eifman provides the composer with a haunting alter ego who appears in a variety of guises as characters from Tchaikovsky's ballets and operas. The whole business is done in little more than two hours. If only all dramatic ballets

adhered to the same economy.

Like Eifman, Israeli choreographer Ohad "Mr. Gaga" Naharin has a strong local following. He first brought Batsheva Dance Company to Toronto in the early years of his artistic directorship in 1995. Batsheva returned in 2012 under the auspices of Toronto's Luminato festival and again in 2017 and 2019 thanks to Sony Centre's dance-loving former programming head, Mark Hammond.

Naharin's 2017 work, *Venezuela*, bears many of his hallmarks, primarily an enigmatic obliqueness and unfettered emotional rawness. In form and content, however, *Venezuela* has considerable rigour. It poses intriguing questions, notably about memory and perception.

Venezuela consists of a series of episodes that lasts roughly 40 minutes. Then, without a break, the entire choreography is repeated with different music, lighting and leading dancers. There are subtle modulations of speed, effort and emotional tone. Where the recorded soundtrack for the first part includes Gregorian chant, the second is a more raucous electronic mix. Both include Notorious B.I.G.'s rap song *Dead Wrong*, except it's the dancers who voice the lyrics in the first half while their voices are drowned out when the actual

recording is played in the second. Its tone of defiance is echoed elsewhere in a dance that suggests, whether hopping or tangoing, a determination to keep moving on in a crazy, chaotic world.

More abstractly, *Venezuela* becomes a test of perception. Has movement seen in the first part been substantively altered in the second? Or might it look so because of the change of music and dynamics? Does music shape how we perceive choreography and, if so, then how much agency does the choreography really have?

The presenting resources of the Luminato festival — its 13th annual edition was held in June — have often provided the opportunity to see the kind of culturally diverse dance that otherwise would be unlikely to reach Toronto.

La Compañía del Cuerpo de Indias, from Cartagena, Colombia, is a performing outgrowth of the city's pioneering El Colegio del Cuerpo, founded in 1997 by Álvaro Restrepo and Marie France Delieuvin to offer dance as a form of self-expression for underprivileged youngsters. *Flowers for Kazuo Ohno (and Leonard Cohen)* is a 90-minute work Restrepo conceived and co-choreographed with Delieuvin and company member/school co-director Ricardo Bustamante. It simultaneously pays tribute to the legendary Japanese butoh master and the iconic Canadian poet/singer/songwriter. Cohen's songs, heard in his own voice and in covers, provide a mood-shifting accompaniment to choreography that gently references, without imitating, Ohno's aesthetic and his personal admiration for the great flamenco dancer La Argentina. Ohno's and Cohen's shared admiration for the writing of Andalusia's Federico García Lorca provides the improbable artistic link.

Luminato programmers vaulted daunting diplomatic hurdles to secure the appearance of Peacock Contemporary Dance Company's production of celebrated Chinese choreographer Yang Liping's *Rite of Spring*. She reimagines Stravinsky's famous score within the context of east Asian aesthetics. The richly costumed result is visually spectacular and the dancers, mostly women, are admirable, but it requires a familiarity with Tibetan/Buddhist cosmology to fully appreciate the extent of Liping's boldly revisionist approach.

Toronto-based Lua Shayenne Dance Company's new work, *KIRA, The Path / La Voie*, co-presented by Luminato, featured hypnotically sensational drumming by djembe virtuoso Fara Tolno, who also choreographed Shayenne and her fellow performers in an uplifting display of West African dance.

At the National Ballet of Canada, life went on as usual, with a thrilling all-William Forsythe program called Physical Thinking that included company premieres of *The Vertiginous Thrill of Exactitude* — think Balanchine on steroids — and the almost minimalist but equally exacting *Approximate Sonata 2016* together with the latest revival of *The Second Detail*, made for the National Ballet in 1991.

If any program could better demonstrate how well the company dances, it's hard to imagine what that would be; certainly not British choreographer Ronald Hynd's *The Merry Widow*, which closed the season.

With predictable and formulaic choreography, it's more a costume parade than

a ballet. But audiences love superficial glitter and stories that don't make your brain hurt, so it's hardly surprising that this gilded Hynd sold better than Forsythe. And, as it happened, it proved a not unsuitable valedictory vehicle for Xiao Nan Yu.

Yu, who joined the National Ballet as an apprentice in 1996 and became a principal in 2001, is in many respects the epitome of a prima ballerina. Apart from natural beauty, Yu has enormous grace, poise and an innate spiritual gravitas that allows her to imbue even as fluffy a role as the widow, Hanna Glawari, with unfathomable depth. Yu is never showy. There has always been a faint aura of mystery about her central to her allure.

There were tears and cheers amid the 15-minute standing ovation that followed her June 22 final performance. Endless flowers were presented, with lots of hugs and kisses. Her husband and two daughters joined Yu onstage. It was an emotional climax. Yu somehow managed to keep her cool to the last curtain drop; a class act to the very end. ▀

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Montreal

BY VICTOR SWOBODA

Other than *The Nutcracker*, Les Grands Ballets Canadiens has not danced a classical ballet in this century, so I welcomed seeing *Giselle*, in an adaptation of Petipa's version, by artistic director Ivan Cavallari. One need not slavishly imitate Petipa, but I found some of Cavallari's Act One innovations questionable.

At curtain's rise, for example, Hilarion launched into a virtuoso solo that seemed more princely than peasant-like, especially when interpreted by the splendid Célestin Boutin. A confused ensemble piece with villagers and nobles brought to mind passengers scurrying at a busy airport. One of four casts, Yui Sugawara as Giselle and Alessio Scognamiglio as Albrecht, strove for, but did not quite achieve, the requisite romantic rapport, a task not helped by charmless minimalist décor. They connected far better in their partnering in Act Two, which also featured a fine flurry of Wilis.

Cavallari's May program of seven short works featured four pieces by some of his dancers who had created promising works in past years for the dancers' independently produced talent showcase called *À suivre*. Glimpses of wit peeked through in *Fukuoka*, a duet by the

choreographic trio Marcos Morau, Lorena Nogal and Marina Rodriguez, who made visual fun intertwining the limbs of two dancers dressed in matching white costumes with black polka dots.

One highly successful piece, which unquestionably merited inclusion in the company repertoire, was *Doma*, a male-female duet by Vera Kvarcáková and Jérémy Galdeano, who had premiered its jerky, quirky gestures at *À suivre* last year. With Emma Garau Cima and Raphaël Bouchard in the roles, *Doma*'s terse, economical vocabulary, so reminiscent of Mats Ek's, powerfully presented the progress of a man and woman dealing with each other's emotional problems. All of the May program's works were interpreted with the individuality that characterizes Les Grands' dancers, but with little exception aside from *Doma*, the choreography was elementary at best.

Les Grands' dancers had more compelling choreography in their season-ending Evening of Stars, which also featured guest artists. Interpreted by Boutin and Emily He, *Blushing* by Peter Quanz was a riveting 2014 duet with a wealth of intricately co-ordinated details. Her tiny beats while held in his arms, and his high jumps with an unusually extended leg, constituted part of an expressive dialogue that never faltered. Quanz's work has often been seen in Montreal, but *Blushing* marked a new maturity.

Hervé Courtain, ending 27 years with the company, interpreted an excerpt from Mauro Bigonzetti's *Four Seasons* with the unruffled elegance that characterized his long Montreal career. He was warmly applauded, but there was none of the pomp that many large companies provide for their retiring veterans.

BJM Danse revealed a raunchy duet, *Soul*, by Andonis Foniadakis, which will be part of its fall 2019 show. To the song *Ball & Chain*, Elijah Labay lifted Céline Cassone high overhead or swung her to and fro in an athletic apache dance — shallow, yes, but sexy and entertaining. International guest stars exuberantly rode some classical warhorses from *Paquita*, *Esmeralda* and *Corsaire*, which pleased an audience that had not seen these oldies but goodies since the demise of the Gala des Étoiles several years ago.

The Festival TransAmériques (FTA) in May again brought an opportunity to observe world dance. Serge Aimé Coulibaly, born in Burkina Faso but immersed in European contemporary dance aesthetics, presented Faso Danse Theatre in *Kalakuta Republik*, a two-part commentary on colonialist influences. If the first half's choreography created a sense of order, the second half had a freedom of movement that suggested an urge to achieve liberty even to the point of violence, as when a dancer began throwing chairs in the kind of scene reminiscent of Alain Patel's les ballets C de la B, where Coulibaly once danced. The work, Coulibaly declared, was inspired by a 2014 uprising in Burkina Faso. There was an ironic ambiguity about an African choreographer using a foreign idiom to express concern over foreign influences in his country.

Lebanese-born Ali Chahrour, too, learned contemporary dance in Europe, but remains based in Lebanon, where he promotes avant-garde approaches. His solo, *May He Rise and Smell the Fragrance*, which ruminated on mourning and on the nature of the afterlife, was rooted in Islamic faith. A sombre, slow-moving work unfolding in gloom with an onstage musical accompaniment of traditional stringed instruments, the solo breathed a gravity equal to its subject. One did not have to share the choreographer's religious convictions to feel the work's deep spirituality.

Unfold / 7 Perspectives by veteran Montreal dancemaker Danièle Desnoyers had the kind of too-loud machine-like throbbing soundscape that has plagued Montreal dance for years. The seven dancers initially moved snail-like between and under two rows of parallel benches. After an over-long period, the benches were put in a square. Dancers became more animated. After another lengthy period, the benches were pushed to opposite sides. Dancers then moved quickly, enjoying their liberty from enclosed environments in short, captivating duets, which Desnoyers characteristically does well. The symbolism was clear yet the transitions from one state to another unfolded without organic connection and so facily that liberty seemed won without effort. Like Coulibaly, Desnoyers needed to throw some chairs. *DI*

Seattle's spring was rich in premieres that found the intersection of the personal and political. Spectrum Dance Theater presented the Wokeness Festival, three weeks of lectures and performances, in which artistic director Donald Byrd added to his canon of politically themed works with *Strange Fruit*, addressing the history of lynching in the United States.

The work follows three Black main characters, danced by Nia-Amina Minor, Michele Dooley and Mikhail Calliste, as they struggle to survive a mob in sinister white fabric masks. Soft-toned dresses and slacks place the dance work in rural 1930s' America.

The movement speaks in metaphors that barely coalesce into a tangible storyline before shifting, creating an abstract narrative that could be telling a thousand people's stories. When the masked mob swept past, Dooley and Calliste buckled as if shot. Dooley ran in place as an unending circling of white masks surrounded her; she was passed back and forth between several of the men, her feet dragging uncooperatively beneath her.

Even without use of stage combat, Byrd's choreography is entrenched in violence. Technical and exacting, the mob is relentlessly serene. Limbs slicing and heels stepping, the mobsters were both sharp as knives and completely perfunctory, as if just going about their daily lives, making their implied violence uncanny and terrifying. In contrast, the three main characters performed with a deep expression of humanity, their choreography showcasing both virtuosity and nuanced presence.

Calliste, in particular, was extraordinary; one moment he was floating in a perfectly balanced pirouette, the next he appeared to unhinge his head from his body, neck lolling in a grotesque image.

Dani Tirrell's *FagGod* also focused on historical travesty, but with a very different approach. Taking over the winding hallways and community rooms of Langston Hughes Performing Arts Institute, spoken word artists Naa Akua and Anastacia-Reneé Tolbert led small groups through an intimate cross-disciplinary response to the HIV/AIDS epidemic.

Turning a corner, the audience came upon Tirrell embodying a tender moment from a bathhouse; later, Tirrell was seen in repose, portraying final moments from

a dying queer who swears they have one more dance left. A video played recordings of flippant commentary from the White House pressroom, as dates on the screen ticked away years of government inaction.

The audience regrouped into a participatory dance party, recalling the disco club culture that has long been sanctuary for the gay community. In each scene, physicality and poetry came together to drop the audience into a specificity of time and place that brought the epidemic to searing life.

Two other intimate works, this time at Velocity Dance Center, delivered the audience into the individual lives of the creators. In preparation for his solo, *Parts to a Sum*, veteran choreographer Mark Haim

Neve Mazique-Bianco, known for disability justice arts, is a rising figure in the Seattle scene. Through performance and regular classes, they have increased accessibility and widened perception about what bodies are involved in dance. Mazique-Bianco's *Lover of Low Creatures* is a semi-autobiographical theatre-dance piece that uncovers the world of a curious and magical 11-year-old. Puppetry, spoken word and music help tell the story, but the dancing is where Mazique-Bianco's body gets to speak for itself. Combining aesthetic gesture with practical negotiation of their wheelchair, we are told a story not of overcoming disability, but of integration and belonging.

Politics played a role more unexpectedly in Ligia Lewis' *Sorrow Swag* at On the



Seattle
BY KAITLIN MCCARTHY

gathered short dance phrases from 370 friends, and performed them in age order — starting with the 93-year-old's contribution and ending with the one-year-old's.

At first, his movement was economical, a gentle arm circle embodying the fragility of age. Pedestrian actions, like moving a bicycle, were performed with equal gravity to balletic dance sequences submitted by his students. By the end, Haim bounced with the floppy ease of a child.

The choreography on its own is unremarkable, but knowing the concept makes all the difference. Watching the movements get progressively younger sparks reflection on one's own life and all the people who fill it with richness. The audience chuckled and cheered throughout, creating a profoundly communal experience.

Boards. Despite extensive documentation and the world-class reputation of both performer and presenting institution, the solo's dancer was denied a temporary work visa when he arrived at customs in Seattle. Lewis reworked *Sorrow Swag* at the last minute as a solo for herself, but the commentary on race and gender integral to the piece were unavoidably affected by the shift in casting.

Increasing restrictions on border crossings have become a rising problem for arts presenters and this latest incident is a blatant example of national infringement on the sharing of culture and ideas. With the exacerbated disparity between the government and the people, it is no wonder political works are so prevalent. ^{DI}



New York

BY ROBERT GRESKOVIC

Dance Theatre of Harlem's four-day spring run at New York City Center celebrated the company's 50th anniversary. The co-founders — former New York City Ballet principal dancer Arthur Mitchell and ballet teacher Karel Shook — guided the company to international fame. Shook was with the company until his death in 1985, and Mitchell, who died last year, until 2009, when he was succeeded by current artistic director and former DTH principal dancer Virginia Johnson.

Mitchell, who was not visible at the company's performances after he was replaced by Johnson, was much honoured during the run, with a film tribute shown as part of the mixed bills, which included a string of short works and excerpts spanning DTH history at the gala opening, which I was unable to attend.

The mixed bill I did attend was a more typical one for today's DTH. Resident choreographer Robert Garland created the bill's bright-toned opener, simply named *Nyman String Quartet No. 2*. Though Michael Nyman's music provides little motor inspiration beyond a kind of

relentlessness, Garland's choreography is challenging and witty with gestural inflections and flair. Pamela Allen-Cummings' costuming has the look of stylish athletic wear. Especially in the free but formal dimensions of Christopher Charles McDaniel's performance, Garland's ballet entertained and engaged.

Tones II, a reimagined version of Mitchell's 1971 ballet, *Tones*, represented a kind of rapprochement between DTH and Mitchell, as, not long before his death, the choreographer worked directly with the DTH dancers who would perform it. With its dry, somewhat dissonant score by Tania León, the 14-dancer, 17-minute showcase, lovingly restaged by former DTH dancers Lorraine Graves and Caroline Rocher, presented the current company with challenges that held out a goal of rigorous, cool classicism at its most bare bones. There is an air of Balanchinean sparseness to Mitchell's often stark choreography,

and while *Tones II* is more classroom-like than theatrical, it was touching to see Mitchell aim to inspire these DTH dancers in a decidedly formal direction.

Later in the quarter, American Ballet Theatre's Metropolitan Opera House season, eight weeks this year, marked the 10th anniversary of its artist in residence, Alexei Ratmansky. In addition to three multi-act ballets by Ratmansky — *Harlequinade*, *Whipped Cream* and *The Sleeping Beauty* — the choreographer was honoured with a Ratmansky Trio mixed bill on which, following its world premiere at a gala held in his honour, the choreographer unveiled his newest ABT creation: *The Seasons*, to Alexander Glazunov's score of the same name and following the scheme of the ballet's original 1900 production by Marius Petipa.

Preceding *The Seasons*, two earlier Ratmansky works were presented. *Songs of Bukovina*, from 2017, in response to its folkish piano music by Leonid Desyatnikov, features a central couple and four subsidiary ones, suggesting a bucolic gathering of Eastern European folk. On the grand Met stage, *Songs* looked a bit lost and strung out, though Isabella Boylston

made something memorable of the leading woman's role.

On the Dnieper, from 2009 and set to a little-known score by Sergei Prokofiev, first staged as a ballet in 1932, gives ABT a worthy one-act ballet showcase. Cory Stearns led the first cast poetically, taking the conflicts of the ballet's torn central man, Sergei, a soldier, and filling out the classical choreography with a dramatic edge and a notable degree of elegance. Amid its strong surrounding cast, with Hee Seo as the febrile Natalia (who loses Sergei's love to Olga, her rival) making good work of her role, a stand-out mime performance came from the inimitable Martine van Hamel as the mother of Olga (danced reliably by Christine Shevchenko).

Especially effective was *On the Dnieper*'s simple but evocative scenery by Simon Pastukh, which uses moveable sections of wooden fencing and freestanding blossoming trees to fine ends.

The Seasons, an ambitiously scaled 40-minute ballet with a cast of 70 (including 8 students from ABT's Jacqueline Kennedy Onassis School), lacked a setting; something along the lines of Pastukh's set for the Prokofiev ballet would likely have lifted the work from a complex confection to a more momentous one.

Winter gets the ballet off to a lustrous and athletic start, especially with the youthful and well-schooled Aran Bell as the central figure, framed by four solo women and a 12-woman ensemble. Soon, however, with a playful dash for two JKO School students as a pair of Gnomes, the individual seasons start to look less eventful.

A central Summer ballerina role called the Spirit of the Corn challenges its interpreters, and Boylston rose to the occasion confidently. However, opposite a prominent male character identified as Zephyr, the Summer ballerina performs a lyrically accompanied pas de deux that looked somewhat knotty and lost on a big empty stage.

By the end, for a marvellously shaped full-cast grouping against a starry firmament lighting effect, *The Seasons* becomes a focused spectacle. It's too bad that much of what comes before that looked distracted and overly spread out once Winter had come and gone. *DI*



BY ANNE-MARIE ELMBY

April brought a new piece to the Royal Danish Ballet — *AFTERITE*, created by England's Wayne McGregor in 2018 for American Ballet Theatre, to Igor Stravinsky's *Sacre du Printemps*. It fascinated with a thrilling choreography perfectly executed by 13 dancers in neutral costumes. The narrative elements were emotionally disturbing, and left a lot of unanswered questions about the choreography's futuristic community and its strange rite. A ballet to Stravinsky's score will inevitably bring to mind earlier *Sacre* ballets, which McGregor has acknowledged in an interview, explaining that he was also inspired by contemporary issues such as concern over humankind's future.

AFTERITE began with a male duet where one man was clearly the aggressor. Two young girls (brought in from the company's ballet school) moved about in a large hydroponic greenhouse, where plants can grow without soil. Behind it, Ravi Deepres' projections from the barren Atacama Desert in Chile flickered on a backdrop of vertical plastic strips. A mother figure, danced with great sensitivity by Ji Min Hong, appeared and at one point a hood was put over her head, while a group formed a fierce circle around her. She sent away one girl and protected the other with her body against the rhythmically prostrating group, but the inevitable sacrifice still happened. The child disappeared in smoke in the greenhouse, where one

would think plants would perish, too. Only then did the mother thrust the head aggressor to the ground, leaving her deserted on the empty stage.

Harald Lander's iconic *Études* followed, which lightened the gloomy atmosphere. Ida Praetorius danced the role of the ballerina with sparkling excellence and fine poetry in the sylphide section. On another night, corps dancer Emma Riis-Kofoed's debut in the same part demonstrated a smiling and technically confident ballerina, proving her more than worthy of this year's talent prize from the Danish Friends of Ballet.

The April 13 performance ended festively with one of the male soloists, the elegantly high-flying Jón Axel Fransson, deservedly appointed principal by artistic director Nikolaj Hübbe onstage.

In May, the Royal Danish Ballet showed a restaging of John Neumeier's tragic love masterpiece *The Lady of the Camellias*, inspired by Alexandre Dumas fils' novel from 1848. Only a few set pieces established the scenes, and Jürgen Rose's opulent silk dresses for the ladies, including 12 for the title character, placed us in 19th-century Paris.

Praetorius embodied young Marguerite Gautier with the frail nature of the tubercular courtesan permeating her slight stature. As her Armand, Neumeier had chosen 19-year-old Ryan Tomash, who joined the Royal Danish Ballet in 2017, shortly after graduating from Canada's National Ballet School. From the first moment, Tomash was convincing

in his infatuation, which initially amused Marguerite, but slowly awakened her belief in genuine love. Their white pas de deux was danced with the innocence of an ideal world that made time stand still. When Armand's bourgeois father interrupts and demands that Marguerite give up his son in the name of moral decency, it was almost unbearable to watch Praetorius as she knelt and hesitantly reached out to him.

In the second cast, Kizzy Matiakis' every movement and pale appearance reflected Marguerite's emotions. Only when Alexander Bozinoff's Armand, with his honest devotion, had opened her heart was there true sweetness in her smiles. Armand's father's claim extinguished every spark of life in Matiakis and, sacrificing her dearest love, transformed her into a shadow of her former self. Her black pas de deux with Bozinoff turned into a whirlwind of passionate desperation, where she totally gave herself to him, as if she knew this would be their ultimate union.

Pianist Alison Smith's spellbinding marathon playing of Chopin's piano concertos, preludes and waltzes, so essential in this ballet, sang in one's head for days afterward.

On June 9, on the outdoor stage by the Royal Drama House at Copenhagen harbour, the Royal Summer Ballet danced the first of 10 open-air performances touring around Denmark. The 16 dancers — principals, soloists and corps dancers from the Royal Danish Ballet — delighted with pas de deux and ensembles from the repertoire and two new creations by talented corps dancers, who are also choreographers.

Oliver Starpov's *Duo* to Franz Schubert illustrated how strength can be expressed with both sensual and bodily controlled energy independent of gender. Nathan Compiano made a classical, lyrical duet to three of Felix Mendelssohn's *Songs Without Words* that held a streak of sweet melancholy.

As a finale, the tarantella from August Bournonville's *Napoli* sent the audience into the summer evening. *DI*



BY SANJOY ROY

Sergei Polunin has become not so much a dancer in search of a role, as a cautionary tale for our times. Precociously gifted, he became a principal for the Royal Ballet at age 20, walked out at 21 and unwittingly found something new — attention not as a dancer within the cloistered world of ballet, but as a person in the public eye. Offensive comments on social media, provocative suggestions of drug use, a tattoo of Vladimir Putin on his chest — all this and more served both to hamper and enhance his career, garnering him yet more attention and fuelling a public narrative of a misunderstood outsider artist.

The story sells; it also distracts attention from the art itself, which has become technically diminished and never has been choreographically distinguished. Polunin's two recent mixed bills at the Palladium Theatre in London's West End comprise the latest chapter in the same plot.

Opening the first program, Ross Freddie Ray's *Fraudulent Smile* purports to ask: why does a good man do bad things? Its answer is a gaggle of white-faced, bare-chested men, one of them (Johan Kobborg) a psychopathic strangler against whom Polunin struggles.

Two women in corsets and stockings are at best incidental; indeed, one is throttled behind Polunin's back, leaving him to emote wistfully to the pineapple that he has inexplicably brought home for her. The choreography is a mishmash of Bob Fosse, *Giselle*, musical theatre and mime, with some bounding ballet sequences thrown in for good measure.

Yuka Oishi's *Paradox* and *Sacré* form a diptych on the tormented figure of Nijinsky. *Paradox* sets Alexey Lyubimov and Dejan Kolarov as the dark and light flip-sides of the Nijinsky coin, while *Sacré* sees Polunin heaving fulsomely about the stage until he collapses beneath the work's own portentousness. It's all storm and stress with no substance — and Oishi scuppers even this with a long and sappy coda, the three dancers gazing toward heaven. My eyes rolled in the same direction.

Oishi's *Rasputin* forms the second program and is stronger. It looks great, with a chessboard set, flushes of colour and chiaroscuro, costumes with satisfying swish. The cast is condensed down to the Tsar and Tsarina (Lyubimov and Elena Ilinykh), their haemophilic son (teenager Djordje Kalenic), poisonous Prince Yusupov (Kobborg) and Polunin as Rasputin. The choreography is coherent but middling fare, saved by Kobborg's layered performance and Kalenic's freshness. Polunin's one-note emoting comes into its own when the work plunges into full-blown melodrama: he pitches across the stage in his death scene, only to rise again, arms outstretched and fingers clawed, buffeted by everything that Kirill Richter's score can throw at him — cymbals, organs, strings, drums. It's as rollickingly enjoyable as the finale of a Vincent Price B-movie, though I don't imagine this was the intention. Polunin, together with his entourage of producers and promoters, might do well not just to rethink the next chapter, but to change the story altogether.

The story of the indomitable Yorke

Dance Project deserves to be better known. Turning 20 this year, the company has from the outset behaved more like a 40-year-old, with its interesting restagings, judicious commissions from reputable but rarely fashionable choreographers, and its roster of classy, well-established dancers. What it lacks in youthful splash, it makes up for in mature substance.

The centrepiece of its anniversary program at the Royal Opera House's Clore Studio was *Communion* by Robert Cohan, former Martha Graham dancer, founder of London Contemporary Dance Theatre, knighted this year for lifelong services to dance and still creating work at the age of 94. It's a peach of a piece, slow to get going but whose unhurried stride carries you through simple walks, quiet pauses, quickening clusters and introspective solos to a place of numinous presence, as saturated with overtones (struggle, assertion, surrender) as the echoing sounds of its low-key but insistent score by Nils Frahm. As soon as it's over, you feel you could watch it again, to get more.

Communion works elementally, through motion, sound, light and space, while a restaging of Kenneth MacMillan's 1979 chamber ballet *Playground* (one of several MacMillan rarities revived by Yorke Dance Project) is all about character and psychodrama. Foreshadowing MacMillan's last work *The Judas Tree*, *Playground* plunges into themes of mob violence, scapegoating, perversion, hypocrisy and religion, here set in the childhood world of the school playground. It's a bitter, biting work (when it hits its target, you wince), yet overly busy, too; spirited performances couldn't quite keep a grip on the piece.

Also on the program was *Between and Within* by Los Angeles-based choreographer Sophia Stoller, a portrait of intra- and interpersonal currents among four characters; undoubtedly sensitive, but sometimes slight.

The evening closed with artistic director Yolande Yorke-Edgell creating a choreographic pièce d'occasion in tribute to the three figures who influenced her most as a dancer: Robert Cohan, Bella Lewitsky and Richard Alston. It's a skillful pastiche and a lovely birthday present, Yorke-Edgell characteristically giving credit to others rather than taking it herself. *DI*

During the spring, the Norwegian National Opera and Ballet presented several performances under the title Baroque Feast. The first was *Dido and Aeneas*, to music by Henry Purcell that was written about 1685.

The production's director and choreographer, Andreas Heise, is a German dancer who previously worked with the Norwegian company for nearly 10 years. Today, he stages opera and ballet in places like Salzburg, Graz and Dresden; during the autumn of 2019 he will choreograph a new piece for Stuttgart Ballet.

With *Dido and Aeneas*, Heise has successfully managed to meld together the different arts to become a visual whole. The singers did a little bit of dancing, not too much; the dancers moved together with the chorus, who were choreographed within their limitations; and the musicians played while they integrated into the action onstage. Heise has a good eye and ear for music, singing and dance, and the way he managed to bring them all together was impressive.

The story itself, however, was not clear. In the pursuit of this playful and often joyful staging, the dramatic content sometimes disappeared.

Les ballets C de la B performed in April at Dansens Hus, presenting a piece by Alain Platel, who founded the group in 1984. With *Requiem pour L.*, Platel served the audience something unexpected. With composer Fabrizio Cassol, who he has worked with before, Platel dived into the world of Mozart's *Requiem*. The work, unfinished at the time of Mozart's death, was completed by a friend of his, Franz Xaver Süssmayr. Cassol, however, has composed his own ending, played by musicians from Africa, Brazil, Portugal and Belgium, with some of the original Latin text translated to African languages.

Requiem pour L. began slowly as, one by one, the 15 musicians entered the stage, on which the scenery was built with 47 differently sized boxes, evoking Berlin's Holocaust Memorial. Since C de la B is a dance company, I was probably not the only one wondering when the dancing would start. When the singers and the musicians began moving, it was a surprise to experience the way they were able to perform with such force and energy, filling the music with so many layers of content.

The only disappointment was that, in the very last seconds of the piece, at the dramatic moment when death has entered, a mobile phone started to ring from somewhere in the audience.

In another Norwegian National Ballet production, choreographer Ingun Bjørnsgaard joined forces with the talented dancer Camilla Spidsøe in an evening titled *The München Trilogy*, based on three plays by Henrik Ibsen — *Rosmersholm*, *The Lady from the Sea* and *Hedda Gabler* — that portray strong women who struggle under prosperous conditions. Ole Willy Falkhaugen, one of the Norwegian National Ballet's strong male dancers, partnered Spidsøe, while National Theatre actress Andrine Sæther took care of some of the text. Music was from Joseph Haydn and modern Norwegian composers.

formerly a member of Norwegian National Ballet. The piece was a joyful play with music from masters such as Handel, Rameau and Vivaldi, danced with energy and humour.

Up next was Melissa Hough, another American, who is still dancing with the company. Like Smith, she is often also on the company's choreographers' list. In *Bout of the Imperfect Pearl*, where she explores similarities between fencing and ballet, she inserted a love story that never really landed. Soloists Klara Martensson and Erik Murzagaliyev tried their best, but it felt like this work had been produced too fast without time to do a proper analysis of the content.

The third premiere was by Cina Espejord, also a dancer with the company, and another one who has created quite a few

BY FREDRIK RÜTTER



Bjørnsgaard has tackled Ibsen before and knows his works well. Yet, despite some good dancing, this attempt to bring Ibsen's women into focus only scratched the surface. The exception was *Hedda Gabler*. In this role, one could really see the contours of a fully formed human being. As well, Falkhaugen partnered Spidsøe beautifully, which made it an evening worth attending.

In April, the National Ballet presented *Baroque Movements*, which provided a chance for audiences to reunite with the beautiful *Vespertine* by Liam Scarlett, the strongest of the quartet featured on the mixed bill. The other three ballets were shown for the first time.

The first premiere, *Resonance*, was by American choreographer Garrett Smith,

ballets. *How did I get where*, a story about dementia, started with violinist Bjarte Eike trying to find where to place the violin arch in order to get the right sound. Once the curtain rose, his difficulty was transferred to the dancers. Espejord's choreography creates one solid block of human beings creeping in and out and over each other, with nobody having an individual life. When someone tries to break out, it only lasts a few seconds before they forget what to do. The same break in the action happens in the music and when the music stalls, so do the dancers.

It was a relief when the closing ballet, *Vespertine*, began. Scarlett's ability to make the movement flow across the stage was pure joy to watch. ^{DI}



Milan

BY SILVIA POLETTI

Wayne McGregor's full-evening *Woolf Works*, created for the Royal Ballet in 2015, arrived last April to La Scala's stage thanks to Alessandra Ferri, whom McGregor cast as the lead in the original production. On that occasion, Ferri returned to the stage after a leave of more than seven years and, at 52, faced a demanding new way of working and a new conception of dance storytelling. A celebrated dancer actress of iconic roles from the traditional repertoire, the Italian ballerina used her still malleable body for the whirling enchainements and multi-directional dynamics of McGregor's style, and also had to find new acting skills to express not simply a character but, as

she explained to me during an interview, "the feelings of the character in a certain event of her life."

Not only did *Woolf Works* win important critics' awards, but since then Ferri has become McGregor's special muse, creating the principal role in his first ballet for American Ballet Theatre, *AFTER-ITE*, and some duets.

McGregor's creations are known by Italian dancegoers and often appreciated (his *Autobiography* won the Italian magazine *Danza & Danza* critics' award for best contemporary work in 2018), but the Scala stage is a difficult place to conquer, above all because the ballet repertoire rarely includes contemporary dance works. Therefore, the Italian success of *Woolf Works* was all the more remarkable. Not only did the Scala box office do well, but the overall buzz led to a broadcast of the Royal Ballet's edition of the ballet on the Italian Rai television arts channel.

The work is based upon three celebrated novels by Virginia Woolf — *Mrs. Dalloway*, *Orlando*, *The Waves* — as well as her own life and ideas about writing and the dynamics of emotions. *Woolf Works* is a very interesting contemporary dance drama composition, with fundamental help from the dramaturg Uzma Hameed, in which McGregor translates the different styles of Woolf's three novels into choreographic scores.

The opening, *I Now/I Then*, starts with Woolf's recorded voice speaking about the constant dilemma of finding new forms to express the beauty of truth. The focus of the plot is a middle-aged woman, Clarissa Dalloway (Alessandra Ferri), and the memories, sensations, longings and hopes crossing her mind on a summer day in London, while she is preparing a birthday party. A melancholic mood changes quickly to light-heartedness, which turns back to sobriety while the plot goes backward and forward through time and other characters enter: her first love Peter, her opaque husband, herself as a witty teenager and Sally, the girl she once kissed.

The memories and the present situation are presented in a stream of dance with crossed trios, quartets and duets, with the present-day Clarissa

fluidly interlacing her gestures and movements to the others' dances. Ferri is truly one of a kind for the special way she has of "dancing" with her glances or a fading smile.

In presenting the characters' inner conflicts, McGregor's choreography stays close to the contemporary dramatic ballet mainstream, but at the same time remains original in the theatrical vision of his piece. This is especially so in the third act, titled *Tuesday*, inspired not only by *The Waves*, but also by the last letter Woolf wrote to her husband before committing suicide in the River Ouse. Ferri is the dramatic focus as, tiny and frail, she shows us the despair and sorrow of her last moments. On a screen, grey waves give the timing of the dance: the dancers, like those moving waters, sweetly and calmly repeat the same rhythm, and carefully embrace the woman who is letting herself go.

In the middle section, *Becomings*, the *Orlando* plot is based upon the story of an Elizabethan poet who over the centuries changes gender. The idea of transformation is the starting point of the most Mcgregorian of the three parts of *Woolf Works*, featuring her typical qualities of speed, hyperextensions, flexible torsions of the torso, and twirling and curling dynamics.

The Scala dancers were the surprise of the show. Not as accustomed to contemporary choreography as other ballet companies around the world, they danced with panache and passion. All the best were in the cast: the three lively principals Nicoletta Manni, Martina Arduino and Virna Toppi; Timofej Andrijashenko and Claudio Coviello in the moving *Septimius* duet; the soloist Christian Fagetti sparkling in the *Becoming* act.

A friend of Ferri's from the Royal Ballet, another Italian, Federico Bonelli, came to perform (he was in two acts of *Woolf Works*) and was warmly greeted for his virile, careful presence.

For a while, La Scala breathed a contemporary air of what ballet of our time can really be, with laser lights by Lucy Carter and an elegiac score by Max Richter. "They needed it," Ferri said, clearly satisfied to have brought *Woolf Works* to her former theatre. *DI*

Singapore



BY MALCOLM TAY

While developing a piece for Frontier Danceland, Israeli choreographer Shahar Binyamini discovered that ostriches sometimes prance around in anticipation of rain. That fact spurred him to title the work *Wet Ostrich*, which premiered during the Singaporean group's mid-year season at the School of the Arts Studio Theatre.

Like Binyamini's previous creation for the group, it depicted some kind of unisex community, with six performers wearing coloured mouthguards, short grey tights and bands of flesh-toned tape over their nipples. Making fleeting avian references — perching on a single leg, arms angling like wings, feet stepping in bourrées — they whipped themselves into a controlled frenzy before suddenly going still and staring out front, as if they had spotted predators.

The performers displayed a similar intensity in a restaging of French-Swiss dance artist Edouard Hue's 2016 *Into Outside*. It covered familiar terrain, that of the individual in relation to society, but in its own movement terms. Three women and two men in neutral-hued street clothes took turns appearing in dim relief, their separate statements merging into smaller units and gradually gelling into a constant flow of expansive yet punchy ensemble dancing. Despite being audibly out of breath by the end, as French composer Charles Mugel's pulsating electronica faded away, the dancers never lost their focus.

In Chinatown, a local collective of independent dance artists called Dance In Situ held a guided performance walk in Hong Lim Complex, an aging site that

comprises five high-rise housing blocks sitting on interlinked podiums containing shops and other amenities. Choreographed by Norhaizad Adam, artistic director of Malay contemporary dance troupe P7:1SMA, *Complexnya* led participants through this warren of private and public quarters. As eight performers probed corridors, stairwells and courtyards, the theatrical collided with the quotidian, casting everyday places and incidents in a different light.

At the Esplanade Theatre, Cloud Gate Dance Theatre of Taiwan celebrated its 45th anniversary with a gala offering glimpses of repertoire crafted by founder Lin Hwai-min. This retrospective felt all the more poignant since this year marks Lin's last as artistic director (he will be succeeded by Cheng Tsung-lung, who helms the company's junior branch). The program included excerpts from productions in which Lin had cemented his now-signature blend of modern dance and Chinese martial arts — *Moon Water* (1998), *Cursive* (2001) and *Pine Smoke* (2003) — and others in which he had modulated this style, such as *Wind Shadow* (2006), *Rice* (2013) and *White Water* (2014).

Only a section from *Portrait of the Families* (1997), inspired by a failed revolt in 1947 and the resulting decades of brutal martial law in Taiwan, represented the expressionist thread of his earlier choreography. Against looming projections of old photographs and voiceovers recounting the senseless killing of loved ones, a woman in a white dress seemed to unearth the survivors' long-buried grief as she staggered and wrenched herself from the ground. But there was also the odd addition of three

parts from the Mandarin-pop-driven *How Can I Live On Without You* (2011). While the performers could indulge their comic side, these extracts strained to be funny and hardly made for a convincing break from Lin's usual artistry.

Nothing was slapstick about German choreographer Sasha Waltz's *Körper* at the Singapore International Festival of Arts in May. Provoked by the design and symbolism of the Jewish Museum Berlin, it featured all but four of the original 13 cast members from its 2000 premiere. In a key scene of this relentless survey of the body, up to nine near-naked dancers squeezed into a glass-faced niche in a giant black wall, creeping among themselves under the pane like microbes moving under a microscope. I found this vignette striking as one of the viewers in the first few rows, though it might have struggled to make an impression on those at the back of the 2,000-seat Esplanade Theatre.

The same venue also hosted Japanese multimedia artist Shiro Takatani's *ST/LL*, which drew more notice for involving composer Ryuichi Sakamoto than for its own merits. Billed as a performance-installation, it fused live action with digital imagery and a dramatic interplay of light and shadow. A mimed meal at a long black table set with monochromatic dinnerware yielded to a shifting parade of stage illusions, as real-time footage taken by a suspended mobile camera was projected and embellished on a large screen. This gave rise to four performers turning into figures floating in the dark or striding alongside their growing and shrinking silhouettes, blurring the audience's sense of perspective and space.

At the Esplanade Theatre Studio, two dancers from contrasting traditions explored the abstract and narrative aspects of Indian classicism in a diptych of solos paying tribute to Krishna, the Hindu god of compassion and love. In *Hari Ho Gati Meri*, based on Sufi poetry in praise of Krishna, kathak exponent Gauri Diwakar swirled confidently to a lively score by Hindustani singer Samiullah Khan.

Krishna Saranam saw odissi expert Aruna Mohanty retelling the romance between the deity and his consort Radha with her emotive hand and facial gestures. Sadly, the pre-recorded music seemed to deflate the show. And whatever possessed Mohanty to sabotage her performance with over-earnest narration? *DT*



BY DEBORAH JONES

This year Bangarra Dance Theatre marks three decades of existence, a fine achievement for a contemporary dance company. It is, however, the merest sliver of time compared with the 65,000 years of First Nations history and culture that informs everything Bangarra does. Why, then, did the celebratory anniversary program include Jirí Kylián's *Stamping Ground*, particularly as Bangarra has never before performed the work of a non-Indigenous choreographer? It's a wonderful story.

The Czech master made *Stamping Ground* in 1983, three years after attending a vast gathering of Australian First Nations communities on Groote Eylandt. Kylián was deeply moved by the centrality of dance in Indigenous Australian life — the necessity of it, really. Dance contained history and stories, expressed spirituality and was the common language for people who spoke many different tongues.

Kylián's experience "influenced each and every work he has created since then," said Roslyn Anderson, Kylián's Australian-born assistant choreographer, who staged *Stamping Ground* for Bangarra, in a program note. It's hard to overestimate this tremendous gift to contemporary dance.

Bangarra artistic director Stephen Page had an abundant repertoire to choose from for the "30 years of sixty five thousand" program, much of it his own work, so the recognition of Kylián was graceful and timely.

Presented at the Sydney Opera House, the program opened with Frances Rings' *Unaipon* from 2004. It explored the culture and ideas of an Ngarrindjeri man, David Unaipon, in seven sections that

alluded to his work as a preacher, inventor and philosopher (he died in 1967). There was a trance-like quality to much of the dance language as Rings placed Unaipon's thinking in a universal context. And nothing was lovelier than the work's night-sky opening, in which we heard Unaipon's suggestion that the source of life is to be found "in another world — yet we are here."

Otherworldliness permeated *Unaipon*. A section based on string games was grounded in the reality of traditional Ngarrindjeri life but abstracted into something grand and mysterious, as was Rings' depiction of the four winds, representing knowledge of the land. Swirling bodies evoked Unaipon's interest in the laws of motion and the rapt calmness his Christian faith. The music, lush with language and song, came chiefly from the hand of David Page. He died in 2016 but his wonderful score lives on.

Stamping Ground opened the second half and was pure joy. Six dancers were introduced individually with a silent solo and the piece then headed into exhilarating, hard and fast duos and trios to a percussion work by Carlos Chávez. It was forceful, witty and 100 per cent Kylián but with touches of the inspiration — not imitation, he stressed — that guided him. The alert use of head, eyes and neck and springy, agile knees were particularly notable. The Bangarra cast danced *Stamping Ground* with splendidly earthy vigour and made it their own.

The program ended satisfyingly with *To Make Fire*, a blending of sections from earlier Bangarra works.

There was more Kylián over at Queensland Ballet when *Soldier's Mass*

(1980) provided the highlight of the Brisbane-based company's contemporary triple bill, Masters Series, at Queensland Performing Arts Centre. With Bohuslav Martinu's anguished *Field Mass* (1939) ringing in their ears, 12 young men faced war and their fears, buffeted by fate and heading for a conclusion never in doubt. The distinction between the soldiers they were forced to be and the community they once were was constantly blurred as formal battle formations gave way to group folk dances and gestures of tender support.

To the sound of martial trumpets, drums that cracked like bullets and a stirring male choir, the men advanced and retreated, gathered and dispersed. Individuals emerged momentarily, but were inexorably subsumed back into the pack. Martinu, who like Kylián was born in Czechoslovakia, wrote this music in 1939 in support of the Resistance after the Nazis invaded his homeland. You would need a heart of stone to remain unmoved.

The QB men danced *Soldier's Mass* with affecting seriousness and purpose, even if the commanding groundedness of Kylián's style wasn't entirely captured by all.

George Balanchine's glorious *Serenade* (1935), a love letter to the language and history of classical dance, opened the program. Has any other choreographer made fifth position of arms and feet look more radiant? The QB women were lustrous at both performances I saw, particularly Lucy Green as the Russian Girl in the first cast.

Serenade and *Soldier's Mass* bookended American choreographer Trey McIntyre's new *The Shadows Behind Us*, a minor work in which six glamorous couples enacted romantic entanglements in busy vignettes mixing ballet and ballroom. The quirky moves and complicated, often awkward-looking partnering may have been more persuasive had there been a better fit between dance and music.

The Shadows Behind Us was set to six popular songs given slow, torchy treatment by jazz singer Jimmy Scott. The selections included *Unchained Melody*, *Our Day Will Come* and, disconcertingly, *Exodus*, written for the film of that name about the founding of Israel. It made sense to read in the program that McIntyre "doesn't really listen to the lyrics in pop songs." *Shadows* may have been rather more memorable if he had a different view. DI

Reviews



Chamber Dance Project

Coburn Bruning, Lopez Ochoa, Cerrudo / Mixed Bill

Beauty unfolded in a series of enveloping embraces between dancers Jonathan Jordan and Francesca Dugarte in Diane Coburn Bruning's *Journey* (2003). The duet opened Chamber Dance Project's New Works + program in June. A summer-only project-based company founded by Coburn Bruning in New York in 2000 and relocated to Washington, D.C., in 2014, CDP's modus operandi is to pair high-level dancers and musicians together on the stage as equals, performing company dance works to live music.

Jordan and Dugarte — the husband and wife are both dancers with Columbus, Ohio's BalletMet — melted in and out of partnered lifts and intertwining choreography that spread across the Sidney Harmon Hall stage like liquid gold shimmering under the soft spotlight. The

moving contemporary ballet pas de deux was danced to the string quartet version of Samuel Barber's iconic *Adagio for Strings, Op. 11*.

Journey was followed by the first of two music-only pieces on the program showcasing CDP's polished string quartet. *Duel*, the first section of Philadelphia-based composer Chris Rogerson's dramatic *String Quartet No. 1*, evoked the feel of a motion-picture car chase with runs of music phrases, which the quartet played with verve.

One of the evening's marquee ballets, the world premiere of sought-after Colombian-Belgian choreographer Annabelle Lopez Ochoa's *Rondo Ma Non Troppo*, came next. Performed to the first allegro section of Franz Schubert's *Death and the Maiden* string quartet, the quartet of dancers — Davit Hovhannisyan

(Milwaukee Ballet), Julia Erickson (formerly of Pittsburgh Ballet Theatre), Dugarte and Jordan — came together around a circular white table in what appeared to be competitive negotiations reminiscent of Kurt Jooss' *The Green Table* (1932). Inspired by King Arthur's Knights of the Round Table legend and its solution for group equity, Lopez Ochoa presented more of a contest of individual wills than a geopolitical statement.

The dancers circled the table in unison folk-dance like patterns, leaned in and away from each other, and sat, stood and slid across the table. The dynamic in Lopez Ochoa's choreography shifted from four individuals in harmony to those same individuals lunging at each other's throats. Whether with the dancers lined up directly behind Hovhannisyan, who

stared at the table surface as if gazing into a crystal ball while the others leaned off their line to see what he was seeing or, with their knees tucked to their chests, cowered underneath the table, *Rondo Ma Non Troppo* delivered more than a table dance; it opened a window into humanity.

Then, CDP violinist and cellist Sean Neidlinger performed the opening section of Hungarian composer Zoltán Kodály's delightful *Duo for Violin and Cello, Op. 7*.

The most unusual of the evening's offerings and its biggest hit, the premiere of *Prufrock*, followed. Choreographed by Coburn Bruning and co-directed by Matt Torney, *Prufrock* was danced to an original pulsating electronic music score by New York-based sound designer James Bigbee Garver that he performed using two computers as his instruments. The ballet featured a cast of five dancers costumed in black suits and bowler hats like characters in a René Magritte painting.

The dancers played out imagery inspired by T.S. Eliot's poem *The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock*, recited live by Torney in an Irish brogue, creating non-linear moving tableaux that faded in and out of existence within pools of white light. Inside *Prufrock's* surreal, black-and-white film noir world, gestural visions of dancers who seemed to be running in place, swaying back and forth and casting large shadows, came and went like snapshots of the mind — and they were glorious. The last of them saw Jordan atop a stool on his back, arms and legs paddling as if we were watching him slowly drown.

After intermission, a snowfall of white feathers silently piling onto the stage greeted the audience to open Alejandro Cerrudo's tender duet excerpt from *Extremely Close* (2017), to dreamy music by Philip Glass. While performed with feeling by Hovhannisyann and former Milwaukee Ballet star Luz San Miguel, their dancing lacked the groundedness and fluidity inherent in Cerrudo's contemporary dance movement language.

The evening concluded with a reprise of Coburn Bruning's *Songs By Cole* (2017) set to music by Cole Porter performed by a jazz trio featuring scintillating vocalist Shacara Rogers. *Songs by Cole* was laced with humour in the form of cowboys with squirt guns in *Don't Fence Me In*; with grandeur, courtesy of Dugart's stage-dominating black-and-white gown in *Night and Day*; and with melancholy, in Erickson's mesmerizing performance in the dark *Miss Otis Regrets*. The ballet was a well-crafted and entertaining closer to a marvellous evening of music and dance. — STEVE SUCATO

Venice Biennale Danza

Venice's 2019 Biennale Danza was the third programmed by its Canadian artistic director Marie Chouinard and, to my mind, the strongest. Big names like William Forsythe and Sasha Waltz helped, but what was most interesting was seeing so many varied approaches to movement on successive nights. Comparing their contrasting styles became a poetic exercise in itself.

One night, differently abled performers, some in wheelchairs and some nude, performed with gusto in Doris Uhlich's *Every Body Electric* (2018). The next night, seven nude dancers performed Daniel Léveillé's *Quatuor Tristesse* (*Sadness Quartet*, 2018). How differently each work emphasized human dignity!

In Austrian Uhlich's work, a man without legs had a showman's flair, pumping his arms and vigorously swaying his powerful upper body. Another big man propelled his wheelchair through body motion alone. At one point, all eight performers formed a human chain — strength through solidarity. Dance is so often about body lines, and professional ballet dancers agonize over achieving perfect form. The aesthetic appeal of *Every Body Electric* lay in rejecting such notions of perfection and simply enjoying the spirit that drives people to dance.

Léveillé's choreography for *Quatuor Tristesse*, like the trilogy of nude works presented

by the Montreal choreographer at the 2009 Venice Biennale, was sombre and reserved, the dancers' faces inscrutable masks. Dancers moved solemnly to baroque music or chants or silence. To his vocabulary first developed a decade ago — lying prone, supplicating outstretched hands, a small jump into another dancer's arms — Léveillé added slightly dynamic elements like arabesque turns. One male-female encounter bordered on sensual, which seemed out of place here. As with Léveillé's other nude works, I felt a spiritual cleansing, as though visiting a temple.

Katia-Marie Germain's duet, *Habiter*, was a 40-minute philosophical study of movement in space and time. Montreal-based Germain sat motionless at a table set with banal objects — a cereal box, a glass, a framed photo. Periods of total darkness for as long as half a minute alternated with light. Each time the lights reappeared, Germain held a different pose. Occasionally she let an object drop, emphasizing movement never seen between flashes of light. The point was to show the beginning and end of movement, leaving the actual movement to the imagination. A soundtrack of constant droning provided a kind of glue, like the unseen force of gravity.

It was curious to watch the same piece in shortened form at one of the Biennale's outdoor performances, which

unfolded under a blistering summer noonday sun. Germain was seen rapidly repositioning both the objects and herself, so the work's essential mystery was lost. Nonetheless, with passersby nonchalantly moving about, Germain's super-quick gestures seemed as unobtrusive as a card sharp's.

What a contrast with Nicola Gunn's 2015 solo, *Piece for Person and Ghetto Blaster*. Australian Gunn prattled ceaselessly and moved nervously, even crawling over audience seats. Movement and monologue had no discernible connection. At 80 minutes, her prattling became repetitive and her act took on an air of attention-seeking. As a cabaret performer, irrepresible Gunn would likely be marvellous.

The expression of conflicted personal relationships took on resonance in the hands of a mature artist like Sasha Waltz in her 2004 group piece, *Impromptus*, set to Franz Schubert's piano and lieder works splendidly performed live.

The initial two dancers' contortions suggested emotional disequilibrium, which was reinforced by a stage split in two halves set at different angles to destabilize the dancers' footing. Keeping balance, the work suggested, took effort. Was the somewhat clumsy partnering during an early male-female duet another sign of people struggling to establish their own space and find harmony?

Their bodies looked and felt heavy.

Later partnering among the six dancers became noticeably smoother and they moved lightly, especially during a group free-for-all. Disequilibrium returned when dark feelings emerged during a male-female duet leading to a scene in which “blood” spilled onto the stage and onto three women, who later underwent a ritual cleansing with water.

The 75-minute piece closed with a lyrical duet — harmony attained. Even if the threads were loosely bound, their impact stimulated reflection. *Waltz* is always worth investigating, but the Biennale could have gained

cachet by presenting a newer work reflecting the German choreographer’s more recent interest in social and political matters.

The Biennale College’s 15 dancers performed two works, which they learned during their three-month Biennale training sojourn. Trisha Brown’s *Set and Reset/Reset*, her 1983 postmodern American classic adapted for this larger ensemble, provided a fine opportunity for learning to navigate a maze of co-ordinated exits and entrances in a somewhat limited space.

The second piece, by Italian Alessandro Sciarroni, *Dance Me to the End of Love* (2019) had no connection

to Leonard Cohen’s famous song, but used a ditty called *I Used to Love Polka*. Couples performed a kind of ballroom quickstep for the entire 25 minutes. An occasional under-arm turn varied the process but it remained a repetitive exercise, typical of a popular contemporary aesthetic in which simple repeated actions of no depth are given high-art status.

Earlier, controversy opened the Biennale when Sciarroni received the Golden Lion Award for lifetime achievement, which seems premature for a 42-year-old artist in mid-career. A Biennale chouchou, Sciarroni has shown at five of the seven most recent Biennales.

Improvisational art was seen in *Tide*, a 30-minute solo by Icelandic dancer Bára Sigfúsdóttir, accompanied live by trumpeter Eivind Lønning. During the Biennale’s regularly scheduled interviews with choreographers, Sigfúsdóttir stated that improvisation was the best way to dissociate preconceived structures from the mind, and clumsy and awkward improvised movements could be interesting. Tall, slim Sigfúsdóttir was never clumsy and, whether erect or on all fours, to me her reactions to Lønning’s playing were only modestly interesting.

As a title, *A Quiet Evening of Dance* belied the constant fascinating movement that



Simon Renaud, Esther Gaudette, Justin Gionet and Mathieu Campeau in Daniel Léveillé’s *Quatuor Tristesse*
Photo: Denis Farley



William Forsythe provided for seven top-flight dancers from his former companies. The evening, which includes two new works and reworkings of older pieces, has been on the international festival tour for more than a year, so its appearance at the Biennale was hardly a coup. Little matter. In Forsythe's hands, simple gestures such as raising a shoulder or doing a plié became the bricks of a compelling structure built by a male and female standing side by side in a piece called *Catalogue*. A lengthy duet, *Dialogue (DUO2015)*, offered plenty of wit by two men rocking and rolling and thrusting their hips out in a funny walk.

Notice should be given to the effective use of the extraordinarily rhythmic hip-hop dancer, Rauf "RubberLegz" Yasit, whose angular lines were integrated organically into the classical ballet fluidity of the others. Yasit was especially good as seducer moving forward spider-like before grasping a woman's leg in the new group piece, *Seventeen/Twenty One*. Much of the evening's movement clearly derived from ballet, though male dancers with beards and sporting elbow-

length mauve gloves gave the balletic moves a definite contemporary tinge.

As radical a choreographer as any on the planet, Forsythe put on a smashing good show, which ended with a smooth chorus-line final bow. — VICTOR SWOBODA

M-Body

Monk, Husak,
Terezakis /
Triple Bill

The range of work included in this triple bill showcased not only Davida Monk's depth as a narrative choreographer in *Ashes for Beauty*, but also her skill as a contemporary dancer in Helen Husak's solo *The Return* and a duet, *For Antigone*, by Paras Terezakis.

Based in Calgary, Monk has been performing and choreographing for more than three decades. Her impact was evident during the post-show talkback when many of the dancers cast in *Ashes for Beauty*, who are now based in Vancouver but have

previously worked with Monk in Calgary, conveyed the significance of her mentorship.

A richly layered work inspired by alchemy and metamorphosis, Monk's 2017 *Ashes for Beauty* takes its title from a line in the Bible, Isaiah 61:3, that begins "Give unto them beauty for ashes." Every element of the ensemble work for seven dancers embodied metamorphosis, from the layered costumes to the evolving movement and distinct sounds. As the dancers transitioned from one section to the next, they seemed to shed their past to explore a new aspect of their identity.

It opened with the dancers spinning in place, their long jewel-toned robes extending their swirling motion and creating a mesmerizing sea of colour. Mouths opening with a silent scream, they began to move in diagonal lines, hunched over with fists and elbows bent in stiff, angular lines. The elbows often led the movement in the first section, until they removed their robes, signalling the first transformation.

The music, composed by Allan Gordon Bell, transitioned from pan flutes and drums to electronic sounds. Matching the sharper music, the dancers moved in quick, tense bursts with their fists still clenched.

Another transformation saw them work in pairs to unspool and unravel intricately woven fabric to remove the next layer of their costumes. Unencumbered by the heavy layers, and with hopeful piano accompaniment, their movements became smoother as they glided in and out of a cluster formation. Lowering their fists from in front of their faces, they suddenly came to a

standstill to look expectantly into the audience.

Embodying the strong, fearless title character in the premiere of Terezakis' *For Antigone* seemed to come naturally to Monk. She was joined by Arash Khakpour as Antigone's uncle, King Creon.

Originally from Greece, Terezakis is artistic director of Vancouver company Kinesis Dance somatheatro and his work is often inspired by Greek classical theatre. While the piece isn't meant to be a retelling of Sophocles' *Antigone*, the relationship between the two characters is clear despite being left unresolved. In the play, Antigone specifically fights for the right to bury her brother, but beyond that she is an iconic figure representing any fight for dignity and respect.

The dramatic tension was heightened by the difference in the dancers' ages. Monk is in her mid-60s while Khakpour is about half that age. Both were fully invested in their characters in a competitive sequence that had them holding each other's head and using their weight to manoeuvre and try to stay one step ahead. This climactic moment seemed to present them as equally matched adversaries.

Amidst their frantic clashing, there were a couple of striking moments. When Khakpour slowly lowered a crown onto his head upside down, the tension mounted, and when Monk was left alone onstage at the end, her intense, worried gaze held our attention until the last moment.

Monk's strength of character was also on display in *The Return*. Husak, an independent choreographer based in Calgary, took inspiration

from two poems by American poet Mary Oliver for this inward-looking solo. In a trance-like state, Monk slowly ran back and forth as if attempting to shed the grief that had a hold on her. The music, again by Bell, was eerie and metallic at times and included a section of breathy demonic vocals that added to the ominous tone.

The antlers that were arranged in three corners of the stage were a visually interesting scenic element that, with their bleached white colour and arrangement in clusters, resembled piles of bones, adding to the sense of grief and loss.

Oliver, who passed away in January 2019, wrote about the natural world and simple pleasures. The fragments of her poems quoted in the program note — *The Journey*

about finding your way in life and *Wild Geese* about the human condition — provide more insight into the antlers' potential significance and the overall themes of the work that aren't, however, completely evident onstage.

A surprise finale ended the evening: a duet from Monk and an uncredited boxing partner. The graceful sparring was full of drama and humour as Monk's strong punches connected with her partner's pads. With all the predictability and polish of a movie fight scene, it was a refreshing end to an otherwise serious evening of intelligent, literary contemporary dance. — TESSA PERKINS DENEALT

Davida Monk in Helen Husak's *The Return*
Photo: Chris Randle



Erin Lequereux, Kirsten Wiren, Hilary Maxwell, Shauna Elton and Naomi Brand in Davida Monk's *Ashes for Beauty*
Photo: Chris Randle

Cinema Series

The Bolshoi Ballet in Alberto Alonso's *Carmen Suite* and Edward Clug's *Petrushka*



The Bolshoi Ballet's double bill of Alberto Alonso's *Carmen Suite* and Edward Clug's *Petrushka* was broadcast live to select movie theatres across North America in May. Audiences were transported from shopping mall multiplexes across America to the Bolshoi Theatre in Moscow where they could not only watch the Bolshoi onstage, but also watch patrons milling around the lobby and dancers warming up backstage. In a word, heaven.

The two works featured here as part of the Bolshoi Ballet in Cinema series were an excellent reminder of Russia's place in the history of ballet. The title role in *Carmen Suite* was vividly

danced by the exquisite Svetlana Zakharova, who was, as expected, beautifully articulate and expressive. Zakharova conveys how glorious dancing must *feel* — she inhabits her body so fully — and her line, attack and control are all exemplary. The glamorous Zakharova stayed in character throughout the bows, with her arms crossed defiantly over her chest, recalling the great ballerina Maya Plisetskaya, Alonso's original Carmen, who believed that bows were an essential part of the performance, “the comet's tail.”

Denis Rodkin as Jose was impeccable. Noble of physique and temperament, he elevated every scene despite

some obvious limitations to the work overall as a piece of storytelling. Mikhail Lobukhin gave a committed and powerful performance as the Torero, which also happened to illustrate some of the pitfalls when a live theatre performance is filmed. Lobukhin's projection was sometimes overpowering when seen in closeup, but it likely wasn't for the original theatre audiences viewing from more of a distance. Zakharova was also dramatically forced at times, since she, too, was playing to the hall not the camera. In contrast, Rodkin's natural reserve served him very well on film.

Alonso's style is an interesting marriage of neoclassical and modern influences. There is some great choreography — Carmen's iconic first solo and the beautiful “love adagio” for Carmen and Jose that must have been shocking for Soviet audiences accustomed to socialist realism when the work premiered in 1967. But it is often difficult to make sense of it all. I never quite figured out who the two women with one leg in black and the other in white who dance to Bizet's *L'Arlesienne* were. The character of Fate, danced by the gifted Olga Marchenko, is altogether too literal and did little to advance the story.

Carmen Suite gives us a look into the not-too-distant past when it was created. Alonso conceived the ballet as a confrontation between two forces — freedom, as represented by Carmen (and

Plisetskaya who created the role) on one hand, and a totalitarian system of subjugation on the other. The atmosphere created by Boris Messerer's set with a giant black bull's head and Rodion Shchedrin's percussion-heavy adaptation of Bizet's original score certainly reflect that darkly oppressive vision. But Zakharova lacks the earthiness and idiosyncratic strength that made Plisetskaya's Carmen one for the ages, and, as a result, the centre doesn't quite hold.

Edward Clug's *Petrushka*, which premiered in 2018, is a brave reimagining of Fokine's original created for the Ballet Russes in 1911 with another Russian superstar, Nijinsky, in the title role. From the first scene, it is clear that the maximalism of the original version has been stripped down. Set designer Marko Japelj has replaced Alexandre Benois' fantastical design with brilliantly conceived large Russian nesting dolls in green, red, purple and blue. The huge dolls represent Mother Russia herself and are multifunctional — they glided across the stage like chess pieces, opened for the entrance of the Charlatan and became a cage that imprisons the dolls.

The townspeople dancing joyously at the fair are costumed in jewel tones and shapes reminiscent of the original. The women wore pleated skirts over leotards that covered the head, and the nursemaids were costumed in delightful dresses

An Enlightening Influence

Clothilde Cardinal, director of programming, Place des Arts

BY VICTOR SWOBODA

with puffed sleeves and bell-shaped skirts in saturated blues, purples, greens, pinks and reds, while the men wore fur coats.

Clug's scenes for the Charlatan and his dolls are wonderfully inventive choreographically and his use of wooden puppets and rods (similar to those used by shadow puppets) deepens the allegory further. In the final scene, the three dolls danced with puppets but this time it was the Moor, the Ballerina and Petrushka controlling them. The Charlatan was danced with authority by Vyacheslav Lopatin, the Moor by Dmitry Dorokhov and the Ballerina by delicate Ekaterina Krysanova. Denis Savin danced the title role with sensitivity and pathos. The final scene between the now liberated Petrushka and his creator, when the doll appears to become the master, was poetic and chilling.

Clug's leaner version of *Petrushka* allowed me to "see" the score more clearly and made sense as a modern take that preserves the humanity of the original while giving a new appreciation for the enduring timelessness of its themes.

— JENNIFER FOURNIER

UPCOMING
BOLSHOI BALLET
AT THE CINEMA
Raymonda, October 25
Le Corsaire, November 17
The Nutcracker, December 15
Check local listings.



When it comes to programming shows at Canada's largest arts complex, Place des Arts (PdA) in Montreal, the buck stops at the desk of a petite Montreal-born woman named Clothilde Cardinal. For the past five years, she has overseen programming for PdA's six halls, where each year about a thousand dance, music and theatre events are staged. Les Grands Ballets Canadiens has resident status there, and local and visiting dance companies make numerous appearances throughout the year either independently or as part of major dance series such as the Festival TransAmériques, Quartiers Danse and Danse Danse.

"As PdA's program director, I can say that contemporary dance attracts a more diversified audience than either classical music or theatre or entertainment. In a contemporary dance audience, you'll find a student in sandals next

to a senior citizen in tailored clothes," says Cardinal, a confessed dance aficionado. She briefly studied ballet as a child, then worked in increasingly important capacities for the Canada Council for the Arts and various Montreal-area theatre companies such as Carbone 14 and Ubu.

Cardinal's instincts for diverse programming were honed during 14 years as co-founder and co-producer of Danse Danse with Pierre Desmarais.

"When Pierre and I set about making a season, we thought about balance and diversity. In all the media reviews about our seasons, we always saw the word diversity. Of course, we couldn't always be audacious or else we would have lost audience members."

The vision that Cardinal brought to Danse Danse informs her decisions at PdA.

"I encourage Quebec artists to think big and to produce works for large stages. And I bring in major international artists to stimulate our home-grown talent and to show them new ways of moving."

Beyond selecting programs, Cardinal's job means ensuring that the curtain goes up each evening and that artists are satisfied with the technical side of PdA's theatres.

"I'm a problem solver. Artists come to me with problems, as I used to come to my predecessor at Place des Arts when I was with Danse Danse." Cardinal is also now involved in producing, which is a significant part of the reason she made the difficult decision to leave Danse Danse. This past year, PdA presented performances such as Faruquito's flamenco spectacle in its biggest hall without the involvement of an outside producer. She also produces French-language shows, such as last year's 50th anniversary production of Michel Tremblay's *Les Belles-soeurs*.

As well, she looks to produce shows that go beyond the usual dance and theatre fare at PdA. "If I don't produce Cirque Eloise's show, there will be no circus at PdA," says Cardinal, referring to the globetrotting local troupe that appeared at PdA most recently in 2018.

Cardinal is convinced that art enriches people's lives and makes them better, more likeable citizens.

"There's a word in English, which translates badly into French, that describes what it is that people look for when they go to a dance show — enlightenment. In pursuing this notion, I feel I contribute to Quebec society." *DI*

Clothilde Cardinal
Photo: Monic Richard

FRAGILE FORMS

by MACHiNENOiSY



GALLERY SPACE

Fragile Forms | Photo: Natalie Purschwitz

For a collaborative company like MACHiNENOiSY, inspiration arrives through shared play and struggle. With *Fragile Forms*, our collaboratively created site-specific performance at New Westminster's Anvil Centre, inspiration came very differently.

At the end of 2015, after producing seven shows in one year, the company's co-director, Daelik, and I were exhausted, with very little creative resources left. When we came across an essay by Finnish architect Juhani Pallasmaa, his words were like lamplight, illuminating a way out of the dark.

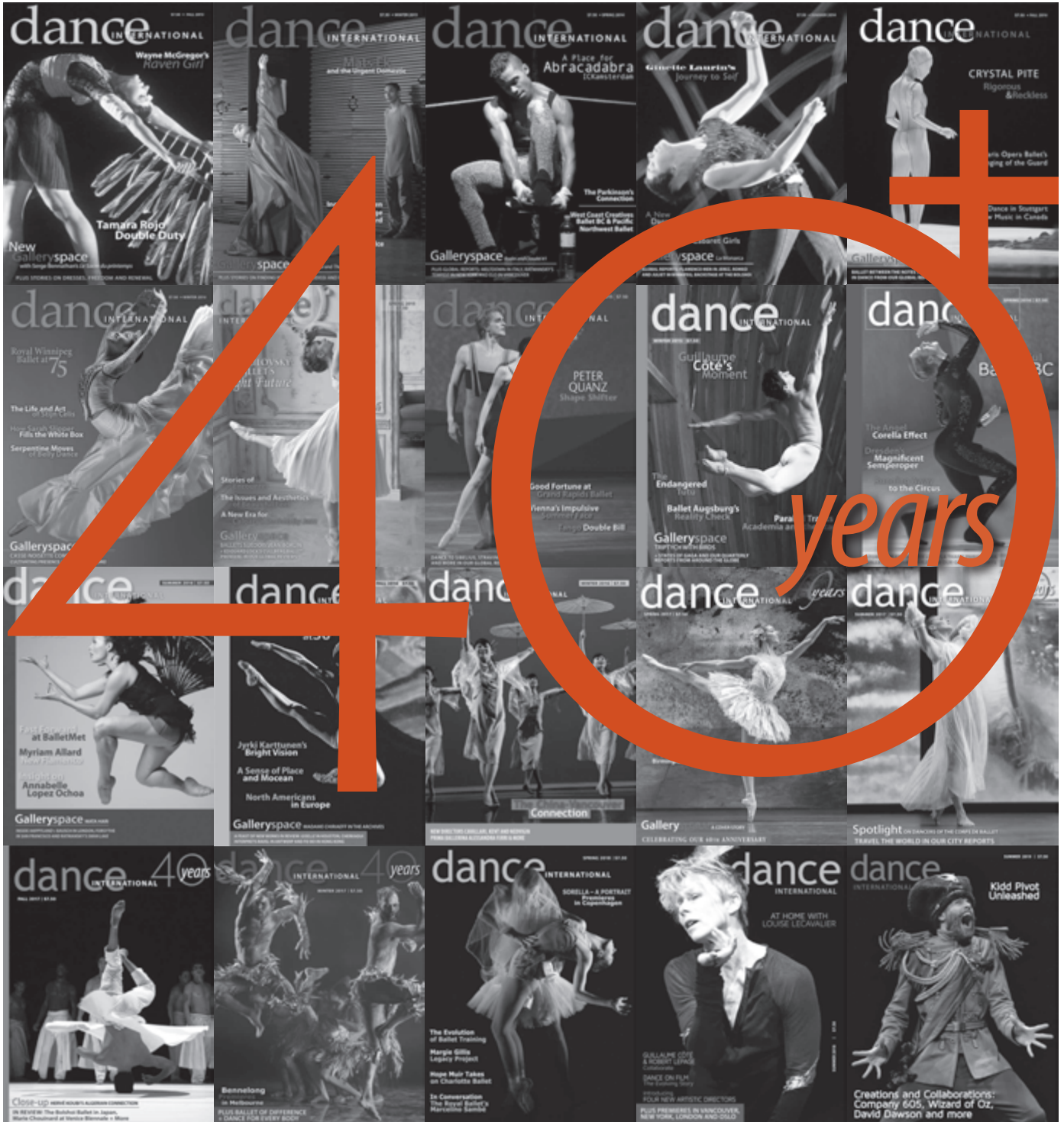
In *Hapticity and Time*, Pallasmaa challenges the hegemony of vision in our ocular-centric culture. He writes about how architecture can engage and unite all our senses, replacing distancing visual imagery with enhanced materiality, nearness and intimacy. Through Pallasmaa's words about time, the multi-sensorial experience, interiority and humility, we were reminded of our own artistic duty to generate from a place of listening and responsiveness to the space in all its dimensionality. As Pallasmaa says, "We enter the space and the space enters us."

Although *Fragile Forms* was complex, involving local and international collaborators from five disciplines, and although the Anvil Centre's architecture was at times imposing, the dance itself was simple: it was "you and us" and our shared imagination, leaning in and listening with our whole bodies to the experience.

— DELIA BRETT, CO-ARTISTIC DIRECTOR, MACHiNENOiSY

MACHiNENOiSY is a Vancouver dance company co-directed by Delia Brett and Daelik, dedicated to creating trans-disciplinary, collaborative, diverse and socially relevant performances.

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