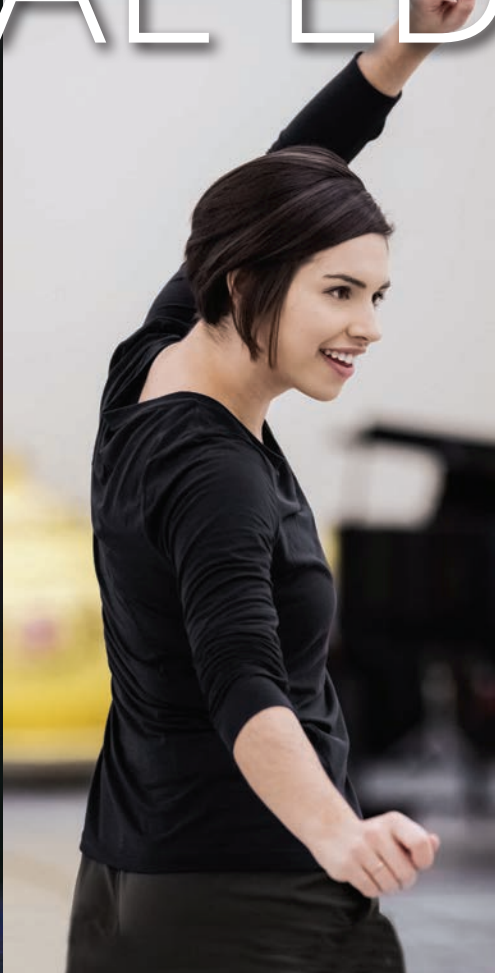


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advertising@danceinternational.org

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DANCE INTERNATIONAL
Scotiabank Dance Centre
677 Davie Street, Vancouver, B.C. V6B 2G6
Tel: (604) 681-1525
info@danceinternational.org
www.danceinternational.org

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CHANGES AHEAD

When I came on board as editor of this magazine in 2013, every issue felt like the last one. The situation was that dire as far as our financial health. Each magazine itself, however, felt like a success story. When the printer sent us our box of copies, I'd flip through the pages, in awe over the many artists and choreographic works that were so beautifully presented through our team of writers and the gorgeous photography to which we were given such generous access. I wanted to frame each cover.

The business side slowly improved, but, unfortunately, not enough to sustain the operational downturns faced over the last year. In particular, with regard to smaller titles such as ours, access to international distribution has become increasingly limited. It is my hard task to announce this Winter 2019 issue as the final one. *Dance International* magazine is closing down after 43 years of continuous publication.

The decision has been a heartbreaking one for the publisher, the Vancouver Ballet Society, but the VBS board has decided to relinquish the ongoing battle of building subscriptions to a hard-copy magazine in an era of freely available online content. Though I myself still enjoy reading print magazines and books, I also take full advantage of online access to the world of ideas and information.

That brings me to the good news: *Dance International* will remain alive and kicking on its website, www.danceinternational.org.

I will stay on as editor of that site and its content, and hope to build our team of talented writers even further. Writers, send me your pitches for features and reviews, and if, as a reader, you know of places and people we should be covering, email me!

Over my six years at the helm, I have been well supported by the DI team. Our longstanding art director, Brenda Finamore, has been patient over the detailed work of bringing each page to life with her design expertise. Margaret Jetelina, our copyeditor, has been proactive with regard to language use, remaining current and informed over best practice. Maureen Allen, president of the Vancouver Ballet Society, has been a staunch champion as we worked our way through the ongoing financial and operational issues involved in the curious business of an art magazine.

These are only three names of the many who deserve sincere thanks, which go also to our national and provincial government funders, whose logos are in the masthead opposite. Our many loyal advertisers, too, have been appreciated over the years. Finally, without you, our reader, *Dance International* would have had no reason to keep going as long as it did. Please stay with us online and follow our social media. And thank you, thank you for your support. *DI*

Kaija

KAIJA PEPPER
editor@danceinternational.org

For more on *Dance International*,
please read the Publisher's Letter on page 62.

www.danceinternational.org



Dance International



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Read our digital edition



Nashville Ballet in Paul Vasterling's *Lucy Negro Redux*
Photo: Karyn Photography

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www.danceinternational.org



Artists

to Keep watching

It would take a hefty book to cover everything we wanted to in this final issue of *Dance International* magazine; instead, we present a selection of carefully curated, bite-sized stories designed to fit within our usual 64 pages.

The result is an overview intended to evoke the state of the art and some current issues and trends. These are pertinent stories the writers were passionate about sharing with you and I am passionate about showcasing. There is no filler; we have worked to make every story count.

Importantly, this issue is not about looking back, but about artists and art professionals who are active today and hopefully long into the future. Close to home, Canadians are well represented, although our commitment to presenting the whole picture of dance remains strong, as you will see in the pages ahead. And we welcome a new contributor from Istanbul, who will continue to connect us to her Turkish world of dance on our website.

Our readers, while primarily based in Canada, are found around the globe. Wherever you might be reading this, I hope you will find something enjoyably familiar and, also, something to provide a springboard to new thoughts and feelings about the possibilities of dance.

KAIJA PEPPER, EDITOR
Dance International
www.danceinternational.org

Luca “Lazylegz” Patuelli

Founder, ILL-Abilities breakdance crew



BY VICTOR SWOBODA

“Some dancers focus too much on trying to do things like everyone else, but if we focus on doing it our way, we start believing in ourselves.”

For Luca “Lazylegz” Patuelli, a Montreal B-boy dynamo, dancing is about moving in your own way. Wielding crutches as an extension of his body, he demonstrates this philosophy each time he performs. Although born with a muscle disorder that left him without the use of his legs, Lazylegz has forged an international dance career. He also founded ILL-Abilities, a breakdance crew of eight dancers from Canada, the United States, Chile, Brazil, South Korea and the Netherlands. None of them see their individual physical disability as a handicap for dancing.

ILL-Abilities challenges conventional notions about dancers. “Some dancers focus too much on trying to do things like everyone else, but if we focus on doing it our way, we start believing in ourselves,” says Lazylegz, an articulate man of 35 who has supported his dance career for the past decade from fees as a motivational speaker at schools and conferences.

Born in Montreal but raised in Bethesda, Maryland, near Washington, D.C., Lazylegz grew up pursuing another urban culture passion — skateboarding. At 15, he was introduced to hip hop by older kids who showed off moves that they saw and imitated in nightclubs.

David Raymond

Dancer, choreographer and artistic director,
Out Innerspace Dance Theatre |
Dancer, Kidd Pivot

“We practised on our own and encouraged each other. We were all pretty much self-taught. I’ve never registered for a dance class.”

In his first breaking battle in Washington, he literally broke a leg. Moving to Montreal to study commerce at Concordia University, Lazylegz searched out the local breakdance scene where his first competition was a contest called Under Pressure.

“When I was breaking in Washington, I didn’t understand that it was attached to graffiti, rap and hip hop. Under Pressure was my first exposure to what hip hop was all about.”

Lazylegz finished fourth, an achievement that put him on the Montreal map.

“At the time, I didn’t know about other disabled dancers. As people got to know me and I travelled, I found other dancers with disabilities, which inspired me to start ILL-Abilities in 2007.”

Although Lazylegz uses the word “disability,” he does not like it.

“The moment you label someone as disabled, you focus on their negatives and the things they can’t do.”

ILL-Abilities’ first recruits were two Americans, Jacob “Kujo” Lyons, a hearing-impaired dancer, and Tommy “Guns” Ly, another dancer on crutches.

“I first met Guns at the B-Boy Summit in L.A. He’d lost his leg to cancer two weeks before. When I walked in the room, we locked eyes. I’d never seen another dancer on crutches.”

Virtually self-financed, ILL-Abilities performs about once a month.

“We’ve performed in over 25 countries. When festivals invite us, we try to build tours using the festival as a base anchor.”

Lazylegz performs outside ILL-Abilities as well. In February 2019, he and Australian-born “Roya the Destroya,” who also dances on crutches, presented their sweetly romantic duet called *Creatures* at Montréal, arts interculturels (MAI). The performers’ earnestness and charm overcame the skimpy boy-meets-girl plot.

“Because of ILL-Abilities, more disabled dancers are starting to compete internationally,” notes Lazylegz. “We’ll probably recruit them for the crew.” *DI*



BY HILARY MAXWELL

David Raymond, at age 36, has achieved what some might view as the ideal trifecta of a dance career. He is the co-artistic director of his own company, Out Innerspace Dance Theatre, and its training program, Modus Operandi, as well as a dancer for Crystal Pite’s innovative Kidd Pivot. To top it off, Raymond shares each of these roles with his partner in life, Tiffany Tregarthen.

When he became involved with Kidd Pivot, first during a 2012 creation residency, Raymond’s interests had begun to lean away from freelance dance work toward his curiosity, and past research, in filmmaking and dance. However, Kidd Pivot was a game changer. “There was something about the environment, creativity, rigour and richness of working with everybody that made me ask myself, ‘how could I turn away from this?’” So, he didn’t, and has since been performing transformative roles in Kidd Pivot’s theatre-dance hybrids *Betroffenheit* and, now, *Revisor*, on stages around the world.

For Raymond, being a dancer and creator are not mutually exclusive. “I feel like they are the same thing.”

As an emerging artist pursuing a career in Vancouver, Raymond was drawn to forms that had an improvisational energy to them, like hip hop and street dance, which, he says, stems from his training in tap as a child. Raymond’s trajectory to becoming a professional dancer and choreographer was largely fuelled by his desire to push the boundaries of these forms.

For Raymond, being a dancer and creator are not mutually exclusive. “I feel like they are the same thing,” he says, and it’s this mindset that allows him to thrive in any choreographic process where the dancer has some responsibility to generate movement. Within his own company’s work and in Kidd Pivot’s, room is given for improvisation and for the dancer to use their instincts to find a path into the work. Raymond is as interested in the design and crafting of the movement as in uncovering a state, spirit or feeling in the roles he dances.

The nature of his choreography for *Out Innerspace*, and of the epic productions of Kidd Pivot, require the height of energetic and physical exertion. Fighting to discover new territory as an interpreter and to find the endurance to dance such rigorous pieces can be challenging, but it is also a source of catharsis. “It’s a double-edged sword,” he says, referring to the satisfaction of developing a deeper connection and expression with the material through a long performance run, while having to deal with the muscular and energetic challenges of bringing his body physically to the same work again and again.

Balancing his full career has worked out to be a fluid process that seemed to just fall into place. He and Tregarthen divide their work throughout the year with Kidd Pivot and with their company and school. While there are challenges with being away from their own projects, Raymond and Tregarthen both feel they receive many benefits: learning more about the choreographic process, getting to travel and see what other dancers are researching and developing, and then returning to Vancouver as educators who share this knowledge with their students. *DI*



Kayla Rowser

Principal dancer, Nashville Ballet

BY MARTHA ULLMAN WEST

L“Lucy owns her body,” chants poet Caroline Randall Williams during *Lucy Negro Redux*. Nashville Ballet’s Kayla Rowser, performing the title role, makes it abundantly clear with her dancing that she owns this role with every fibre of her five-foot-four-inch body, every bit of her technical and storytelling skill.

Williams’ poem forms the libretto for Nashville Ballet artistic director Paul Vasterling’s evening-length ballet, which premiered in June 2019. In it, Lucy, the Dark Lady of Shakespeare’s sonnets, owns an Elizabethan brothel. “Mr. Whiteness Him Bad Bard Self,” a.k.a. Shakespeare, danced by Brett Sjoblom, loves her. It becomes increasingly obvious in three demanding pas de deux that Lucy doesn’t reciprocate.

Because she analyzes character whenever she dances a story ballet, Rowser knows exactly why: “Lucy knows her own worth and beauty, she doesn’t apologize for who she is.” And, as Vasterling says, “She’s a powerful woman of colour and won’t be pushed around. Lucy has her own agency.” So does Rowser. For instance, Vasterling had intended to use soft shoes for the ballet; one day Rowser told him she felt most powerful on pointe and he changed his mind.

Dancing Vasterling’s blend of classical and modern movement (including floor rolls) to Williams’ spoken text, bluegrass composer Rhiannon Giddens’ songs and Francesco Turrisi’s Elizabethan tunes, all performed live, offered multiple challenges.

“I actually had choreography based on the phrasing of the music, on Rhiannon’s lyrics and on Caroline’s speaking parts. Paul created my choreography to accent

and emphasize not just the music, but also Caroline’s spoken word and Rhiannon’s voice, which both had their own rhythms. Having the choreography set in that way really helped me to feel connected to them as the other embodiments of Lucy onstage. I appreciated the complexities of trying to weave the score, the lyrics and the poetry together to motivate my dancing and character development.

“It never occurred to me,” Rowser says, “that I would dance the character of a Black woman.” She considers Lucy to be “a version of speaking your mind.” In a way, interpreting traditional classical roles in Vasterling’s versions of the great ballets — Aurora, Odette/Odile, Cinderella, Firebird — is also a way of speaking your mind. And, over her 11 years with Nashville Ballet, she’s done that as well in works by other choreographers, shining as the Russian girl in Balanchine’s *Serenade* and in Christopher Wheeldon’s *Ghosts*. In April 2020, she’ll dance in Wheeldon’s *After the Rain*.

Does Rowser, like Lucy, own her body? “Your body is your tool for craft,” she says. “Ballet owns it in a way, but you make your own choices in how you take care of it, how you’ll perform the next day.”

Now 30, she is preparing for a post-dancing career by working for a degree in communications. “I’m already good at communicating with an audience,” she says as she continues to take up new artistic challenges. In September, she debuted as Juliet in Vasterling’s *Romeo and Juliet*, speaking the mind and heart of the “bad bard’s” star-crossed teenager. ⁰¹

“It never occurred to me, that I would dance the character of a Black woman.” Rowser considers Lucy to be “a version of speaking your mind.” In a way, interpreting traditional classical roles is also a way of speaking your mind.

Jason Reilly

Principal dancer
Stuttgart Ballet

BY GARY SMITH



Jason Reilly, the Canadian dancer who joined Stuttgart Ballet in 1997, is not your average prince. Yet despite the tougher look of a soccer star, he can still suggest an elegant, refined quality. He makes his Onegin an attractive but narcissistic cad. When he dances Romeo, he summons the essence of the young lover, hiding behind a billowing cloak, desperate to hold his Juliet in the moonlight. And then there's his Stanley Kowalski, a brooding beast of a man who projects white-hot desire.

The thing about Reilly is he can do it all. He finds the dark humour of Petruchio in Cranko's *The Taming of the Shrew* and also the lethal temper of the title role in Neumeier's thrilling *Othello*. In the physical exploration of pure dance roles such as in a lyrical Kylián ballet, Reilly can dominate the stage.

"I am completely relaxed onstage," Reilly says, explaining his ability to dance full throttle at the age of 40. "I can still do a full-length ballet, no problem. It's the recovery time that takes longer."

In Stuttgart last summer, Reilly tackled Rudolf in Kenneth MacMillan's *Mayerling* for the first time. He always researches his characters, reading books, looking at images and building a personal scenario.

Very physical, Reilly has a daily workout in the gym each morning before company class. "My knowledge of my body and its needs is much greater now than at the beginning of my career," he says.

Reilly's first dance lessons were at Toronto's National Ballet School at age five. A rebel even then, he didn't last the first day, interrupting the class. "I was pretty difficult," he says. "Fortunately, I was able to go back a year later after I apologized," he laughs. "I didn't give up. I liked the way boys lifted girls way up in the air and made them look light. Even now I fall in love with the ladies I dance with."

Reilly feels at home in Stuttgart now. "This company has an exceptional repertoire. And I guest all over Europe. Ballet is highly subsidized in Germany and our audiences are fiercely loyal." Married to Stuttgart dancer Anna Osadchenko and with a young daughter, Reilly says his life has changed. "There's no sleeping in anymore," he grins. "I don't stress about the little things now."

Onstage, Reilly connects with his audience completely. There's no wasted moment. He uses technique seemingly effortlessly to bring drama to the surface of a performance. He's a musical, muscular dancer, and gives an audience full value for its ballet money. The applause after one of his performances is sustained, loud and long.

"I'm just me," he says. "I'm just as likely to come back from holiday with a Mohawk haircut than not. I dress how I like. I've got body hardware and tattoos in lots of places."

None of these modern affectations stops Reilly entering romantic bygone worlds. Set him loose on a ballet stage and you get star quality that transcends dance technique and storytelling. *DI*

ALYSA PIRES



Choreographer and artistic director
Alysa Pires Dance Projects |
Choreographic associate
National Ballet of Canada

BY JENN EDWARDS

After graduating from Toronto's Ryerson University with a dance degree in 2012, Alysa Pires started making dances for any company, studio, youth program or musical that would have her, determined to establish herself as a choreographer as quickly as possible. With a background in tap, jazz and musical theatre before her contemporary training at university, she had a versatile movement vocabulary on which to draw. Now, seven years later, the young choreographer is a newly appointed choreographic associate at the National Ballet of Canada.

Pires grew up in Victoria, B.C. As her mother was a theatre director, she was exposed to the performing arts at a young age, before training at a pre-professional program in nearby Parksville. More than being onstage, she remembers falling in love with the rehearsal process early on.

She recalls always being interested in very physical, athletic work. Although her own training was more contemporary, it was a natural progression to work with ballet dancers, who are in top physical form. In her words, "the possibilities with ballet are endless. I'm very rarely limited by what ballet dancers are capable of."



To date she has made three works for Ballet Edmonton: *All of Me* (2014), a dreamy ride inspired by music from Billie Holiday; *Herd* (2016), which explores the tension between the individual and the mob mentality; and *If You Knew* (2017), set to a soundtrack of Nina Simone songs.

For Ballet Kelowna, she created the comedic and joyful *Mambo* (2018). She has also choreographed works on young dancers at Ballet Jörgen and Canadian Contemporary Dance Theatre, among others. In 2017, Pires was one of the winners of Northwest Dance Project's International Choreographic Competition in Portland, Oregon.

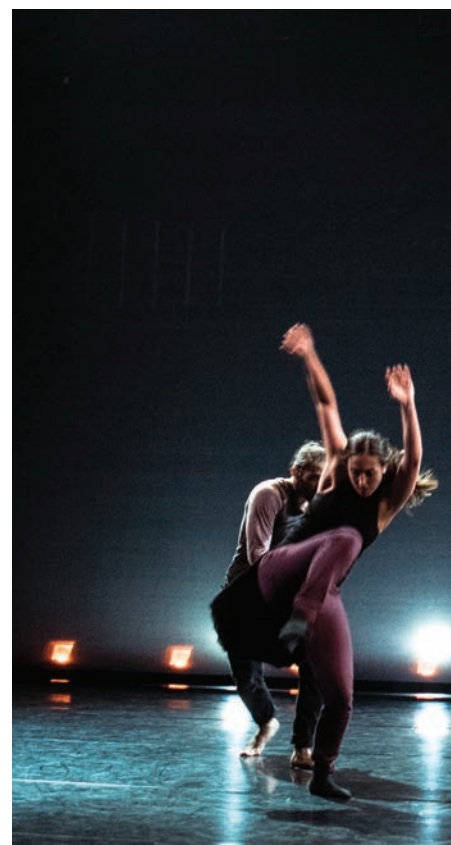
Her pieces show a compositional maturity and intuition. Pires' highly physical work is often infused with irony and humour, highlighting facial expressions. Pedestrian-like gestures also feature heavily, in a rhythmic hyper-articulate way.

Under her company name, Alys Pires Dance Projects, Pires self-produces shows. In 2016, she presented a full-length work at the Toronto Fringe Festival entitled *Exterminating Angel*. An energized ensemble dance theatre piece set to a razor sharp electronic score by her husband, Adam Sakiyama, the show received rave reviews and was featured in Best of the Fringe lists in *NOW Magazine* and the *Torontoist* blog.

Pires made her first pointe work, *In Between*, as a participant in the National Ballet's choreographic workshop, a stepping stone on the path to her current choreographic associate position. After it premiered at a showcase in early 2018, Martha Schabas wrote in the *Globe and Mail*, "The real discovery of the evening was Alys Pires ... Pires displays so much clarity and consistency in her aesthetic that it's hard to believe that this is her first work on pointe."

Full of passion for her craft, Pires says, "I'm just trying to make as much work as I can, because that's my favourite thing, being in the studio with dancers." ⁰¹

The National Ballet of Canada's Siphesihle November and Jeannine Haller in Alys Pires' *The Other Side*
Photo: Karolina Kuras



BY JENN EDWARDS

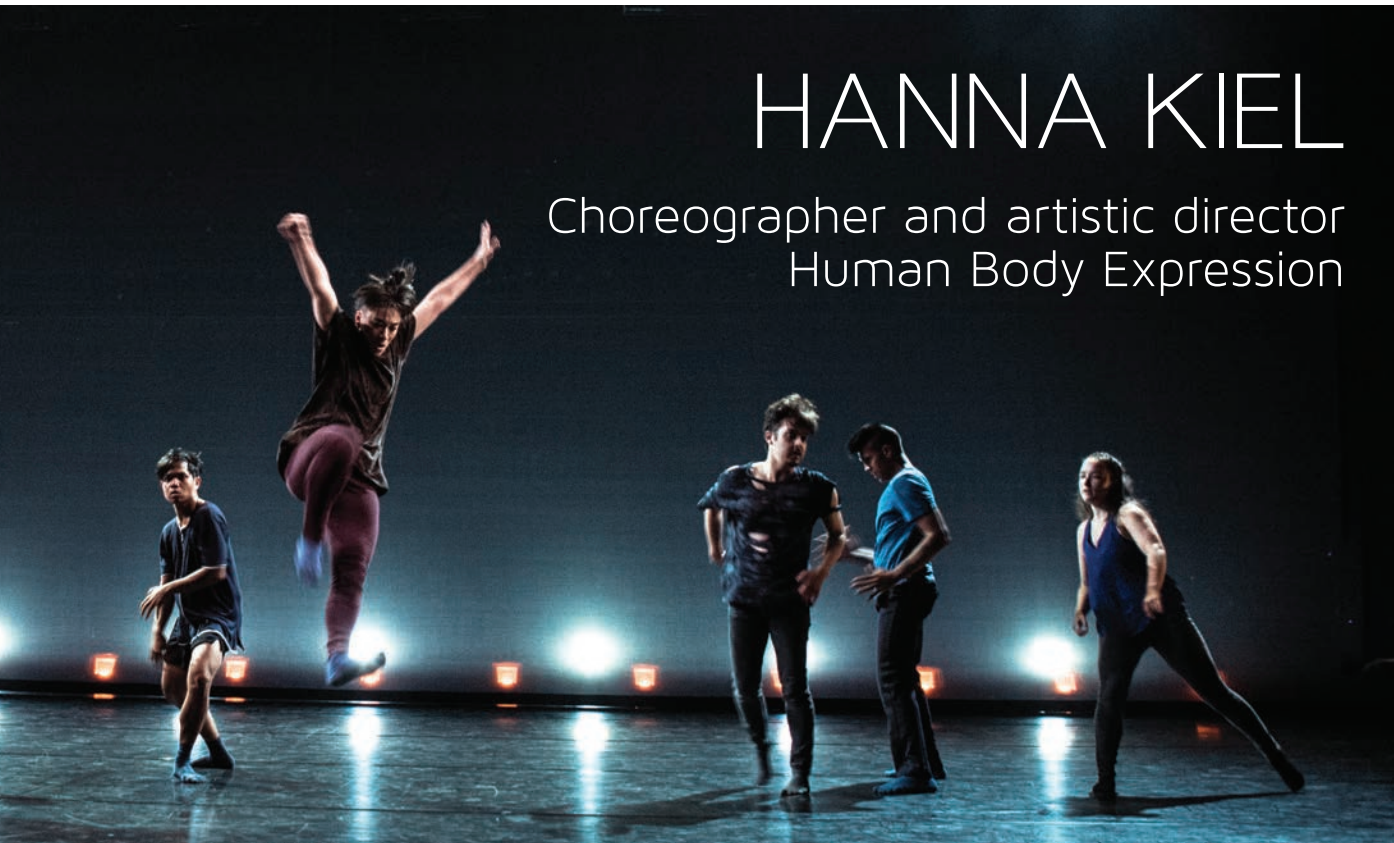
In Seoul, South Korea, Hanna Kiel grew up thinking she would be a writer of novels and screenplays. Kiel's dance debut was in a talent show in her last year of high school, when she won first prize for a Madonna impression. She had no formal training, but, afterwards, her gym teacher encouraged her to pursue dance as a career.

Kiel spent a few years at Soong-Hee Women's College studying modern dance, before moving to Vancouver for pre-professional training at Main Dance. She choreographed a series of solos there and also worked as a journalist at a Korean newspaper. It wasn't until moving to Toronto in 2008, and consciously recommitting herself to her craft, that things really started to take off for the young choreographer.

Kiel's first full-length work in Toronto, *Project L — The World That You Created* (2013), is a grounded, percussive trio filled with thought-provoking tableaux invoking family dynamics. *Entangled*, a vigorous fast-paced ensemble work inspired by political protests in South Korea, was presented at the Dance: Made in Canada festival in 2017. In 2018, Kiel won a Dora Mavor Moore award in the Outstanding Original Choreography category for her darkly cinematic work, *Chasing the Path*.

HANNA KIEL

Choreographer and artistic director
Human Body Expression



Working in close collaboration with her dancers, Kiel guides them back into their own memory banks to inspire movement that she then edits and embellishes. The result is a poetic, dreamlike approach to contemporary movement that has garnered a lot of attention over the last few years. She has had commissions from Toronto Dance Theatre, ProArteDanza, Ballet Jörgen and, in Calgary, Decidedly Jazz Danceworks, among others. She was also part of the National Ballet's choreographic workshop during the 2016-2017 season, and was invited to present a duet created there, *When the Wind Comes*, in a showcase for workshop participants.

An approachable and generous person, Kiel is passionate about inspiring fellow dance artists and creating platforms for them within the Toronto community. On top of running her own dance company, Human Body Expression, in 2013 she founded the Garage, a collective of emerging dance artists that meets once a week to develop new work.

She acknowledges her collaborators as huge contributors to her success, and has worked consistently with composer Greg Harrison, rehearsal director Natasha Poon Woo and mentor Bonnie Kim. She also chooses to work with dancers who have strong technical backgrounds, bolstering her own knowledge of classical technique and laying a strong foundation for the experiential, emotional journeys inherent in her creative process.



Photo: Shy Alter

Her most recent project was a continuation of *Entangled*. Now titled *Resonance*, the full-length version premiered in September, featuring 12 dancers and four musicians. Kiel's goal with *Resonance* was to expand audiences beyond only contemporary dance enthusiasts. As she continued to explore the theme of community, revolution and collective strength in the face of corruption, this iteration of the work placed patrons in the round and invoked a rock concert-type environment. ⁰¹



Choreographer Sean Dorsey has been caught off guard at the extraordinary audience response to his riotous and poignant *Boys in Trouble*, a piece of dance theatre that unpacks tropes of masculinity and gender construction. This has been true even in smaller communities on his company's recent 20-city U.S. tour, in places like Sheboygan, Wisconsin. "There's been this torrent of love and emotion," he says, "with packed audiences everywhere and people hanging around after the performances." He feels the themes of this show have never been more urgent and timely.

Boys in Trouble was shaped around the personal stories of his dancers and of transgender, gender-non-conforming, gay, bi, queer, and cisgender people on the masculine spectrum whom he met during a two-year period of interviews and workshops across the United States.

Dorsey's own journey as a transgender dancer and choreographer was often a lonely one. Born and raised in Vancouver, B.C., he started formal dancing training at Main Dance, and also pursued university studies in gender and political science, never believing a professional dance career was in the cards.

SEAN DORSEY

Choreographer and artistic director
Sean Dorsey Dance |
Artistic director
Fresh Meat Productions

BY CARLA ESCODA

Will Woodward, Sean Dorsey, ArVejon Jones,
Nol Simonse and Brian Fisher in Dorsey's
Boys in Trouble
Photo: Kegan Marling



But since he came out as transgender and moved to San Francisco, he has discovered the power of dance theatre to illuminate social justice issues.

He is proud, as a transgender artist, to have been presented by New York's Joyce Theater, in the Joyce's first LGBTQ+ program, timed to coincide with New York Pride week in 2018. To what he called "a big queer coming out for the Joyce," his company, Sean Dorsey Dance, brought *The Missing Generation*, a tribute to the survivors of the HIV/AIDS epidemic.

Beyond touring his own work, Dorsey pioneered the annual

San Francisco showcase of queer and transgender artists known as the Fresh Meat Festival. A rare platform for performers whose voices have often been suppressed, its 18th iteration last June featured exemplars of voguing and bachata, Deaf dance artist Antoine Hunter and Axis Dance Company, which brings together dancers with and without disabilities.

"I feel like there's this widening discrepancy," Dorsey says, "between the number of really smart, talented trans or gender-nonconforming artists and the limitations of the institutions, the lack of forward thinking. Even with more visibility and more trans awareness, the number and calibre of artists is growing much faster than the pace of cultural and institutional change. There is such a policing of gender conformity [in a dance world that prescribes] how to present as female in ballet, for example."

Dorsey believes that money is not the main obstacle. "There are low-cost fixes," he maintains, "like changing bathroom signs." He raised the situation of "gender non-conforming dancers who have been asked to leave highly esteemed training institutions once they've said they wanted to transition," which is not being talked about openly. "There's so much shame from people who've been ostracized, who've been forced out. They have no cultural power to bring attention [to the problem]. It's going to take government funders to say you can't discriminate."

Meanwhile, in his role as activist and educator, Dorsey continues to address gatherings of artists and presenters, urging them to take practical, meaningful steps toward inclusivity. ^{DI}



Benoit Swan Pouffer

Artistic director, Rambert

BY GERARD DAVIS

He may only have moved to London just over a year ago, but Benoit Swan Pouffer is clearly loving life in the English capital. “Even the weather’s been amazing!” he laughs. He’s here as the new artistic director of Rambert — only the eighth in its 93-year history — and he’s determined to make his mark. Rambert was originally a ballet company founded by Polish émigré Marie Rambert, but it is now the U.K.’s best-funded contemporary dance company.

Paris-born Pouffer studied at the Conservatoire national supérieur de musique et de danse (“A great education,” he says) before moving to New York to join Alvin Ailey American Dance Theater, a dream he’d had since the age of 13 when a teacher showed him a video of the company. “I saw these incredible beings who were honouring the tradition and proud to be black,” he remembers. “As a young mixed-race dancer, that really impacted the way I felt about dance.”

He reached the rank of principal at Ailey, where it wasn’t just the technical aspects of dance he mastered. The grueling touring schedule, working on new creations and maintaining the quality of historical work all gave him

an understanding of how a repertory company operated. This was to stand him in good stead in 2005 when he was offered the directorship of Cedar Lake Contemporary Ballet, founded just two years earlier in New York by Walmart heiress Nancy Walton Laurie.

“Cedar Lake was an amazing vehicle for me, but in their first season, before I arrived, a major newspaper said it was the worst place to see dance,” he says. Pouffer set about changing this perception and after just a few years turned Cedar Lake into a company to be reckoned with across the world.

It was not, however, the international acclaim that pleased him the most. “I think my biggest accomplishment was bringing Sidi Larbi Cherkaoui, Crystal Pite and Hofesh Shechter to create for the company; none of them had made work in the United States until I invited them.”

Pouffer resigned from Cedar Lake in 2013 to pursue other opportunities and spent the next few years as a freelance choreographer, furthering his work in movies, TV, theatre and cabaret. Then, in early 2018, he got a phone call from Helen Shute, Rambert’s chief executive, asking if

Benoit Swan Pouffer in rehearsal with Rambert
Photo: Pierre Tappon

Tara Birtwhistle

Associate artistic director
Royal Winnipeg Ballet

BY HOLLY HARRIS

he'd like to look after the launch of Rambert's new junior company, Rambert 2. He agreed. Then, at the end of that season, the artistic director of Rambert, Mark Baldwin, stepped down, and Pouffer was asked to replace him as guest artistic director. Finally, in December 2018, he was given the job on a permanent basis.

"After Cedar Lake, I was cautious about taking another directorship because my experience there was so euphoric I didn't want to try and repeat it — that to me would be boring. But going back to the studio, working with the dancers here, I really feel at home. Also, Cedar Lake was built from the ground up, everything was new for the company, whereas here there's all this history and an amazing repertoire to dive into."

Not that he's ignoring the future; far from it. "I want to create something new from something old. If I can put 93-year-old Rambert together with artists in their 20s and produce a moment that's relevant, then I've done my job."

The dancers have impressed him. "They're incredible technicians," he says. "And now I can see they're beginning to understand where I'm taking them because I'm going to push their boundaries as artists. I love to blur the lines; it's 2019 and a good dancer should be able to do everything. If a dancer tells me they're only a modern or a classical dancer, I mean, where have they been?"

The 2019-2020 season marks his first full program as permanent artistic director of Rambert, and some of his plans for the company are already coming to fruition. *Invisible Cities*, a collaboration between Rambert, Cherkaoui and director Leo Warner, premiered just a few weeks after our conversation; Sharon Eyal, Andrea Miller and Kidd Pivot's Jermaine Spivey are among those who'll be creating new works; and there's a Merce Cunningham Event coming in November, at Sadler's Wells.

The longer-term goals are even more ambitious. "I want to make Rambert indispensable," Pouffer states. "I want us to be the first point of call for all artists coming to the U.K., whether that's to join the company, take class or watch a performance. I intend to honour the brand and keep at its core Marie Rambert's idea that the company needs to challenge the audience in order to attract a new generation of dance-watchers. It's therefore essential that we have a diverse company that caters to a diverse audience. It's truly going to be a new journey for me." *DI*

For Tara Birtwhistle, her journey to becoming the Royal Winnipeg Ballet associate artistic director began with a series of progressions within the company itself. She embarked on training at the RWB School Professional Division at age 14 in 1986, then rose through the ranks to become a beloved principal dancer and, upon her retirement from the stage in 2011, respected ballet master. She was appointed to her current leadership role — a newly created position — in July 2018.

"I never imagined myself being in a directorial position," says Vancouver-born Birtwhistle. "But I've come to realize that I know more than I thought I did. When you're a principal dancer, people already look up to you as a natural leader, so that has carried through. I now feel very comfortable both in the rehearsal studio and the ballet boardroom."

Birtwhistle began learning the "business of ballet" when she moved into her position of ballet master, which continues to comprise one half of her portfolio. Then, deeply devoted to the company she calls home, and hungry for more, three years ago she approached the RWB's long-standing artistic director André Lewis about her desire to learn "everything" from the ground up, including the company's closely integrated RWB School Professional and Recreational Divisions. Lewis, who since 2017 also serves as chief executive officer, immediately took Birtwhistle under his wing, inviting her to organizational and board meetings.

Lewis considers the inside promotion of the former dancer to her new position to be "a testament to the depth of talent, maturity, resilience and strength in our organization." Birtwhistle, he says, "is part of the leadership team looking forward into the future of the RWB," including its international touring and world premiere commissions and co-productions by leading ballet choreographers.

Today, her duties include everything from collaborating on casting, coaching dancers, scheduling, working with marketing and development teams, advising on repertoire for regular season and touring productions,

“The RWB has always had a pioneering spirit of presenting new choreographies. I would like us to continue that legacy with a new, modern voice that features a company full of storytellers.” — Tara Birtwhistle



and conducting media interviews and press conferences, as well as ensuring that the team of five ballet masters have what they need for daily rehearsals. As one of those ballet masters, whenever possible Birtwhistle still teaches company class to the dancers, including her husband, principal Dmitri Dovgoselets, with whom she has two daughters.

Birtwhistle speaks with reverence about former artistic director Arnold Spohr. “Mr. Spohr always said, ‘Never be complacent. Say what you’re good at, and learn from others what you’re not good at.’”

She is also indebted to former RWB principal Evelyn Hart, whom she describes as an “amazing storyteller.” It is, in fact, this sense of storytelling that Birtwhistle prizes most and is bedrock to her own shared vision with Lewis for the company. Both believe that in full-length narrative-based ballets, as well as more abstract works, dancers create emotional resonance through “telling a story through your body.”

This tenet has always defined the RWB’s artistic voice and was given flight onstage by past principals, including Birtwhistle herself.

“These days dancers post how many pirouettes they can do or how high they can jump on Instagram, focusing more

on technical virtuosity than on creating mood, emotion and character,” Birtwhistle says. “The RWB has always had a pioneering spirit of presenting new choreographies. I would like us to continue that legacy with a new, modern voice that features a company full of storytellers.”

Birtwhistle attended the second biennial international conference, Positioning Ballet, held in February 2019 at the Dutch National Ballet, which widened her horizons with candid discussions about leadership and the future and relevancy of ballet in the 21st century. It also provided Birtwhistle an opportunity to speak on behalf of the RWB and give it an “international face and voice” during those critical sharing sessions. As importantly, it helped to build invaluable bridges and network systems with artistic directors from both smaller-scale and larger companies around the world, as well as closer to home, including the National Ballet of Canada’s artistic director Karen Kain in Toronto.

The Royal Winnipeg Ballet is Canada’s oldest troupe and the longest continuously operating company in North America, co-founded in 1939 by two English women, Gweneth Lloyd and Betty Farrally. As it embarks on its 80th anniversary season, Birtwhistle considers herself fortunate to be in a key position to help take the company into the future. *DI*

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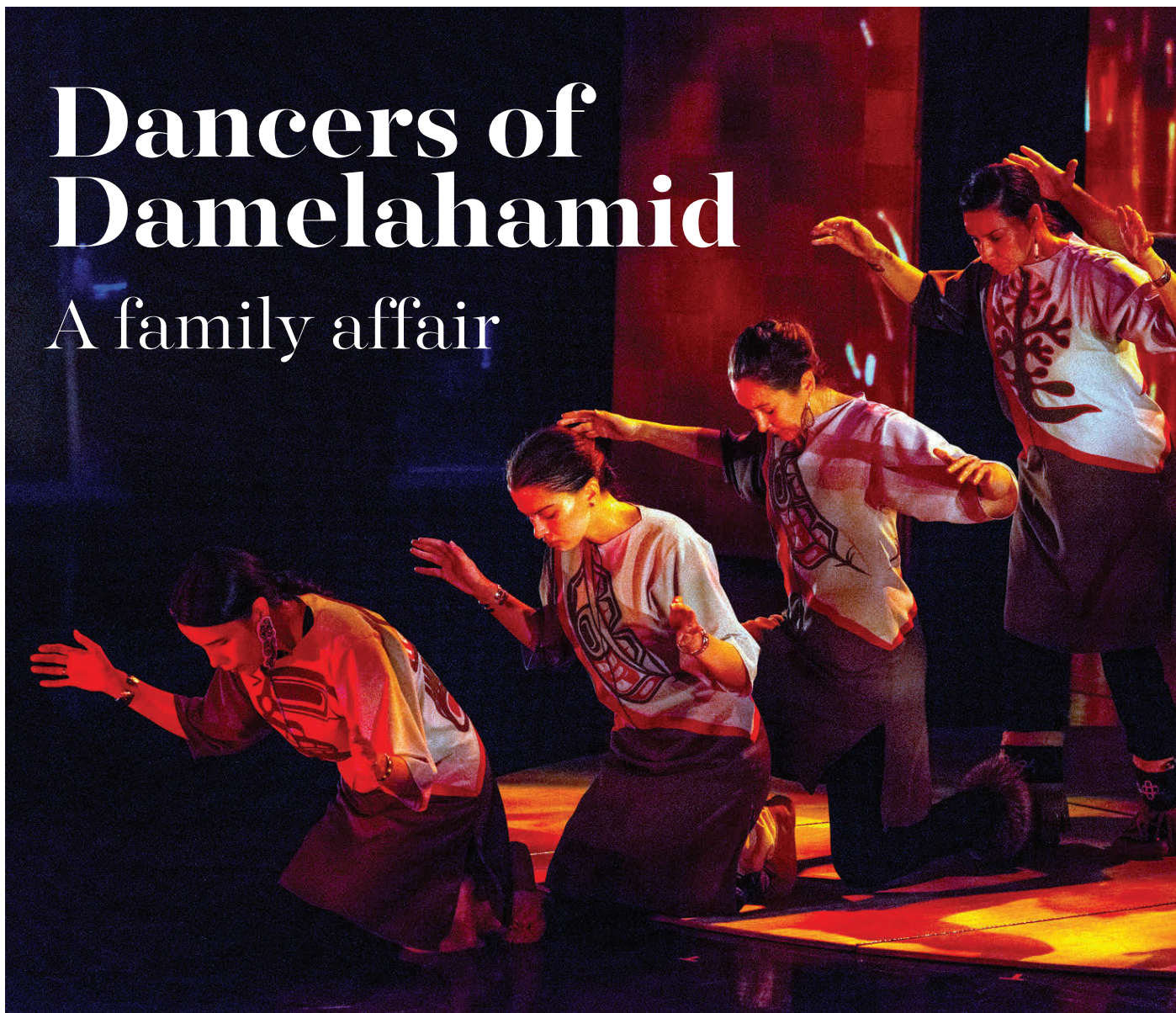
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Dancers of Damelahamid

A family affair



The Dancers of Damelahamid is, and has always been, a family affair. Founded by Gitxsan Chief Kenneth (Ken) Harris and Cree Elder Margaret Harris in 1967, the company remains committed to its hereditary cultural roots. Their daughter, Margaret Grenier, grew up with the company and in 2003 became artistic director. “I was part of the first generation of my family to grow up always knowing dance,” says Grenier. “It’s about more than just learning songs and dance; it’s also learning about oral history and language. It shaped my identity as an Indigenous person.”

Grenier, who has a master’s in arts education from Simon Fraser University and has served as a faculty member for the Banff Centre Indigenous Dance Residency, has broadened the reach of the company — since she became artistic director, they have presented several full-length productions and toured internationally, including to New Zealand in 2008.

A Dancers of Damelahamid production combines movement with elaborate regalia, carved wooden masks and traditional songs, which together tell rich narratives onstage. *Dancing our Stories* (2010) and *In Abundance* (2014), a story of the salmon cycle, were developed for the company’s frequent school performances. *Spirit and Tradition* was presented at the 2010 World Expo in Shanghai, China, and subsequently toured to Peru, Ecuador, and to the 2015 Pan Am Games in Toronto. *Flicker*, an active part of the company’s repertoire, is a contemporary multimedia work about the mystical realm portrayed through coastal masked dance. This September, the company premiered *Minowin*, another ambitious multimedia work, as part of the inaugural season of the Indigenous Theatre program at the National Arts Centre.

Almost all the members of Dancers of Damelahamid are immediate or extended family, including Grenier’s husband,

BY TESSA PERKINS DENEAULT



Andrew Grenier, who is the company's creative producer; their two children; and their daughter-in-law. Sometimes 88-year-old Margaret Harris joins them onstage.

When dancers outside the family join the company, they become honorary members of the Damelahamid family and are considered equals. Honorary members include Jeanette Kotowich (Cree-Métis), Kristy Janvier (Dene) and Cameron Fraser-Monroe (Tla'amin).

Born out of an urgency to restore pieces of their culture that were lost during the Canadian government's ban on traditional Indigenous dance (1884-1951), Ken and Margaret Harris began to work with Indigenous communities to revitalize and perform their songs and dances. They established a

small festival in Prince Rupert, a city on the northwest coast of British Columbia, which led to the formation of Dancers of Damelahamid in the traditional territories of the Gitksan nation. "Damelahamid" refers to the origins of their first ancestor, Hagbegwatku — a hereditary title held by Ken Harris until he passed away in 2010.

In 2019, Ken and Margaret Harris were inducted into Canada's Dance Hall of Fame by Dance Collection Danse. The award was presented by Grenier at a ceremony in Toronto where she explained, "Our privilege is that our lineage goes all the way back to the origin of Damelahamid. We were born into a narrative that was carried through song and dance as the most important form of cultural wealth."

Grenier is grateful for her parents' work and the impact they had on Indigenous communities. "Without their work, some communities wouldn't have songs and dances," she says during our conversation.

A pivotal moment for the company came in 1991 when Vancouver contemporary dance choreographer Karen Jamieson approached the Harrises to be part of *Gawa Gyani*, a site-specific collaboration with First Nations artists at the University of British Columbia's Museum of Anthropology (MOA). Much of Jamieson's work of that period was based on collaboration with Indigenous and settler artists, where the two groups were meant to be coming together to resolve conflict, an idea was based on a Gitksan concept.

"Ken wasn't comfortable at first," says Grenier, explaining that her father didn't know how it would work to combine traditional Gitksan dance with a contemporary piece. It was a learning experience as they figured out how to take something steeped in history and protocol and bring it to a state where they felt comfortable sharing it with the general public.

This project was Dancers of Damelahamid's introduction to the Vancouver dance scene and also the beginning of their ongoing relationship with the MOA, where, in 2008, they hosted their first Coastal First Nations Dance Festival. The annual festival, now called the Coastal Dance Festival, celebrates the stories, songs and dances of the many Indigenous peoples of the northwest coast of North America, including the Musqueam, Squamish, Tsleil-Waututh, Kwakwaka'wakw, Gitksan, Tsimshian, Nisga'a, Haida, Tagish and Tlingit nations. Artists from B.C., the Yukon, Alaska and Washington State are joined by overseas guests.

Looking to the future, Grenier is thinking about how to best support the next generation of dancers in the company and strengthen their dance practice. And invitations to tour both nationally and internationally only seem to be growing. Recently, the company was part of the Canadian contingent at Mexico's 2019 Festival Internacional Cervantino, a prominent performing arts festival that invites one country as a guest of honour each year.

For the Dancers of Damelahamid, their songs and dances are more than performance; they are a part of the dancers' cultural heritage, passed down through generations. As Grenier told the crowd at the Dance Hall of Fame ceremony: "Our dance is the steadfast story of who we are. It is an act of love, it is an opening of the heart and it is a ritual to share of our true selves." ^{DI}

MALPASO'S DUTY TO RISK

A CONTEMPORARY DANCE COMPANY IN CUBA AND ABROAD

The company name Malpaso has two derivations: the first takes its inspiration from *Voy a nombrar las cosas* (*I will name things*), a poem by Eliseo Diego that urges people to call things correctly as one sees them. The second, proposed by Malpaso Dance Company's co-artistic director and resident choreographer, Osnel Delgado, is based on a prediction that leaving the company he danced with previously, Danza Contemporanea, would be a misstep or, in Spanish, malpaso.

"We had no ambition to be viewed as Cuban kings, queens or caballeros [gentry]," says executive director Fernando Saez. "We chose a name conveying decency, humour and the deepest layer of our mission: the duty to take risks. Without those, art for us is meaningless."

The Cuban company drew its first breath in 2012, founded by co-directors Delgado, Saez and former Danza Contemporanea member Daileidys Carrazana, who now dances with Malpaso.

"Co-directing the company is not complicated," Saez says. "It's based on our common experience, confidence in our chief choreographer Osnel Delgado's graciousness and daily sorting of tasks. It's been an absolute asset not to serve vanity or one viewpoint, but company interests."

Malpaso has spent its young life pursuing collaboration. For example, Delgado recently set *Ocaso* (*Twilight*) on Hubbard Street Dance Chicago, whose resident

choreographer, Robyn Mineko Williams, set *Elemental* on Malpaso. *Ocaso* was performed by dancers from both companies on a mixed bill at the Chicago Auditorium in March 2019, and *Elemental* was danced by Malpaso two months later, in Havana.

Taking into account that several contemporary companies have begun to flourish in Cuba over the past decade, Saez has been mulling over the idea of Malpaso collaborating with other groups to host a contemporary dance festival. "Strategizing for a contemporary Pan-American festival, including companies from Canada to Argentina, on the level that Cuban dance deserves, excites me," he says. "It could jumpstart Cuba playing a curator role in contemporary dance."

He sees such an international festival as a natural outgrowth of Barack Obama's overtures to re-establish diplomatic relations, which led to the company becoming better known through a greater number of performances in North America and Europe. After tours to Holguín, Cienfuegos and Matanzas, the company has gained a corresponding visibility inside Cuba.

At their studios in the Sephardic Centre in Havana's Vedado neighbourhood, the public is invited to open rehearsals, and students from the country's main ballet school, the Fernando Alonso National School of the Arts, show up on Malpaso's doorstep for company class.

BY TOBA SINGER



Above: Malpaso Dance Company in
Robyn Mineko Williams' *Elemental*
Photo: Rachel Aka

Right: Fernando Saez
Photo: Courtesy of Malpaso



Malpaso is “open to going anywhere, primarily to fulfill a philosophical commitment to reach deeply into local culture.”

— Fernando Saez

Concerns about tourism having become Cuba's cash cow echo among the island's dance milieu, who wonder what impact it will have on the art form.

“There are many ways to host visitors beyond purely commercial tourism,” Saez points out. “Tourism can encourage small nests of organic local audiences. Art should attract audiences — tourist or not — to a thrilling rendering of human existence.”

The U.S. trade and travel embargo, which discourages travel from the U.S. to the island, aims to isolate Cuba, and so international company tours take on added importance. On the 2019 tour to the U.S. and Canada, the company found a warm reception, according to Saez.

“The character of our audiences stood out this time,” says Saez. For instance, in Jackson Hole, Wyoming, known as a ski resort, the community has, over two decades, consolidated a project called Dancers Workshop. “Their work has recast the town as a small dance capital,” he explains, “and, as a result, we found another cohort: parents!” Their reactions and questions during audience Q and A sessions at the end of the children's workshops Malpaso conducted made Saez feel he could build even more challenging encounters with the community on future tours.

Malpaso is “open to going anywhere, primarily to fulfill a philosophical commitment to reach deeply into local culture,” Saez says. “We like to return to previous venues to build audiences.” With an informed audience, “we have a safe place from which to move more broadly and deeply into our art,” an approach that has been richly rewarded by return invitations from the New York's Joyce Theater (where Malpaso is an associated company), Washington's Kennedy Center and Toronto's Luminato Festival.

In January 2020, Swedish choreographer Mats Ek will restage *WWW (Women with Water)*, a solo made for Sylvie Guillem in 1995, adding a male role. Malpaso will premiere the new duet in Gainesville, Florida, in March 2020, to honour Cuban choreographer Alberto Alonso, who, in the last years of his life, taught ballet at Santa Fe Community College there. Ek and his wife, the former dancer Ana Laguna, will be onstage in conversation, and then *WWW* moves to the Joyce. In August 2020, the company will appear at California's La Jolla Festival, with an Azure Barton commission, as yet unnamed. ¹¹



TALDANS

The experimental voice
of contemporary
dance in Turkey

BY N. BUKET CENGIZ



Turkey is not a country that instantly comes to mind when the subject is contemporary dance, let alone the experimental vein of this art form. However, Mustafa Kaplan and Filiz Sizanli are co-artistic directors, choreographers and dancers of an independent and highly experimental company, Taldans, based in Istanbul.

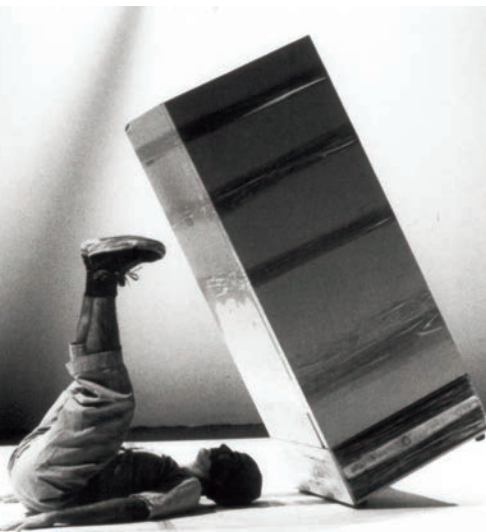
Kaplan trained as an engineer and Sizanli as an architect, and the inspirations they derive from these professions are at the core of their idiosyncratic and intellectual approach to dance. It is never easy to find them in Istanbul as their schedule is usually packed with performances and activities abroad. For instance, last October they performed at the Experimental Media and Performing Arts Center (EMPAC) in Troy, New York; in November, in Hungary, Croatia and Serbia.

The paths of the two artists first crossed in 1996 at the Theater Research Laboratory (TAL), a unit under City

Theaters of Istanbul focusing on movement theatre. Kaplan, a movement trainer and choreographer at TAL, launched free dance and movement classes; Sizanli joined these classes, which soon evolved into a collective of semi-professional dancers. In those days, participants of the TAL collective often went abroad for training since this was not possible at home, unless one was a student of the Mimar Sinan Fine Arts University State Conservatory. Thus, Kaplan asked participants to share knowledge they gained abroad with the collective members at TAL.

When Kaplan and Sizanli officially formed their company in 2003, they called it Taldans with reference to this important centre of the early phase of contemporary dance in Istanbul, which closed in 2002.

Although for the most part Sizanli and Kaplan are the company's sole dancers, they sometimes invite others to join them. In countries where they receive funding for



Top left: Mustafa Kaplan and Filiz Sizanli in Taldans' *Victory Over the Sun*
Photo: Ebru Ahunbay

Top right: Taldans' *DO KU MAN*
Photo: Murat Dürüm

Bottom left: Taldans' *Dolap*
Photo: Courtesy of Taldans

Bottom right: Taldans' *Ritual for a Sensitive Geography*
Photo: L. Delamotte



co-productions, they work with local artists; in Turkey, they have worked with Turkish dancers.

Sizanli moved to Eskisehir, a city around 200 miles from Istanbul, a couple of years ago and since then Taldans has not had its own studio; in her regular visits to town for rehearsals, they use various locations. Although there is no consistent funding for their company, the duo has managed to create around 15 works, half of which were partially funded by European organizations such as Montpellier Danse Festival, Kunstenfestival 0090 in Antwerp, Belgium, and Linz European Capital of Culture in Austria. The Turkish state supports different art forms, including traditional dance, but not the less familiar style of contemporary dance. Similarly, arts councils in Turkey prefer

other branches of art, leaving a negligible share for dance. Despite financial challenges, the duo presents their works all around the world and, except for *Ritual for a Sensitive Geography*, they have performed all of them in Turkey, as well.

A few words on four of their works give an idea about Taldans' experimental soul. *Dolap*, their 2000 duet, has been seen in around 20 countries to date, ranging from Japan to Norway and Brazil to Morocco. "Dolap" means fridge, yet metaphorically the word is used to describe a deceptive scheme. The concept at the centre of the 40-minute *Dolap* is the body at work, two people trying to carry a fridge, which eventually becomes a third character onstage. Aiming to abolish the line between rehearsal and performance, there is no pre-established ending, which is different each night.

The first version of *Dokuman* (a word made up of a combination of the Turkish words for text, textile and texture) premiered in 2009 at deSingel in Antwerp, with two dancers joining Sizanli and Kaplan onstage. In this exploration of the movement, sound and rhythm of a textile factory in Linz, the aim was to translate the various factory systems into onstage movement. Taldans revisited *Dokuman* in 2018, renamed *DO KU MAN* and featuring four pairs of performers; in this version, it's almost like the pairs are body-doubles of each other. This time, Kaplan and Sizanli did not perform, choosing to only direct the work instead.

In 2017, their *Victory Over the Sun*, loosely based on the first Russian futuristic opera of the same name (1913) by Aleksei Kruchenykh, premiered at the 21st Istanbul Theatre Festival. For the first time, their departure point was a written text, with the duo dealing with Kruchenykh's often ambiguous libretto through mathematical and architectural calculations designed to untangle the content hidden in the form, emphasizing the aural dimension of the words and images through body language.

Taldans' most recent work, *Ritual for a Sensitive Geography*, was a series of three choreographic installations that premiered in 2018 at the Centre d'art la Graineterie in Houilles. Based on the concept of meeting rituals, the work was positioned somewhere between installation, performance and audience connection, with Kaplan and Sizanli joined by French choreographer and dancer Julie Nioche.

In their next, still untitled work, Kaplan and Sizanli will continue to explore the structure of musical forms: the destination in their new project is to find the choreographic counterpart of serialism in music. ▯

Upcoming: *Ritual for a Sensitive Geography* is at the Pharenheit festival in Le Havre, France, on January 31 and February 1, 2020; *Victory Over the Sun* is at Théâtre de la Ville in Paris February 27 to March 3, 2020.

Dressing the Body in Motion



Designing for Dance at the Banff Centre

BY KAIJA PEPPER

“The most important thing is to stay calm and never run out of ideas,” says Stine Sjøgren, speaking about the art and craft of costume design. Sjøgren, the lead faculty of the Banff Centre for Art and Creativity’s Designing for Dance program, is surrounded by a sea of colour and concentration as the summer 2019 cohort finalize details on their third costume.

The two-week program will come to an end the day after we speak, and the seven designers are preparing for tomorrow’s studio showing. There is indeed a sense of calm — though very charged and focused — in the costume workshop, located in the basement of the centre’s theatre complex. The designers’ worktables are covered with fabric, trim and sewing paraphernalia. Mannequins stand serenely, decked out in an array of colour, texture and shape, patiently accepting the creative team’s endless attention.

Teamwork is part of the reality of creating in the performing arts that Sjøgren stresses with participants. One of a designer’s closest relationships is with their cutter, and at Banff each designer is paired with a summer practicum student whose expertise is in costume building.

Alberta Ballet’s Jennifer Gibson, costume by Deirdre Morgan; Laura Vande Zande, costume by Valentina Martelli; and Garrett Groat, costume by Juliana Silva / Designing for Dance studio presentation
Photos: Jessica Wittman, the Banff Centre

Another key relationship is with the lighting designer. “A good lighting designer is able to keep all the colours, and also the dancers’ faces, alive. The wrong lights can completely kill the design,” says Sjøgren.

This is brought home during an onstage lighting session. Linda Beech, a theatre designer in Winnipeg, said that when she saw her all-black costume under the lights, it looked flat. Beech added several shiny trim pieces to pick up the shapes and to help define the dancer’s legs. She also told me about a pair of bright orange shorts on another costume that, under stage lights, made the dancer wearing them look nude.

Right at the beginning, the realities of the human body and the typically extreme movement involved in any choreography are taken on board. Each designer is introduced to a dancer (this year, from Alberta Ballet), who will not just model their creations, but dance in them, demonstrating the kind of stress that costumes need to withstand in performance.

After listening to an assigned snippet of music, together they devise a concept to inspire both costume and movement. The dancers give feedback during fittings and are invited to listen to group critiques, so it’s a learning experience for them, too.

“The most important thing is to stay calm and never run out of ideas.” — Stine Sjøgren



“During the fittings, we’re quite vocal,” says Sjøgren. “We explain things that normally, as professional designers, we would just automatically take into consideration.” This includes suggestions on how to extend the line of the limbs, how to free the neck and how to make sure the legs show.

Stacia Smith-Alexander, a lecturer and costume shop supervisor at the University of New Mexico, found one of her designs featuring geometric shapes “just didn’t work in terms of allowing mobility for the dancer.” But, she says, “I’d like to revisit it in the future and engineer it really well.”

Another of her costumes needed only a bit of tweaking. Under the lights, Smith-Alexander realized she didn’t quite have the top part of a black tunic and the dancer was lost; by adding a shiny piece to the shoulders, attention was drawn up to his face.

The ability to think and rethink a costume is crucial. In the real world, the lighting design, and its effect on colour and definition, might change. Or, says Sjøgren, “the choreographer might not get the rights for the music, or they might say the costume is not right for the piece. So we push everyone to come up with different interpretations of their design.”

Sjøgren has developed the program philosophy based on her decades working in dance, theatre and opera in Norway.

“It’s lovely when people come up after a performance and say, ‘Your design is beautiful, I loved it.’” But, she says, some of the most successful costumes are designed not to draw attention to themselves, but, instead, to serve the overall piece.

She mentions her work last year for Tanztheater Wuppertal Pina Bausch, designing the costumes for Alan Lucien Øyen’s *Bon Voyage, Bob*, a highly theatrical dance piece. “I loved being one of the people who created this story,” she says. “If people understand what’s happening onstage, then you’ve done your job.” *The New York Times*’ review described *Bon Voyage, Bob*’s “deliberately Bauschian” aesthetic, including the “dowdy flower print dresses and Oscar-worthy evening gowns,” suggesting Sjøgren’s success at serving the piece while also creating a strong visual statement.

Polish designer Katarzyna Lewinska, who works mostly in film (with Peter Greenaway and Andrzej Wajda, among others), was also on faculty last summer at Banff. “Even though you’re an experienced designer,” she says, “you learn from every single thing each participant does. It’s so interesting to observe the way they solve problems and the decisions they make that lead them to a particular colour combination.”

It’s also important to push participants to risk new

directions. Valentina Martelli, a fashion designer from Sao Paulo, told me she usually favours lots of colour. Sjøgren says she and Lewinska “saw right away that Valentina has the ability to work with colour and beautiful and interesting shapes, so we pushed her in another direction.” Martelli says she “really struggled” with her second design, all black and with only a few clean straight lines. “But then I saw it on the dancer in movement on the stage and now I’ve fallen in love with it!”

Despite the all-consuming creative process involved in the intensive program, participants took group hikes and swims in the natural beauty and inspiration of the Rocky Mountains, where the Banff Centre is located. “We made sure to take care of mind and body,” says Sjøgren, “so then everyone was back fresh the next day.”

At the final studio showing, each team of designer, cutter and dancer introduced themselves and the joys and challenges experienced during *Designing for Dance*. “I’ve never worked with so much stretch fabric before!” said one cutter. A designer spoke about how her second costume took her out of her comfort zone by incorporating both masculine and feminine aspects in a way that turned out to be very reflective of today’s cultural moment. And then the dancer put her costume to the test, bringing it to life through motion. ^{DI}

TRAINING THE CONTEMPORARY DANCER OF TODAY

THOUGHTS FROM THE FRONTLINE

BY REBECCA KARPUS

Whether it is the choreography being created or the dancers being produced, dance is constantly shifting in response to its environment. How do today's educators remain current while looking to the future, and what does it mean to train a contemporary dancer today? Three Vancouver-based professionals offer their thoughts.

Artemis Gordon, artistic director of the Arts Umbrella dance program, feels that educating a contemporary dancer is less about teaching a particular style of movement and more about imparting values and tools. In fact, she considers the term contemporary to be widely misunderstood.

"Contemporary is not a style," she explains, "but the methodology, curriculum and aesthetic of the current zeitgeist." The irony, however, is that the deeper Gordon delves into contemporary education, the more she learns about ballet. Therefore, Arts Umbrella aims to use ballet in a way that is most relevant to contemporary choreography. Instead of seeing ballet and contemporary as separate genres, using differing techniques and philosophies, the school attempts to blur boundaries, to create a dancer who can embody sophisticated movement and seamlessly shift between choreographies.

Gordon remarks that ballet is never a perfected craft and, with so much vocabulary, it is easy to focus all of one's attention on the development of steps. Interested in a more holistic approach, she believes that focusing on developing balletic virtuosity in terms of mastering steps at a young age is short-sighted. "Education implies time," she says, and technique, which is just one element of education, only develops with maturity.

Mirroring this sense of maturity, she works to instill appreciation in her dancers for the work itself and for all that is involved in the creative process. Gordon hopes that the Arts Umbrella method of gradual and consistent work becomes more common, as "improvisation, collaborative thought and the ability to have a classroom dialogue are essential for a valuable functioning dance artist today."

Gordon took on her role with Arts Umbrella in 1992 after

graduating from the National Ballet of Canada's teacher training program. Since Arts Umbrella is located in relative isolation on the west coast of Canada (far from Europe and the majority of large ballet schools), Gordon had the freedom to develop a program without any creative or pedagogical expectations. Today, Arts Umbrella is the affiliate training institution of Ballet BC, as both organizations share similar philosophies and visions.

Natalie Lefebvre Gnam has sat on the board of the Training Society of Vancouver for nearly a decade, and currently serves as board chair. She, too, has deeply contemplated the term contemporary, especially when the organization updated its mandate from its intention to "... provide contemporary dance training ..." to "... provide training to contemporary dancers ..." In her eyes, there are new skills and challenges that dancers face today, and the mandate's revision highlights her belief that diverse training is key. It was no longer relevant to offer classes only in the realm of modern dance.

To Lefebvre Gnam, a local dance artist and artistic producer with plastic orchid factory, a contemporary dancer is expected to encompass a versatile skillset. To support this, the not-for-profit Training Society offers a range of drop-in "working classes," from urban to theatrical, with the intention of providing professional and emerging dancers with diverse and consistent training, by a variety of rotating (and rarely repeated) local and guest teachers.

The Training Society's attention to inclusivity is another core element of their philosophy. With a subsidy from the Vancouver Dance Centre (where the classes are held), the society is able to charge a fee much lower than most drop-in classes in the city, and the diversity of programming attracts a far-reaching demographic of dance artists. Instead of different ages and genres being divided into various classes, all are welcomed into the same space. A scholarship is offered every term, based simply on a letter of intent submitted by applicants.

Newer and smaller organizations such as Ballet Bloch, a



Dancers in rehearsal at
Arts Umbrella International
Summer Dance Intensive
Photo: Michael Slobodian



Arash Khakpour in class with the Training Society of Vancouver
Photo: Yvonne Chew



Tracy-Lea Bloch rehearsing student Pauline Koeplin
Photo: James Kondrosky

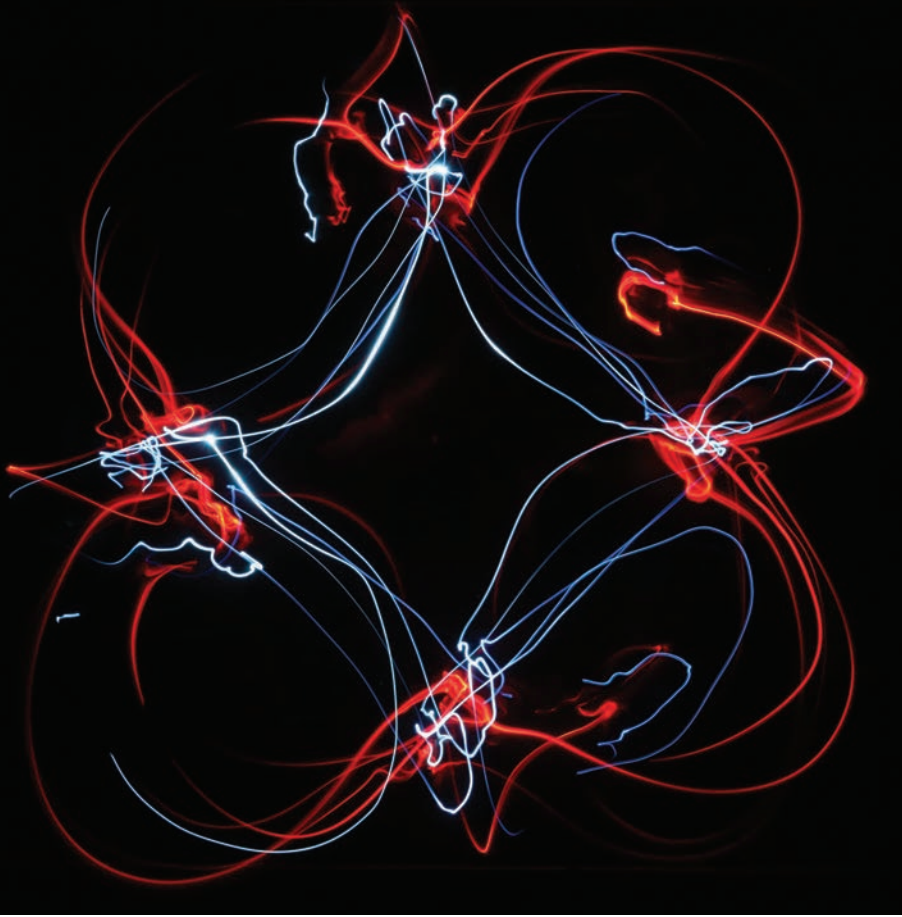
ballet school located in North Vancouver, are also pushing for progressive training models. Director Tracy-Lea Bloch doesn't believe that advanced classical technique alone creates a professional ballet dancer today; what is also needed is a new level of choreographic collaboration and curiosity, and she is motivated to offer ballet training grounded in "intention and intelligence." Since the school's inception in 2012, Bloch has gradually shifted its performance focus away from the popular competition world toward annual full-length ballets.

Ballet Bloch may only have about 40 student dancers, but the productions are ambitious and imaginative, implementing full musical scores and often re-choreographing scenes in collaboration with the faculty and dancers. While rehearsing, Bloch encourages dancers to offer creative input, with the goal of developing an independently minded artist. For instance, in 2017's production of *Giselle*, when faculty member Monica Proenca took a creative approach to Act II,

telling the story of Myrtha's past and offering a glimpse into how the Wilis originally came into being, the dancers were actively involved.

To produce dancers who can improvise and collaborate in a contemporary setting, Bloch strives "to create a safe place to explore artistic expression and to be vulnerable to develop as a dance artist." Despite its small size, Ballet Bloch feels it is important to also focus on broader training that supports dancer health, and the space includes onsite gyrotonic, Pilates, and massage therapy equipment and personnel.

The concept of the contemporary dancer is complex. For Gordon, it is located within the current zeitgeist; for Lefebvre Gnam, within the increasing versatility required; and for Bloch, inside ballet's artistic growth. While the contemporary dancer is progressive in essence, Gordon reminds us that "the goal is not to be progressive, but to be relevant to this present moment in time."^{DI}



JULIA CARR'S LIGHT DRAWINGS

Long-exposure photography meets Métis jigging

BY HILARY MAXWELL

Swirls of vibrant colours, with bursts of neon, curve, flip and intersect, creating unique geometric patterns in Julia Carr's light drawing photographs. Created through a collaboration with V'ni Dansi and the Louis Riel Métis Dancers, Carr reimagines Métis square dances, jigs and reels using long-exposure photography.

Light drawings are a type of performance art that involves moving a light source while taking a long-exposure photograph (when the camera's shutter speed is slowed down) in a darkened space. This technique allows for a series of movements to be documented in one

shot, making crisp single point lines combined with motion blur. "It lends itself well to see these traditional dances in a new way and to think about them differently," says Carr, artistic director and choreographer of the interdisciplinary Body Narratives Collective.

Carr is an experienced Métis jigger, having performed with V'ni Dansi for close to 10 years. "I was really curious to see what the square dance patterns would look like with long-exposure light traces from above," she says. Her idea to shoot from a bird's-eye view was partly influenced by the perspectives she's gained through her aerial dance

practice, which involves performing at great heights off the sides of buildings and suspended from treetops. Carr's curiosity was further fueled when she heard a story about a legally blind jigging dancer from St. Ambrose, Manitoba, who performed with a professional touring group. Carr then realized, "Oh! We could do this shoot in the dark!" and the creative wheels for the light drawings were set in motion.

The research project took place over two days in Vancouver's Scotiabank Theatre, and resulted in a seven-piece exhibit. The titles for the light drawing refer to specific square dance calls and quotes from the Métis elder who had taught the dances to V'ni Dansi artistic director Yvonne Chartrand in Manitoba.

Allemande Left and Grand Chain, the image seen here, is titled after a common square dance that many children learn in public school gym class. The abstract pathways give an impression of the movement formation, performed here by four women and four men, who are depicted by, respectively, red and blue light, colours represented in the two official flags of Métis culture.

To achieve the eagle-eye perspective, Carr secured a lens, attached to a Canon 6D mark II camera body at the centre of the theatre grid above the stage. The dancers, including Carr, would rehearse smaller sections of the choreographies, while a colleague triggered the camera remotely through an iPad or cellphone.

The group experimented working in darkness, except for light emitted by LED bike lights, which the dancers tried holding or fastening to different parts of their body and costume. They also played with taping coloured cellophane over the light covers. As the dancers jiggled, their movements appeared as vivid traces of fluorescent blue, red, yellow and white on the black canvas of the darkened theatre.

Carr's contemporary take on traditional Métis dances is not what typically comes to mind when imagining dance photography, nor what we see in live performance. In both, the physical form of the body is the subject. Instead, Carr captures the energy of the dancers, the dance and the ephemerality of performance in a still image composed of light. ▀

Louis Riel Métis Dancers perform *Allemande Left and Grand Chain* with lights worn on left wrist (women with blue lights, men with red)
Photo: Body Narratives Collective



ONE DAY FOR THE CLIMATE

HOW KIDD PIVOT WORKS TOWARD SUSTAINABILITY

"Instead of looking for hope, look for action. Then and only then hope will come." — Greta Thunberg, 16-year-old climate activist, TED Talk

BY ERIC BEAUCHESNE

Among the topics shaping our vision of the future, climate change is at the forefront. Scientists have flagged the impact of human activities on the climate for more than 30 years, but it is only recently that the combined effects of extreme weather events, activism and media coverage have put the climate crisis in everybody's mind. In 2018, following the latest report from the IPCC (International Panel on Climate Change), the United Nations Secretary-General António Guterres declared, "If we do not change course by 2020, we risk missing the point where we can't avoid runaway climate change." He called on the civil society of all countries to reduce their emissions by 50 percent before 2030.

If we accept the urgency of his statement, if we care about the future of all living beings on the planet, we must mobilize and be the catalysts of positive change.

Growing up fishing and hunting in Quebec, I sensed at an early age the natural world's interconnections, and my impact and responsibility to protect it, yet as a dancer, I embarked on a career that involves travelling the world and contributing to the problem by taking many flights every year. I struggled with this reality my entire career as a performer and continue to grapple with it now as Kidd Pivot's associate artistic director.

As dance artists, we are part of an industry that values the sharing of dance nationally and internationally. We are artists but also cultural ambassadors, tied in a logic of touring, and it seems impossible to avoid flying extensively. This includes

performers, choreographers, staggers, teachers, students, designers, technicians, agents, presenters, art councils' representatives and arts journalists. If many of us agree on the benefits of being exposed to different artistic voices and of making our art form accessible to broad audiences, we must also question the environmental impact of what we do.

As a member of Kidd Pivot for the past 15 years, I've witnessed the evolution of the narrative around the environmental impact of touring. Efficient tours have obvious financial benefits, but Kidd Pivot now also considers the company's carbon footprint when planning tours and this can lead to refusing important gigs. Nevertheless, the impact of Kidd Pivot's touring results in an average of 20 tonnes of CO₂e (carbon dioxide equivalent) per year per touring member, a footprint that comes mostly from flying the performers, crew and set. Even if this number is relatively small compared to other touring organizations, it is about 10 times more than what many agree to be the carbon budget per person per year in order to meet the Paris Agreement targets.

1Day for the Climate

Although the footprint of going to specific destinations is now considered, Kidd Pivot remains dependent on presenters' availability, agents' networks and touring grant application criteria, and the company's footprint has not substantially decreased in the last years. Yet the discussions around our touring impact have increased noticeably and have encouraged the company to launch 1Day for the Climate.

Inaugurated in 2015, the initiative is a company–employee voluntary partnership dedicating one day of work per year to climate protection. In short, employees and collaborators joining 1Day for the Climate commit to donate one day of their salary per year. That amount is, in turn, matched by the company and the combined funds are directed to climate protection. The mission of 1Day for the Climate is to encourage organizations to acknowledge their carbon footprint, aim for net carbon neutrality and raise public awareness. Through this initiative the company has worked with Offsetters in order to measure its touring footprint and has offset more than 750 tonnes of CO₂e (the equivalent of removing more than 150 cars from the road for a year), enabling Kidd Pivot to become one of the first dance companies to tour carbon neutral. Among other things, the initiative has also helped protect British Columbia's Great Bear Rainforest and support leading environmental organizations.

The successful launch of 1Day for the Climate attests to our ability to get involved in our own capacity, whether that is as an individual or organization. At the same time, it is a humble response to the urgency of the climate crisis we face; the real challenge remains to swiftly reduce our emissions from the very beginning. I find hope when thinking of the intellectual and creative level of the dance community; there must be a way to reinvent ourselves so we can keep sharing our art form and be part of the solution. *DI*

www.kiddpivot.org/1day-for-the-climate



Rosie Kay Dance Company
in Rosie Kay's *10 Soldiers*
Photo: Brian Slater

10 SOLDIERS

Choreographed by Rosie Kay, artistic director, Rosie Kay Dance Company

BY DAVID MEAD

Soldiering is not a subject usually associated with dance, but it was put firmly into the spotlight by British choreographer Rosie Kay in her 2010 work, *5 Soldiers*, recently expanded into the large-scale, two-act *10 Soldiers*.

The idea came in 2007. Recovering from a dislocated knee and under anaesthetic, Kay dreamed she was in a desert war and her leg had been blown off. With images of soldiers killed in Iraq in the news daily, it occurred to her that they still lay their bodies on the line (the work is subtitled *The Body is the Frontline*) despite technological advances, and that dance could be a powerful means of exploring the lead up to combat and its effects.

Kay is noted for researching her subjects in depth. It took almost two years, but she finally secured a two-week attachment to an infantry battalion

based in Aldershot, Hampshire, where she took part in full-scale exercises and manoeuvres on Salisbury Plain and Dartmoor, experiencing firsthand the physically and psychologically demanding training. Another secondment saw her spend time at defence medical and rehabilitation centres where she spoke with soldiers with trauma injuries and amputations. Later, serving soldiers sat in on rehearsals to ensure authenticity.

It may have the army's backing, but like its earlier iteration, *10 Soldiers* is no glossy recruiting poster. Intense and visceral, the 80-minute, two-act piece provides a no-holds-barred view of soldiers' preparation for conflict, the fighting itself, and the impact they have on bodies and minds. It is also remarkably compelling.

The army may meld people into fighting units, but Kay reminds us that soldiers are individuals, too, with personal

struggles that have to be dealt with. She brings a particularly female perspective in her observations of issues women in the frontline face: how they are required to suppress their femininity, but at the same time can become revered by or objects of fantasy for men starved of female companionship. Going back to her dream, she doesn't forget the personal consequences of conflict either and the shattering injuries that it can bring.

The army's support continues. *5 Soldiers* has been performed at numerous army venues. For those and for *10 Soldiers*, a larger-scale work performed in theatres, senior officers frequently take part in post-show discussions. Comments are heard regularly on the work's realism, not only in its depiction of the aggression of combat, macho swagger, peacocking and horseplay, but also the way it portrays the tedium and terror.

Never one to shy away from difficult and controversial topics, Kay has also explored religion, belief and ritual in the unsettling *There is Hope*. More recently, *MK Ultra* was meant to be about politics but disappeared "down the rabbit hole of conspiracy theory," as she puts it. The pop culture piece takes up the idea of secret Illuminati signs in pop videos and the theory that pop stars are under some kind of brainwashing programming based on the CIA's real MK Ultra program.

But there's a lighter side to Kay, too, and she's also worked with film, made large-scale dance for theatre productions and site-specific works including *The Great Train Dance*, which actually took place during a trip on a steam train. ⁰¹



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ARTS UMBRELLA

DANCE NOTES



Contract and Release

The Noguchi Museum's collection installation *Noguchi: Body-Space Devices* — a group of about 30 works that motivate and modulate our physical understanding of space — is reconfigured as a set for *Brendan Fernandes: Contract and Release*, a performance-based collaboration with Canadian artist Brendan Fernandes, who works at the intersection of dance and the visual arts. The installation was developed with architecture and design collaborative Norman Kelley, with chair fabrication by Jason Lewis and costumes by Rad Hourani. Running until March 8, 2020, at the Noguchi Museum in Long Island City, New York.

Artwork by Brendan Fernandes, concept drawing and photomontage for *Contract and Release*, 2019
Photo: Courtesy of the artist

Mr. Pinhead at FODAR

Nova Scotia's Festival of Dance Annapolis Royal, at King's Theatre in August, presented artistic director Randy Glynn's 1995 *Mr. Pinhead* — a story of a young dancer, his overbearing parents and his journey to ultimate redemption. Built entirely on ballroom dance vocabulary, and influenced by Ettore Scola's 1983 film *Le Bal*, Glynn says the work was "inspired by a dream I had of a tall lone man with a small head walking in an empty city street." This remount featured an all-Nova Scotian cast: Phil Roy (Mr. Pinhead), Georgia Skinner (the Girlfriend), Maria Osende (the Mother) and Glynn (the Father).

NYT New Dance Critic

Gia Kourlas, the *New York Times*' new dance critic, has long covered many forms of dance, from ballet to modern to street styles. According to the *Times*' announcement on her appointment, Kourlas says part of her mission as a critic is to make dance accessible to general readers and audiences, to take something that's already happened and make it "alive and in the moment." She began studying dance when she was five in Columbus, Ohio, where she also trained as a figure skater.

Karen Kain Retirement Announcement

The National Ballet of Canada has announced that Karen Kain (our cover story in Fall 2019) will retire as artistic director in January 2021 and will be named artistic director emeritus.



Maria Osende and Randy Glynn in Glynn's *Mr. Pinhead*
Photo: Zhenya Cerneacoc

Dance Across Canada



Photo: Courtesy of Canadian Dance Assembly

The new interactive Dance Across Canada Map has more than 2,880 entries mapping dance activity coast to coast. In 2011, the Canada Council for the Arts, in partnership with the Ontario Arts Council, launched the Canada Dance Mapping Study to quantify and describe the ecology, economy and environment of dance in Canada. Now, in 2019, the Canadian Dance Assembly redeveloped the mapping site, which it will manage and maintain. Listings include dance companies, presenters and promoters, events, festivals, competitions, venues, dance training institutions, funders, policy makers, associations and networks, management and professional services and leisure dance groups. www.cda-acd.ca.

Obituary: Alicia Alonso

Alicia Alonso, the celebrated Cuban dancer, choreographer and director, died October 17 at age 98.

Alonso pursued her passion for ballet from an early age, training in her late teens in New York and joining the fledgling Ballet Theatre. There, in 1943, she made a triumphant, unscheduled debut as Giselle, the role for which she was to become world-renowned. Despite worsening eye problems that impaired her peripheral vision, Alonso won acclaim for her combination of technical strength and sensuality through a wide range of roles.

In 1948, she founded the Ballet Alicia Alonso in Havana, the precursor of the company that in 1959, with state backing, became the Ballet Nacional de Cuba.

Alonso, who continued to perform into her seventies, propelled the Ballet Nacional to international fame although the iron grip she maintained on the group was controversial and spurred many dancers over the years to defect. Regardless, Alonso remained a Cuban cultural icon to the end. s— M.C.

More on Alicia Alonso's legacy upcoming from Michael Crabb online in 2020.



The Ottawa Ballet's Jean Stoneham Orr in a choreography by NESTA Toumine, circa 1949
Photo: Courtesy of the Vancouver Ballet Society Archives

Canada's First Giselle

Jean Stoneham Orr, who was Canada's first Giselle in a performance by Ottawa Ballet in 1948, celebrates her 90th birthday in December. Orr is a longstanding board member of the Vancouver Ballet Society, the founding president of Ballet BC and a much-loved supporter of the Canadian dance community.



Thibault Lac in Tobias Koch, Tore Wallert and Lac's *Such Sweet Thunder*
Photo: James Bantone

ImPulsTanz

ImPulsTanz — Vienna International Dance Festival 2019 awarded the Young Choreographers' Award to Europeans Tobias Koch, Thibault Lac and Tore Wallert for *Such Sweet Thunder*, and Tatiana Chizhikova and Roman Kutnov, both from Russia, for *Time to Time*. In their statement, jury members Steven Cohen, Nastya Proshutinskaya and Gabriele Coura said these "two vastly different" works, both of which are a collaboration between a choreographer and a sound artist, "are made with thought and make us think."

Notebook

William Forsythe once memorably stated: “If dance only does what we assume it can do, it will expire.” Forsythe, who turns 70 on December 30, has spent the better part of his career ensuring that does not happen. He did not set out to be a revolutionary, but the effect of his relentless investigations into how movement can

Forsythe, spurred by his interest in post-modern deconstructionist theory, is one such person. As with comparable luminaries such as Pina Bausch and Merce Cunningham, Forsythe’s broad artistic explorations have influenced other fields — architecture, film, music and the visual arts.

Forsythe, a New Yorker by birth and a musical prodigy, only began serious

For the next 20 years, while occasionally venturing out to choreograph elsewhere, Frankfurt Ballet became his creative laboratory. With a devoted ensemble of dancers, Forsythe increasingly challenged the conventions and tropes of classical ballet, not because he disdained the classical heritage, but because his curiosity about its possibilities propelled him forward.

Forsythe’s improvisational techniques allowed him to explore the potential of the human body in motion, its capacity for speed, how far its limbs could be extended and angled, be pushed off-center or rapidly change direction. Forsythe,



William Forsythe in rehearsal with students from the Glorlya Kaufman School of Dance at the University of Southern California
Photo: Rose Eichenbaum/USC Kaufman

be organized in time and space has permanently altered the way we think about what dance is and can be.

Like most theatrical art forms, dance has evolved through a natural process of imitation and elaboration as succeeding generations have built on the achievements of their predecessors. Now and then, however, someone emerges to challenge the foundational assumptions that support this evolution. William

dance training in college. He performed with Joffrey Ballet II before leaving in 1973 for Stuttgart Ballet, a creative hothouse where Forsythe soon emerged as a promising choreographer. Although he did not formally leave Stuttgart until 1980, he was increasingly in demand as a freelance choreographer and, in 1984, was invited to head the city-sponsored Frankfurt Ballet.

mischievously perhaps, undermined audiences’ expectation of art to clearly “mean” something. There was no obvious logic to his choreographic geometry and audiences were often bombarded with more information than even the quickest-witted could absorb. Curtains might rise or fall for no apparent reason. Interestingly busy dancers might be relegated to gloomily obscure parts of the stage. They might speak to each

other or unexpectedly switch from full-on performance mode to casual everyday movement. While he sometimes entered into physical conversation with the music, Forsythe more often favoured electronic soundscapes, aural backdrops that created tension or mood without directing the steps. Gender norms were flouted. Forsythe's powerful deployment of pointe work upended notions of ethereality. It projected a physical manifestation of gender equality that had moral force.

These characteristics could nowadays almost be called commonplace in contemporary ballet, but only because Forsythe has been trailed by so many imitators — most of them pale.

While North America, particularly the U.S., remained coolly skeptical about Forsythe's experimentations, he and his company became superstars of the European dance scene. Dancers, including many from North America, vied for the chance to be part of Forsythe's exciting vision. Among several Canadians

who succeeded were Crystal Pite, now a choreographic star in her own right, and Emily Molnar who, having resurrected Ballet BC, will next August become artistic director of Nederlands Dans Theater.

As Forsythe's work became increasingly abstruse and less audience-friendly in the eyes of Frankfurt's cultural czars, the purse holders began to balk at the cost of supporting it. The dance world's scandalized reaction seemed to offer the promise of a reprieve, but in the face of such civic opposition Forsythe chose to move on. The company he had nurtured for two decades gave its final performance in 2004. He gathered as many of his former dancers as possible and established a new, smaller troupe of his own, Forsythe Ballet, based in Frankfurt and Dresden. This move unleashed some of his most experimental work, the kind rarely seen in North America — although a limited budget could no longer accommodate the use of prohibitively expensive pointe shoes.

Running a company is a burden that can thwart the creative impulse and, in 2015, Forsythe relinquished his German company, passing it on to Italian choreographer and former Ballet Frankfurt member Jacopo Godani, with the remit to follow his own course. The troupe is now called the Dresden Frankfurt Dance Company.

Forsythe, the father of three children and an equal number of grandchildren, resettled in his native land, in Vermont. He spends several weeks a year in California teaching at UCLA's Glorya Kaufman School of Dance.

"I have projects I'm interested in doing. It's a matter of finding the appropriate place to do them," says Forsythe. One of these is likely to be Boston Ballet where artistic director Mikko Nissinen, a huge admirer, is determined to build on the company's existing body of Forsythe works.

As a disarmingly youthful septuagenarian, Forsythe's creative career is far from done. It is unlikely he will stop asking "What if?" any time soon. *DI*



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INSIDE ED

Liquid Leading

BY ALIDA ESMAIL

"Classic Latin and ballroom dancing isn't just a system of dancing. It's a way of thinking, of being, of relating to each other that captures a whole period's values. There's one thing that stays consistent: the man leads and the woman follows ... So, this is gender training. You aren't just learning to dance, you are learning to 'man' and to 'woman.'"

— Trevor Copp, TED Talk: *Ballroom dance that breaks gender roles*

Discussions around gender identity and inclusivity are happening across disciplines, but the world of mainstream partner dancing is in danger of lagging seriously behind because of how tightly it clings to traditional ideas, especially around gender. With the rise of dance TV shows like *Dancing with the Stars*, ballroom and Latin dances have become more popular, bringing the traditional image of males leading and females following along with them. Liquid Lead Dancing is a way of updating and expanding approaches to partner dances so it can keep up with society's progress.

Liquid Lead Dancing looks at partner dancing by separating the idea of "lead" and "follow" from having anything to do with sex or gender. It's an approach that enables the lead and follow to switch roles within the dance, if they wish to, and then switch back, taking turns listening and speaking as in any healthy conversation. Liquid Lead Dancing expands the options and aesthetics of partner dancing while incorporating an updated set of values for relating to one another that is more fluid in its idea of identity and more conscious of issues of consent.

The Liquid Lead approach was initially developed in Burlington, Ontario, by Trevor Copp and Jeff Fox, as a way of taking turns and playing fair during social dancing events. The sight of two dancers casually exchanging roles while remaining consistent in their presence, personality and power is empowering both to embody and to witness as it shakes us free of the notion that we must choose (and be forever defined by) one role.

Liquid Lead is not about disrespecting

or disposing of existing traditions. It is simply an addition to a dancer's toolbox, a way of helping those traditions be more representative of how we think today. Although same-sex couples and others from the LGBTQ+ community may find immense benefit in Liquid Lead's inclusive values, letting go of predefined male-female roles can be rewarding for everyone.

Here are some suggestions for "liquefying" your own dancing.

If you teach partner dancing:

- Use the language "leader" instead of "man" and "interpreter" instead of "woman" or "follower." This creates a more accepting and empowering environment for anyone to try either role and discards the idea of a hierarchy between roles.
- Regardless of their initial choice, allow and encourage dancers to try both roles.
- Have a toolbox of techniques for switching roles within the dances. For example, in salsa, an underarm turn naturally leaves the interpreter on the bottom in the handhold; instead of readjusting the hands to continue, this is a point where the roles can switch.

If you dance partner dancing:

- Be true to yourself! Are you dancing that role because you chose it or because it was given to you? Do you connect with both roles? Then try both!
- Always ask. Ask if your partner is open to switching roles before or while on the floor.

Partner dancing is a wonderful form of bonding and sharing enjoyment. It is time to release it from the shackles of out-dated ideas so that everyone can experience the joy of partner dancing. *DI*

Alida Esmail (alidaesmail.ca) is a ballroom and Latin dancer, and part of the team developing Liquid Lead Dancing. She holds a master's degree in rehabilitation sciences from Université de Montréal.



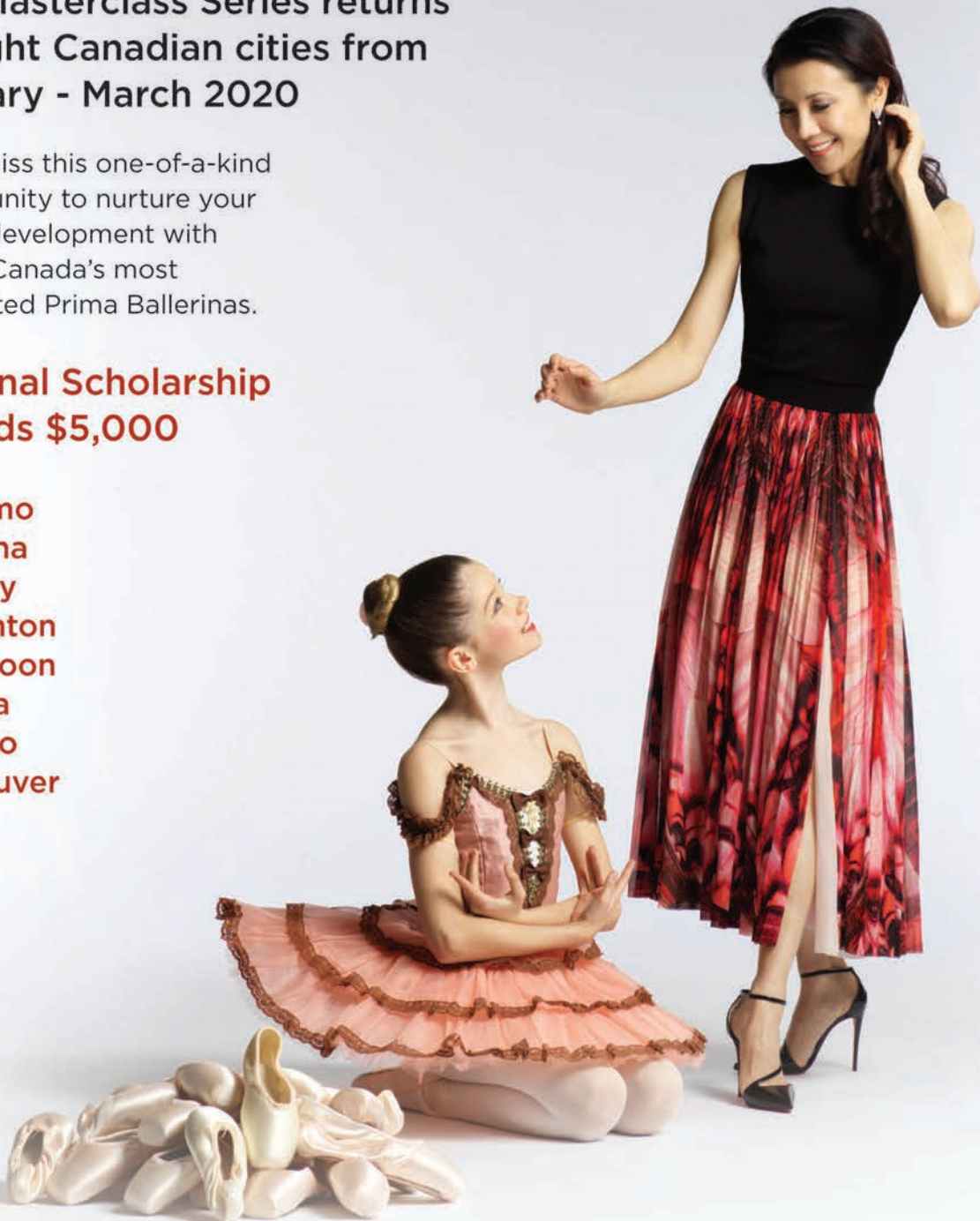
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GLOBAL REPORTS



Vancouver

BY KAIJA PEPPER

Deborah "La Caramelita" Dawson in
La Caramelita company's *Nritya*
Photo: Tim Matheson

Flamenco Rosario, the festival's producing organization, has a decades-long history of presenting and teaching in the city. One of the festival's smaller Waterfront Theatre shows featured a former student, Deborah "La Caramelita" Dawson, who now heads her own company in France. In *Nritya* (meaning dance in Sanskrit), Dawson draws on her Indian heritage, Malaysian parentage and training in flamenco.

Fusion work is a tradition with Flamenco Rosario's own shows by co-directors Rosario Ancer and Victor Kolstee, which have previously highlighted flamenco's connection to the Romani people and India. With La Caramelita company's *Nritya*, Dawson's fusion dance was rhythmically and conceptually supported by the musical team's inspiration in Indian, flamenco, and contemporary electronic rhythms and sounds. The teamwork among the quintet of dancer and musicians — vocalist Alejandro Mendía (Dawson's life partner), guitarist Guillermo Guillén, percussionist Alex Carrasco and flautist Lara Wong — gave *Nritya* that essential ingredient of heart.

The following night at the Waterfront, Flamenco Rosario's own *Nuevo II* went

More and more, I find myself appreciating the joy in flamenco expression, which is as integral to the art form as pain and sorrow. In a world filled with so many political and ecological challenges, we could all use more joy, which certainly filled the theatre at the three shows I caught at this year's Vancouver International Flamenco Festival in September.

With the Playhouse headliner, *Baile de Autor*, Spain's impeccable stylist Manuel Liñán shot into laser-sharp poses that

were as often witty and chic as bold and angst-filled. Whether in dark trousers and white shirt, or, later, a black skirt with a long frilly train (the traditionally female bata de cola), his luscious hands and hips unfurled majestically, his short compact body asserting the energy and power of each shape. Liñán's solo dance, accompanied by singer David Carpio and guitarist Manuel Valencia, left the audience giddy with delight, judging from waves of excitement that washed over the auditorium, with applause erupting at those moments of climax flamenco does so well.

for broke, bringing the audience into a collective state of happy enthusiasm. The featured guest dancer — a Chilean who lives in Spain, young Gabriel Aragón — was physically very different from Liñán, his long limbs unfurling into elegant profile poses. Aragón might have drawn us in more slowly at the start in order to vary the dynamics, but the fireworks of his footwork and spinning turns were impossible to resist. *Nuevo II*'s feast of emotions was especially rich when led by dynamite Mexican singer José Jesús "El Cachito" Díaz Marcos, who channels song from the core of his being.

At the Playhouse earlier in September, there was a ballet night out with the premiere of Joshua Beamish's *@giselle*. The 32-year-old British Columbian choreographer made an early splash in his career when New York City Ballet's Wendy Whelan commissioned him as one of four choreographers in her independent performance project, *Restless Creature* (2013). He has continued to make international contacts, in 2016 creating a piece for the Royal Ballet's Draft Works program: *Reimagining Giselle*, featuring a cast of four Royal Ballet dancers.

Building on that London studio presentation, Beamish assembled a stellar lineup for his *@giselle*, produced by his own MOVETHECOMPANY, which he runs in both Vancouver (he hails from nearby Kelowna) and New York.

Headlining the cast of 14, which includes a corps of six young Wilis, was American Ballet Theatre soloist Catherine Hurlin as *@giselle*, National Ballet of Canada principal Harrison James as *@albrecht* and Pennsylvania Ballet principal Sterling Baca as *@hilarion*. The *@* sign precedes all the act one character names, establishing the fact that, in Beamish's version of the 1841 ballet, they are best known by their online presence. His production is set in a world where a media platform, the Village, dominates daily life, and so, in the ballet, there is almost as much texting and live streaming, projected onto a scrim at the front of the stage, as there is dancing.

Brianna Amore's lively projections feature text messages and selfies as *@giselle* falls for *@loys*, who *@hilarion* discovers is actually *@albrecht*. A contemporary scenario of online deceit and betrayal plays out in solos danced alone in front

of a camera, with narcissistic self-display, sensual suggestion and, eventually, aggression sent out by social media as *@giselle* and *@loys* connect online. The scrim also makes possible some spine-chilling solos in act two, when *@hilarion* and *@albrecht* engage with the Wilis, the two men joined by ghostly projections that envelop them like a deadly mist.

Beamish uses the familiar Adolphe Adam score, and he follows the familiar story of young love betrayed, although *@giselle*'s death from a weak heart has an actual scientific diagnosis, shared in an online text by *@mamaberthe* (Beverly Bagg, a resident teacher at Ballet BC) as being from SADS (Sudden Arrhythmic Death Syndromes). There's a flirtatious scene of love-me-love-me-not with a daisy and other reminders of the original libretto, along with references to the Romantic choreography in *@giselle*'s pretty skips and pointe work, and in the Wilis' icy poses. Mostly, though, the choreography resists any obvious ballet flow with hips that abruptly jut out, and joints that lead and punctuate the movement: shoulders, elbows and knees make definite appearances throughout,

creating a puppet-like, Petrouchkian echo I wasn't sure how to interpret in this particular ballet.

Hurlin, James and Baca performed with commitment on opening night. Their technical precision and power was awesome, but the rich emotional details of the classic production's solos and pas de deux were missing, partly because of the reliance on technology, at the cost of choreographic development, to tell the story.

The focus on technology did create media buzz, which might well have attracted an audience yet to fall in love with the art form of ballet, and with *Giselle*, that young woman whose story so many have told. Other recent versions created buzz with their own timely themes: Akram Khan's 2016 production for English National Ballet imagined *Giselle* as a migrant factory worker and, in 2017, Dada Masilo — a South African woman — created a feminist version. In one form or another, *Giselle* lives on, and classical ballet, often condemned as creaky and irrelevant, continues to be an inspiration able to take on a multitude of interpretations. ^{DI}





Winnipeg's Contemporary Dancers began its 55th season this fall by welcoming new artistic director Jolene Bailie. The Winnipeg-born-and-raised dance artist and graduate of the Professional Program of the School of Contemporary Dancers was appointed last February, following a nearly yearlong international search, with Bailie taking over from Brent Lott, who led the company between 2005 and 2017.

The 42-year-old, who has a master of fine art in dance through the American Dance Festival/Hollins University, is no stranger to the local dance community. She is the founding artistic director of 19-year-old Gearshifting Performance Works, through which she presented 39 of her original contemporary works, including 10 full-length shows. Her eclectic choreography has ranged from more surrealistic offerings such as *All*

You Can Eat/The Top? (2014) and last year's *Schemas, 1-5* to visually arresting works such as *Hybrid Human* (2010), created in conjunction with Canadian visual artist Wanda Koop and premiered at the Winnipeg Art Gallery to critical acclaim. Her works have also been staged across Canada and internationally, including in New York, Beijing, Xi'an and Stuttgart.

Gearshifting Performance Works will now go "fallow" as Bailie turns her attention to getting Winnipeg's Contemporary Dancers back on its feet, offering her inaugural, three-production season this year. The first show was an emerging dancer initiative in October at the Rachel Browne Theatre, featuring her own choreography performed by six local, multi-generational dance artists, with the 2019-2020 season's total of 24 featured dancers hired on a per-project basis, which Bailie says allows choreographers to have a voice in selecting



Jolene Bailie
Photo: Gary Sewell

individual artists for their works. A second mixed bill opens on November 29 with new works by Winnipeg's Zorya Arrow, Ming Hon and others. Next up is a touring production of *Animal Triste* in February by Montreal's Mayday Dance with choreography by Mélanie Demers.

Top: Dancer/choreographer Jolene Bailie (foreground) in front of Wanda Koop's painting during their collaboration *Hybrid Human*
Photo: Hugh Conacher

Bailie met Demers in the late 1990s while training at O Vertigo's summer school. "As a dancer, I had wanted to work with Mélanie for the longest time, but then my world changed as I began to focus primarily on choreography. I've been following her work for many years and am thrilled to bring her to Winnipeg," she says.

Some of her long-term goals include developing new touring opportunities as well as spotlighting the work of both mid-career and emerging choreographers and performers.

"I believe a clear investment in our mid-career artists by providing opportunities will ensure that we will have senior artists, that is part of my artistic vision and has actually been WCD's mandate for a long time," Bailie states. "I've always personally been interested in creating for dancers of all different backgrounds and experiences, as it brings a very different kind of richness to the work."

On a more practical note, Bailie plans on offering professional daily class in tandem with each production's creative process, open to each show's ensemble of dancers and to members of the local community.

She clearly states she has no current plans to sell the company studios and the intimate Rachel Browne Theatre, located in the city's historic Exchange District, in order to pay down a nagging deficit — a proposal by a local buyer that became a hotly debated point within the local dance community. Long term, Bailie hopes to create more training opportunities and collaborative projects with troupes from around the country.

Bailie speaks fondly of WCD founder Rachel Browne, the late contemporary dance matriarch with whom she worked extensively; she was in the original 1997 cast of Browne's deeply personal *Willow Island* and performed her Kurt Weill-infused 1991 solo *Freddy* more than 30 times across Canada and the United States.

"Rachel was always curious about everything, which has been a valuable lesson to me," she says. "She also had a clear vision, was very goal focused and worked hard, with a beautiful way of being patient and waiting until you got

to where she wanted. She had a great calmness to her, but also paid a lot of attention to detail and was very wise. I do believe she loved us all, and loved all of the work we were doing in the community."

She says running Gearshifting has helped prepare her for her newest role, which includes a multitude of responsibilities, not least of all creating annual budgets, preparing grant applications and reaching out to potential new audience members while growing the company's subscriber base, in addition to teaching and new creation.

"I've learned to understand the difference between an individual artist's goal and an organizational goal, because those are two very different things," she explains. "As the leader of an organization, you want to not only create projects and opportunities that satisfy your personal artistic vision, but you also want to think about the dancers and the other artists who are

involved in that project, and honour each individual for who they are."

Bailie is also mining her experience as a teacher. "I have been teaching since I was a teenager and that experience has also affected how I envision an organization to run, because it's all about working with people ... You want to follow your artistic vision and create the work you want to create, but still provide meaningful opportunities for others, because the spirit of new creation also brings a deeper meaning to the artists involved, and to the audience."

Life — and art — is a balance, and Bailie will continue to juggle both her professional and personal lives, including being a mother to three young children, with her ophthalmologist husband. She says that having children has only enriched her own artistic creation. "You begin to see life as being about not what is impossible, but what is possible." *DI*

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Toronto

BY MICHAEL CRABB

Conservatory in Boca Raton, Florida. “It taught me to create a more friendly environment and allow for everyone to grow together.”

Sellman and Gan, who won a silver medal, were among only three men in a field of 62 competitors, a small proportion even by Genée standards where women routinely predominate by numbers.

Early in the 10-day event, Sellman, who in April at age 14 won the junior division grand prix at the Youth America Grand Prix in New York, doubted he’d even make it to the Genée finals. Sellman had arrived from Los Angeles with a stomach virus that knocked him out for the first two days, but he bounced back to impress audiences and judges alike with his well-mannered, almost understated but eloquently musical and technically accomplished dancing. Gan, an incandescent power performer, took home the Audience Choice Award; no small achievement given there were several similarly incandescent dancers among the 14 finalists on stage at the Four Seasons Centre opera house.

Sellman is now on scholarship at the Princess Grace Academy in Monaco although if things had worked out differently he might be enrolled at Canada’s National Ballet School. He came to Toronto for NBS summer intensives in 2016 and 2017 and was offered a place in the full-time program. “But,” Sellman explains, “I was not ready to leave home just then.”

The Genée is unusual in a number of respects. It is open only to dancers aged between 15 and 19 who have progressed through the RAD’s vocational graded syllabus to pass at least Advanced Level 2 with distinction, the ultimate being Solo Seal. The competition may be seen as the culmination of RAD-based ballet training since it offers candidates a week of special classes and coaching, and collective participation in the creation of a new solo, this year choreographed by Canada’s Gioconda Barbuto. Apart from prescribed classical

variations, competitors also present a short “Dancer’s Own” solo, self-choreographed or made for them by a teacher or peer.

Until 2002, when it was held in Sydney, the Genée had always been convened in Britain, thus disadvantaging talented young dancers in far-flung corners of the RAD’s 84-country empire. Since then it has moved around, coming to Toronto for the first time in 2008.

Although there are various programs to support young dancers who wish to travel to the Genée, for understandable reasons there is typically a large representation from the host country. This summer there were 19 Canadians although only two vaulted the semi-finals and neither won a medal. (In 2008, Canadians won bronze and silver.) The next largest contingent — seven dancers, two of them medallists — came from Australia, an RAD stronghold.

Attendees at the two ticketed public events — the examination class that forms part of the semi-final round is private — were treated to some lovely dancing, but the wide range of competence in classical ballet technique raises troubling questions. Either the best of these young dancers far exceed the minimum standard required to pass the RAD’s top-tier exam or the standard itself is not uniformly upheld by local examiners.

Quite separately, it was odd how often competitors — given a generous list of classical variation options from Petipa to MacMillan — chose choreography that exposed their weaknesses rather than played to their strengths, as if they were aiming for audience impact rather than considering the more precise and subtle attributes that one assumes attract a judge’s approval. It was telling that both gold medallists were among the least aggressively showy competitors, putting their technical and interpretive gifts at the service of the choreography rather than using it as a bullhorn.

The judges included Dame Monica Mason, former director of Britain’s Royal Ballet, Boston Ballet artistic director Mikko Nissinen and Magdalena Popa, principal artistic coach at the National Ballet of Canada. At the finals, when a fresh set of eyes is introduced, Popa was replaced by her artistic director Karen Kain, who in a preceding reception was presented with the RAD’s highest accolade, the Queen Elizabeth II Coronation Award. *DI*

“We’re happy to be known as the ‘friendly competition,’” says former Royal Ballet star Dame Darcey Bussell, president of the London-based Royal Academy of Dance, whose peripatetic annual Genée International Ballet Competition was held this past summer in Toronto.

“The Genée is more than just a competition,” Bussell explains. “The emphasis is on the personal growth and development of each individual dancer.”

“Meeting and connecting with so many dancers from all over the world is priceless,” says 15-year-old Australian gold medal winner Mia Zanardo. “The Genée experience was of great value because I was able to work closely with inspiring international tutors and a wonderful choreographer who allowed us to have input into the choreography.”

“It felt like a summer intensive with a performance at the end that was judged,” says fellow gold medallist Darrion Sellman.

“The Genée taught me that not everything is about winning and being competitive with one another,” adds Julian Wen-Sheng Gan, a 17-year-old Malaysian currently in his final year at the Harid

Judging from its 17th annual edition, Festival Quartiers Danses is undoubtedly a prominent autumn forum for both local and out-of-town choreographers. The nine-day festival presented shows at Place des Arts' Cinquième Salle, often triple bills, as well as at outdoor venues in keeping with the aim of bringing dance to local neighbourhoods.

Montreal's splendid Tentacle Tribe, which made its debut at the festival several years ago, opened this year's edition with the 30-minute *Synecdoche*. The piece consisted of reworkings of earlier repertoire by founders Emmanuelle Lê Phan and Elon Höglund. They and three other proficient urban dancers twisted and turned over and around each other in close formations like greased parts of a complex machine. Lê Phan and Höglund have an instinctual feel for creating and releasing tension, which made the choreography dramatically compelling throughout. The ending used an amusing sequence from their 2018 work, *Ghost*, involving body-covering long robes and white plastic globes for heads. As usual, Tentacle Tribe offered no overt message, but the flow of human bodies meeting and separating spoke loudly of the choreographers' vision of people in complex, difficult positions searching for and finding harmony.

On the same bill, local choreographer Pauline Gervais of Pauline Berndsen Danse presented a 20-minute trio, *Temps Mémoire* (2019), inspired by the famous fog that blanketed London, England, in 1952. Amid billowing artificial fog that sometimes overwhelmed the stage, the trio began moving slowly, then progressively faster as they made repeated physical contact. The movements were deliberate, almost cautious, but too little developed to sustain attention.

Compelling is the right word to describe Japanese Ismaera Takeo Ishii in a half-hour solo, *Immortality*, by choreographer Lene Boel of Denmark's Next Zone. Ishii's movement blended butoh's contemplative aura with urban dance's freewheeling spirit. The dancer's ability to carve space with controlled, fluid gestures consistently held the eye, though Boel's choreography was meandering, leaving no strong final impression.

Boel's second festival work, *Ritual for the Inuit*, featured two splendid hip-hop

trained dancers, Hocine Khair and Mehdi Belkabitir. The choreography offered numerous chances for acrobatic partnering. The two were equally adept as soloists, balancing on one hand, spinning, posing. Created in 2010 for four dancers, the festival's delightful two-person version spoke more about urban dance, less about Inuit culture.

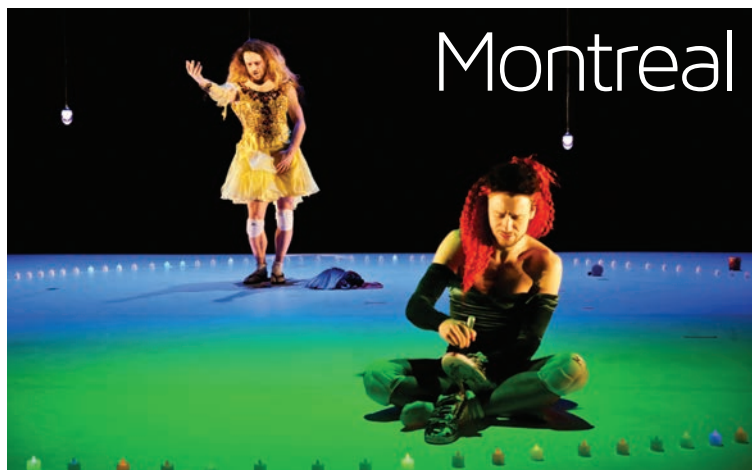
The early fall season's most ambitious contemporary dance show was *Danse Mutante*, four duets at Agora de la Danse. Montreal dancemaker Mélanie Demers invited New York's Ann Liv Young, Haitian-born Kettly Noël and Belgium's Ann Van den Broek to create versions of her 2018 duet, *Cantique*, to be presented one after the other. The proviso was that each choreographer saw only the work

turned the tables on her abuser, who called for help. The dark, disturbing moment suddenly generated laughs, in a complex moment of dance-theatre that mixed tragedy and comedy.

Young's over-the-top flamboyance was followed by Noël's work set among rugs, tiny flickering candles and colourful silk gowns. Of the four, Noël's was the most sedate and lyrical.

Rejecting all warmth and lyricism, Van den Broek ended with the two men dressed severely in black, seated on modern stools flanked by long neon lights. Dressed alike, the duo mirrored each other's hand and head gestures. How curious that Van den Broek unknowingly reversed the colour scheme of Demers' work, where the two were identically dressed in white

BY VICTOR SWOBODA



preceding her own. Demers launched the challenge as a way of exploring the transformative creative process. What would each successive choreographer take from the preceding one?

Demers' opening duet was about searching for and asserting identity, and certain elements reappeared in later versions — spoken texts, candle-like illumination, pop cans, makeup, nudity and homoerotic tension between the two superb dancer/actors, Francis Ducharme and Riley Sims.

Whereas Demers made demure use of nudity and makeup, Young staged a flamboyant circus of two men in yellow and green dresses wildly flashing their genitals even as one addressed himself to his mother, who was supposedly in the audience. Spoken text described a coach raping young gymnasts, followed by a seduction scene when the female victim unexpectedly

underwear and sneakers.

Argentina seemingly has an endless supply of proficient young tango performers, but Valentina Belizan and Juan Braida, both in their early 20s, showed special promise at Montreal's 17th International Tango Festival. Quick, smooth, equally seductive and merrily playful, their choreographies brimmed with invention and purpose. As they mature, this couple might well create works of deep artistic interest.

At Le Monastère, Miho Inaba pushed circus still further into serious dance territory with her routine on the big hoop called the cyr wheel. No mere prop, her wheel became both adversary and asset. Often, it just lay flat as Inaba prowled the stage, admittedly with more intent than obvious meaning. Contemporary dance, Inaba's number suggested, has entered circus minds in a big way. *DI*



Seattle

BY KAITLIN MCCARTHY

As so often, the Seattle season in dance opened with Whim Whim's Choreographic Shindig and, in this case, Whim Whim's 10th anniversary season. Three new works were presented in the fifth annual mixed bill in which the choreographers are chosen by the company dancers.

See-Saw, by Joshua Manculich, flowed organically between nostalgic children's games, jumping and twirling as if on a playground, and contemplative dancing that displayed the dancers' skills in molten partnering sequences. Kyra Jean Green's *The Smile Club* used clownishly exaggerated facial expressions in conjunction with finely articulated movement isolations to create unique and detailed characters that seemed to shift with every robotic tick, oscillating between ironically chipper oldies numbers to grungy industrial techno. The promising vocabulary failed to develop beyond face value, but the performers' commitment to character made it worth the watch, particularly Karl Watson's finely tuned and convincingly doll-like opening solo.

The highlight of the evening was Yoshito Sakuraba's *Laurentide*, which set aside the conceptual and let the dance do the talking. Sharp and powerfully directed movement matched intensity with a driving score featuring a sci-fi thriller vibe. Quick snapping into positions and suspended moments of tension created dynamics that had all the intention and specificity of story, but inside an abstract world. Sakuraba showed a keen understanding of composing space, rhythm and tension,

while also showcasing the dancers' extreme athleticism, such as Cameron Birts running and sliding across the stage in a side splits.

With their season opener, *On the Boards* continued to develop the relationship between Seattle audiences and Berlin-based choreographer Ligia Lewis. *Water Will (in Melody)* portrayed a haunting world of jilted physicality and disjointed realities. The four dancers each appeared stuck in their own individual hell, stuck in a loop or, more literally, with body parts stuck to invisible walls. A heavy use of mime infused this avant-garde world with an outward focus, as if the dancers were desperately trying to project a message beyond the boundaries of the stage. While the message may not have been literal, it was deeply felt as the unpredictable action and entrancing performers pulled us into their terrifying realm.

Pacific Northwest Ballet's season began with a split program including Kent Stowell's extravagant *Carmina Burana* and the notable Stravinsky/Balanchine collaboration *Agon*. The 1957 neoclassical ballet puts Balanchine's inventiveness and rigorous construction on full display with devilishly fast and exacting canons that constantly shift configurations. Inside the complex spatial design, during the rehearsal I watched shortly before opening night, the dancers embraced Balanchine's play on the classical form — arabesques that balance on the heel and pirouettes that land with inverted knees. Leta Biasucci was featured well, striking the perfect balance of exactitude, lightness and suspension inside the snappy and capricious

choreography. Laura Tisserand and Joshua Grant showed incredible strength and stamina in the harrowing pas de deux that requires extended balances of slowly shifting contortions.

Au Collective's Randy Ford has become somewhat of a Seattle darling, and for good reason. Her demanding stage presence and advocacy for trans people of colour has created a following that extends beyond the dance community. Her first evening-length show, a co-production with Central District Forum for Arts and Ideas, was one of the most enthusiastically attended shows in recent memory.

Unapologetically personal, *Queen Street* functions as an interdisciplinary manifesto. "My name is Randy Ford. And in Seattle I've been making quite the name for myself," she declared within the first few minutes, a fitting introduction for a piece that works through claiming space and owning it. The vocabulary blended modern dance, voguing and street styles, along with spoken word, to convey a nonlinear biography.

The opening dance sequence began with Chip Sherman berating Ford with repetitive demands: "You can't wear that," "Fix your wrists," "Go change."

At first, Ford was passive, arching and tortured on the ground, but gradually she stumbled to her feet (in high-heeled boots) and confronted her aggressor in a duet that blended modern partnering with fight choreography. Ford finished victoriously, but it was heartbreaking to watch as she was forced to adopt the same violence hurled toward her in order to survive.

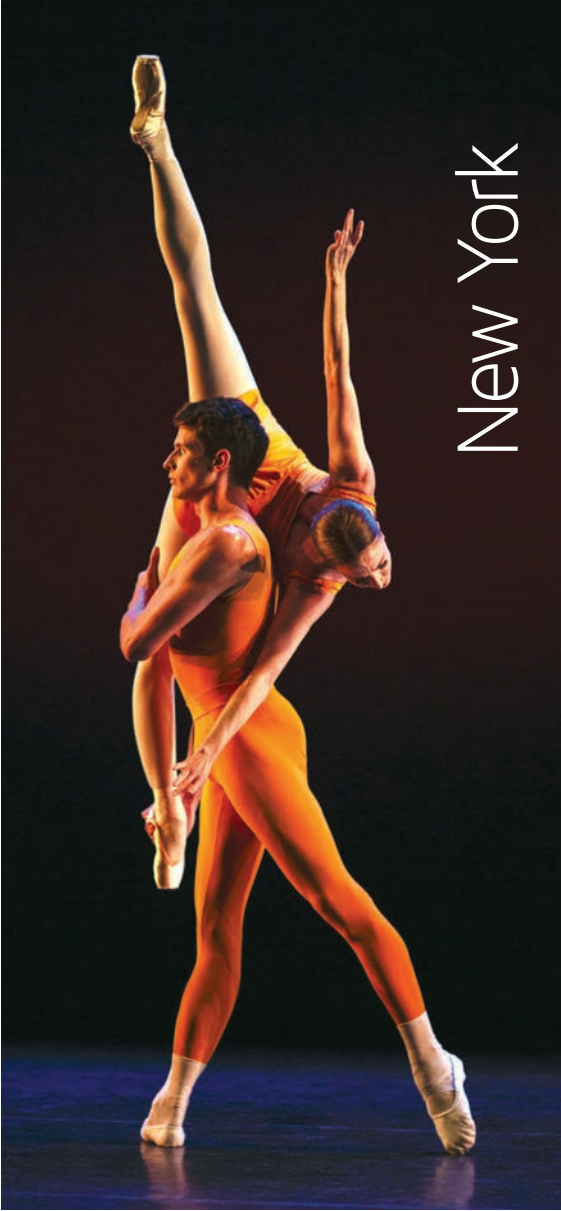
The constant undercurrent of violence toward Black and trans bodies is referenced throughout; at several points the dancers call out the names of the many Black trans women murdered in the United States just this year. It is this knowledge that made the performers' joy, tenderness, humour and love all the more powerful.

As they duckwalk, drop into a showy split or undulate sensually, the unabashed pleasure in the self is a blow against these oppressive forces. Pulling from the lives of the four non-binary performers (Ford, Sherman, Saira Barbaric, Keelan Johnson), the work addressed trans acceptance, exoticification, ableism and mental health, while simultaneously affirming the humanity and presence of the intersectional identities presented onstage. *DI*

Pacific Northwest Ballet's Joshua Grant and Laura Tisserand in George Balanchine's *Agon*
Photo: Angela Sterling

New York

BY ROBERT GRESKOVIC



The Royal Ballet's Lauren Cuthbertson and Nicol Edmonds in Kenneth MacMillan's *Concerto Pas de Deux*
Photo: Maria Baranova

New York City's 472-seat Joyce Theater, a converted movie house, has situated itself in the city's dance world as an intimate, welcoming surround for dancing of all kinds. Recently, to close out its busy calendar, the Joyce has chosen to offer what it calls a Ballet Festival.

This year's festival had an English pedigree as it was overseen by Kevin O'Hare, director of Britain's Royal Ballet. On offer over a two-week period were 21 works and 26 dancers drawn from the Royal Ballet, with others from American Ballet Theatre, the National Ballet of Canada, New York City Ballet and New York Theatre Ballet. Five of the additional dancers had separate status as "special guests."

O'Hare programmed the first of the festival's four bills, *An Evening of Solos and Duets*, which came with a statement by Ninette de Valois, the Royal Ballet's founder: "Respect the past, herald the future, but concentrate on the present." The other three programs were put in the hands of individuals chosen by O'Hare: Royal Ballet principal dancer Lauren Cuthbertson, dancer-turned-theatre designer Jean-Marc Puissant and Royal Ballet principal Edward Watson.

Having Royal Ballet touring traditions in my past since 1965 when I first encountered the troupe and, essentially, ballet itself, this festival prompted reflection and recollections. Happily, and here O'Hare deserves full credit, the eight variously featured Royal Ballet dancers showed impressive schooling and artistry.

It should be stressed, however, that, given the now familiar refrain that goes "good dancers, less good dances," here the distinction was pronounced. The Royal Ballet dancers displayed notable depths of schooling and finesse in both the forgettable dances that featured them as well as in the more artfully shaped and challenging ones. Prominent among these performers was Cuthbertson, who shone in Kenneth MacMillan's limpid *Concerto Pas de Deux*, to Shostakovich. Her finely controlled limbs and core let MacMillan's softly singing movements breathe palpably into the steady, momentous line of the duet's choreographic throughline. As Cuthbertson's partner and escort, Nicol Edmonds provided secure support and rapport, making the dance one of unerring harmony.

On the same bill, Joseph Sissens embodied the lyrical essence of Frederick Ashton's *Dance of the Blessed Spirits* (from Gluck's *Orpheus and Eurydice*). As often with Ashton lyricism, this solo is made of physically demanding accents, some of them strict and strong, and Sissens negotiated these with an eye-catching blend of delicate power and unflagging energy. The only detail missing from this staging was the little riser of stairs that was once part of the work, which would have helped vary the pervasively unadorned stage look of the program and essentially the rest of the festival.

In less compelling works, versatile Sissens and elegant Calvin Richardson enlivened and made passingly persuasive two unmemorable choreographic efforts, Wayne McGregor's *Obsidian Tear* (to Esa-Pekka Salonen) and Charlotte Edmonds' *Jojo* (to *Pandi Groove* by French pop band Chinese Man). In another Ashton solo, the playfully wind-swept *Five Brahms Waltzes in the Manner of Isadora Duncan*, Romany Pajdak made good effects though lacked the underlying grandeur needed to sustain the solos as a theatrical suite.

Just what O'Hare hoped to reveal by having the ensuing bills programmed by two dancers and one designer is unclear, but the result was an arbitrary sampler of opportunities that one presumes were more engaging to the directors, who were sometimes the dancers involved, than to audiences looking for insights into today's dancers and dancing.

Cuthbertson's five-part bill concluded with Robert Biner's *Dialogue Dances*, to selections from *Wolastoqiyik Lintuwakonawa* composed by Jeremy Dutcher, and featuring Cuthbertson and Edmonds alongside four accomplished dancers from the National Ballet of Canada. The essentially disconnected suite of segments, miscellaneously costumed by Thomas Tait, opened with a mostly mumbled string of introductory remarks by each of the dancers, presumably meant to underscore the work's intended inspiration as based in homage to Canada's Indigenous peoples. Unfortunately, the playing out of the individual dance sections proved rather more arbitrarily busy than focused or meaningful.

Puissant's triple bill presented arguably the run's biggest draw, Maina Gielgud's staging of Maurice Béjart's *Song of a Wayfarer* (to Mahler) cast with American Ballet Theatre's David Hallberg and New York City Ballet's Joseph Gordon. The posture-and-pose filled dance, with sometimes shadowy lighting (by Carolyn Wong after Dominique Roman's original scheme), looks primed to be moody and austere at the same time. Despite the dutiful dancing and artful projection on the part of Hallberg and especially Gordon, the effort looked more portentous and arid than pure of essence and effect.

Another MacMillan work closed out Puissant's bill in the form of a suite extracted from *Elite Syncopations* (to ragtime selections). Here every dancer involved, four from the Royal Ballet (Sarah Lamb, Pajdak, Richardson, Sambé and Sissens), plus one from ABT (Cassandra Trenary), found their fine dance talents wittily and smoothly engaged by the choreography's often slinky challenges.

Nothing on Watson's five-part bill proved more than doodle-like, with Watson featured in three of them. The oddest offering was Arthur Pita's three-part *Cristaux*, starting with its title's reference to Balanchine's 1947 *Le Palais de Cristal*, which became *Symphony in C*. *Cristaux's* concluding part is set to Frank Moon's arrangement of the Bizet music associated with the 1947 work, but as often happens with reprocessing masterworks, the borrowings tend to stand out from the original and are dwarfed in comparison. *DI*



Photo: Maxime Beaudoin



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BY SANJOY ROY

Best known for his remakes of classic tales — especially his now legendary version of *Swan Lake* — Matthew Bourne is a very big name, his company New Adventures touring nationally and internationally far more than any other British company. It's a lofty position, but Bourne is far from aloof, and has invested considerably in nurturing new choreographers and young performers over the years.

His new *Romeo and Juliet* at Sadler's Wells reunites his perennial team of designer Lez Brotherston and music arranger Terry Davies, but also draws in a raft of talent from the company's Young Associates Scheme, including assistant choreographer Arielle Smith, creatives working in design and sound, and several young dancers. More than a laudable initiative, it also makes the piece feel flushed with the energy of youth: headstrong, dynamic, emotionally intense, often unpolished, always fresh.

In Bourne's scenario, Verona is not a city of feuding families but the name of an institute for troubled young inmates, one of whom is Juliet. Romeo, the son of career politicians, is placed there more for their convenience than his own good, and befriended by the coltish trio of Mercutio, his boyfriend Balthasar and their friend Benvolio.

The ensuing drama is not subtle, but, damn, it's powerful. Repressive guard Tybalt — toxic masculinity at its most

brutish — intimidates, manipulates and then (the implication is clear though the act takes place off stage) rapes Juliet. That trauma underlies her attraction for Romeo, whose vulnerability speaks to her own, and with whom she can recover a sense of her own desire. Of course, it's not all psychology: they also have the hots for each other. Their choreographed kiss is the longest you'll ever see, lips locked as they writhe and wriggle over the set.

Within this clinical, oppressive setting, there's a good deal of (sometimes black) humour in Act 1: deftly choreographed joshing among Romeo's mates, some sprightly references to *Grease* and an excruciating ballroom scene, in which the male and female roles enforced by ballroom dancing feel deeper and more divisive than any Capulet/Montague feud. Act 2 becomes more shocking, more tragic and more horrific, and there is a lot of blood. Is it excessive? Yes, but it's also very effective. Bourne never loses touch with his characters, and he twists the tale as well as the knife.

The set is spare, imposing and remarkably versatile, allowing action to be sensed both on and off stage. Prokofiev's music rescored for small orchestra grates initially, but soon comes to feel just right, harder and nervier than the lush original. But hats off, in the end, to the young cast — especially the leads (Cordelia Braithwaite and Paris Fitzpatrick on press night), who gave it their all and made it their own.

Figure a Sea, performed by the Swedish Cullberg company for one night only at the Southbank Centre, is the polar opposite of Bourne's youthful drama. Choreographed in 2015 by Deborah Hay, a veteran experimentalist with a career stretching back to the 1960s, it's an undemonstrative work that ends up seeping into the bones of your being.

Watching it is like sitting quietly in nature, and letting yourself receive the sounds and textures of life around you. Before the piece begins, it seems to be already there: the dancers are wandering about the stage as we enter the auditorium. What do you notice, as the lights dim and the audience settles? That the stage is marked by a white square. That the costumes form three distinct species: mesh vests with grey shorts; blue-black shirts and shorts; and coral-patterned tops with long leggings. That the performers look as alert and inscrutable as animals. That their actions seem random: there, someone wobbles a loose leg and swivels stiff arms; here, someone ambles aimlessly.

Patience. After a while, you notice patterns forming and fading. For example, the dancers assemble into a rough V, and swivel until they're all leaning in one direction, like leaves tilting their faces toward the sun. Somewhere along the way, you realize that Laurie Anderson's sound score has crept in, enlivening the air with bubbling blips, quickening rhythms or notes sustained like sighs.

Stay longer and your perceptions sharpen further. You notice different dancers simultaneously, each with a distinct ambulatory mode and weight of presence. What had looked random becomes a picture of shifting elements, large and small. And in one extraordinary yet still undramatic scene, a man advances through the flux in a graceful balletic adagio and takes a slow-motion bow. It's like watching a strange and wonderful creature emerge from the forest only to realize, as it finally faces you, that it is another human being.

One of Hay's recurring questions has been: how do you get a group of people dancing without telling them what to do? *Figure a Sea* is one answer: a piece that seems to emerge from its own ideas through its bodies, without aiming for an outcome yet leaving its imprint nonetheless. *DI*

It has been 30 years since the first performance of *Peer Gynt* by Norwegian author Henrik Ibsen on the shore of Gållå Lake, which is situated in the heart of the mountain chain where the play is set. This year's Peer Gynt Festival in August featured a new production of the Ibsen piece, directed by Marit Moum Aune, who was previously involved in two ballets by the Norwegian National Ballet, based on Ibsen's *Ghosts* and *Hedda Gabler*. Aune's staging of *Peer Gynt* includes choreography by Silas Henriksen, a soloist from the Norwegian National Ballet. Another

to return to their Norwegian home after he has been travelling the world trying to find himself. In the case of Peer Gynt, that takes a lifetime. Nybakken had some very nice solos with long lines and high extensions, some danced in the water, which covered parts of the stage. Having two dancers as part of the cast gave the performance an extra dimension.

Just before the dancers of the Norwegian National Ballet could leave for a very deserved vacation at the end of June, they danced an evening titled White Nights. The title reflected two

her must be a joy, and Yoel Carreño as Solor was a great match.

The men were challenged when the curtain opened for *Secus* by Mr. Gaga, Ohad Naharin, for 17 male dancers and one female, Melissa Hough. Naharin's choreographic language is explosive, wild and energetic. In his works, the dancers have only one thing to do: go all in. This is not a story ballet, but small short stories emerge. Some have humour — for instance, at one point not everybody on the stage is feeling well — and one can see the contours of everyday life. The short moment Hough was onstage, she threw herself into the dance with a fearless force.

The last piece on the program was George Balanchine's *Symphony in C*, which has been in the repertoire of the company since 1967. It was staged by Patricia Neary, a former New York City Ballet dancer who has been long active with the Balanchine Trust and has been a frequent guest to Oslo over many years, staging several Balanchine ballets here.

In this ballet, both the soloists and the corps de ballet have opportunities to shine. In the first movement, Whitney Jensen and Ricardo Castellanos gave the impression they were having great fun, and the chemistry between them was impeccable. The tempo in this movement was fast, which might have been the reason that the corps did not keep up the whole time. Nybakken, in the adagio movement, danced with an expression on her face like an ice queen, which did not suit the mood of the movement, though Philip Currell was an excellent partner.

During the third movement, the Japanese couple Leyna Magbutay and Gakuro Matsui went for extreme speed, and they managed to transfer their enthusiasm to the audience. Eugenie Skilnand and Douwe Dekkers had the advantage of enthusiasm in the fourth movement, which they performed beautifully, with the whole cast in the grand coda easily following the quick baton of conductor Per Kristian Skalstad. When music and dance is performed this way, it is a joy to have the privilege to sit in the audience. *DI*

BY FREDRIK RÜTTER



company soloist, Grete Sofie Borud Nybakken, was cast as Solveig, the play's main female character.

Henriksen was also onstage, dancing the inner thoughts of Peer Gynt, while an actor played the actual character. It was a good idea, but it did not work out through the whole play; it is not easy to find the right way to express another person's feelings and mood, and Henriksen often was only walking slowly around looking very introverted. Nybakken was both actor and dancer for her role as Solveig, who waits for her lover

things: the ballets on the program and the bright white nights in Scandinavia at this time of the year.

The evening opened with the white act from *La Bayadère*, The Kingdom of the Shades, which is always a challenge for the female corps de ballet. The entrance coming down the inclined ramp is really tough, and the 24 women have to dance in unison, but they pulled it off with bravura. As Nikiya, Maria Kochetkova had fantastic technique, and though she is tiny she managed to make her lines seem neverending. Partnering

Norwegian National Ballet's Grete Sofie Borud Nybakken (as Solveig, running in the middle ground) in Ibsen's *Peer Gynt*, directed by Marit Moum Aune, choreographed by Silas Henriksen
Photo: Bård Gundersen

Established dance festivals all around the country made the last few months a rich and lively time. A wide range of current choreographic trends was key to larger festivals such as Bolzano Danza, while others balanced their programs between first class contemporary dance and ballet companies on tour. Italians were lucky enough to see *Batsheva* — The Young Ensemble at Florence Dance Festival; Hamburg Ballet at Ravenna Festival; Dutch National Ballet's tribute to Hans Van Manen at Two Worlds Festival in Spoleto; and a wonderful homage to Merce Cunningham by the Centre national de danse contemporaine — *Angers* at Bolzano Danza.

The most exciting event was the world premiere of *Romeo and Juliet* by Danish choreographer (and former principal dancer with the Royal Danish Ballet and London's Royal Ballet) Johan Kobborg. There were many reasons for this: first, the venue — the Arena in Verona, the greatest ancient open-air theatre, which typically attracts thousands of spectators. Then, the performers, led by superstars Alina Cojocar and Sergei Polunin. And, above all, the production itself, which was supported by Polunin through Polunin Ink, an independent platform the dancer founded for new ballet projects that should be both popular in the sense of being able to reach the largest audience possible and have a creative approach that evolves the classical vocabulary.

How did Kobborg's *Romeo and Juliet* work? Rather well, indeed.

Kobborg cut almost a third of the original Prokofiev score (including the bedroom pas de deux) to give his storytelling a quicker pace that emphasized the breathless speed of the actions and emotions. His focus is on the sudden explosion of passion — love, but also rage and despair, which are accentuated: Capulet violently slaps Juliet's face in front of the people of Verona to remind her she must obey him; after Tybalt's death, a desperate Juliet rushes and jumps against Romeo's chest, crying; the duels, especially between Tybalt and Romeo, are spectacular and realistic in their blind outbursts. Kobborg amplifies these impressions by using a continuous stream of larger-than-life movement: big jumps and wide turns, long glissades, high lifts à la Russe, dazzling fish dives —

all executed at great speed, à la Balanchine. In this way, he works to exalt the technical qualities of his dancers and their characters more than to invent an original choreographic language.

A leading soloist of the British Royal Ballet, Valentino Zucchetti, as Mercutio, was revealed as a brilliant actor whose physical gestures blend pantomime with the whirling dynamics of his jumps and turns. Atlanta Ballet's Nikolas Gaifullin — a true revelation — was an impetuous and virtuosic Prince of Cats, as Tybalt is described in the play.

As for the leads, Romeo and Juliet are introduced by two solos at the very

a stony-looking sculpture in dark grey with revealing arches, terraces and staircases, is almost another principal character. In its folds the two lovers play hide and seek at their first encounter; up on the high terrace Lord Capulet (Ross Freddie Ray) expresses his will that Juliet marry Paris (Kilian Smith); the desperate rush of the lovers after Tybalt's death ends abruptly against the sculpture's back wall, a symbolic, traumatic stop to their hopes of freedom.

The elegant and stylized costumes, revisiting the Renaissance through a contemporary eye, were by fashion group Collettivo Anonimi Creativi.

In the well-defined character role of

BY SILVIA POLETTI



beginning, giving us danced portraits of their personalities. Polunin's Romeo flies and devours the stage with his stealthy jumps; his youthful exuberance dominates air and ground, as when he falls to the stage floor after a breathless dance that expresses his wish to catch every moment of life. Cojocar's Juliet is lively and curious about the life she does not yet know. Her quick footwork with continuous changes of direction seems to suggest her wish to explore new paths.

In the first scenes of the ballet Juliet always appears at the top of the beautiful set conceived by sculptor David Umemoto. Indeed, the set, which features

Romeo, Polunin shows his magnetic stage personality and the quality of his dance, which is sparkling, rich with nuance and appearing incredibly natural although full of ballet virtuosity. In close relationship to Cojocar, one of the greatest dancing actresses of the present day — her powerful and expanded gestures of despair recall the acting skills of the celebrated Carla Fracci, the very first Juliet in John Cranko's version of the ballet — Polunin balances his tenderness and impetuosity well. No wonder this *Romeo and Juliet* thrilled more than 10,000 spectators, who came from all over the world to attend the one-night only performance. *DI*

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Singapore



BY MALCOLM TAY

Subtlety was sorely missing from the program presented in August by Dance Ensemble Singapore, which was founded in 1988 to feature Chinese dance but has since branched out into contemporary work. Lately, the company has also been pursuing a style that artistic director Yan Choong Lian calls “Nanyang” — a sinocentric term in Mandarin for Southeast Asia — by premiering pieces rooted in Singapore’s history and culture, albeit filtered through a Chinese-centred lens. The triple bill at the Drama Centre Theatre paid homage to two local Chinese-language writers.

The recent nonfiction of Rong Zi, who has been writing for half a century, served as a springboard for a pair of dance-dramas. In 2018, she had compiled and contributed to a prose collection on qiaopi, remittances sent home

by southern Chinese immigrants in the 19th and 20th centuries, which became partial inspiration for resident choreographer Goh Yan Dan’s *Correspondence from Chinese Immigrants*. It revolves around a man who runs a Chaozhou opera troupe in China, until poverty forces him to search for employment abroad without his family. While his wife holds the fort, he marries the daughter of his boss in Singapore and sets up an opera troupe there, through whose performances he expresses his guilt toward his original spouse.

Correspondence from Chinese Immigrants came across as a baffling blend of documentary and melodrama. Information on the historical importance of qiaopi was delivered via earnest voiceovers and animated background projections that flitted by too quickly to be absorbed. This was the case as well for the guest appearance of Chaozhou opera actress Chua Ai Peck, whose brief songs were meant to convey the protagonists’ emotional turmoil but felt like intrusions in the plot. And the dancers’ overacting could barely be taken with a straight face, ranging as it did from playing adults rushing around looking distressed to seniors tottering on canes looking distressed.

Personal anguish was on display, too, in *Mother*, the second item inspired by Rong Zi’s writings, this one by creative director Cai Shiji. It was based on the author’s autobiographical essay of the same name. Born in the southern Chinese region of Chaoshan, she left China at the age of eight with her adoptive parents, relocating to Malaysia before settling in Singapore in the 1950s. In Cai’s *Mother*, Rong Zi — portrayed by television actress Priscelia Chan in her first stage outing — reunites uneasily with her birth mother, played by veteran performer Elena Chia, with three dancers enacting her child, teenage and grownup selves as the narrative shifts backward and forward in time.

Mother, like *Correspondence*, had the makings of a téléroman. There was a scene of early physical abuse. Chan’s Rong Zi cowered while covering her ears when her memories hurtled together in a jumble; she shouted at a flashback, helpless to stop her young alter ego from following her adoptive mother. Most jarring

of all was an extended dance passage in which a woman in white was surrounded by and then tied to figures in flesh-toned lycra by a cat’s cradle of red rope symbolizing the umbilical cord: maternity as bondage. Such images hit the audience on the head, as did the eventual arrival of scissors to cut the rope.

Dance Ensemble Singapore’s third piece was triggered by former newspaper editor Pan Cheng Lui’s cryptic poem about a girl who daily greets a fish in the well fronting her home, until one day she moves away and the well is sealed. This poem prompted Taiwanese-American choreographer Kun-Yang Lin to craft *Fish and Girl*, which for once in the evening revealed the performers’ technical facility. The abstract patterns and fitful solos had no overt connection to the text, though some of Pan’s lines were recited occasionally into a microphone to dubious effect. At several points, a woman stepped onto a platform upstage, holding up the edges of her wide gold-and-silver overskirt like outstretched wings. Did she represent the fish, the girl or something else altogether? Lin’s creation seemed as mysterious as his source material.

Elsewhere, at the Esplanade Theatre, Singapore Dance Theatre mounted a revival of Choo-San Goh’s *Fives* (1978) — for many years a signature work of Washington Ballet — and two Balanchine gems, with Chua Bi Ru, Elaine Heng and Kwok Min Yi completing successful debuts in *Serenade* (1934) and *Theme and Variations* (1947).

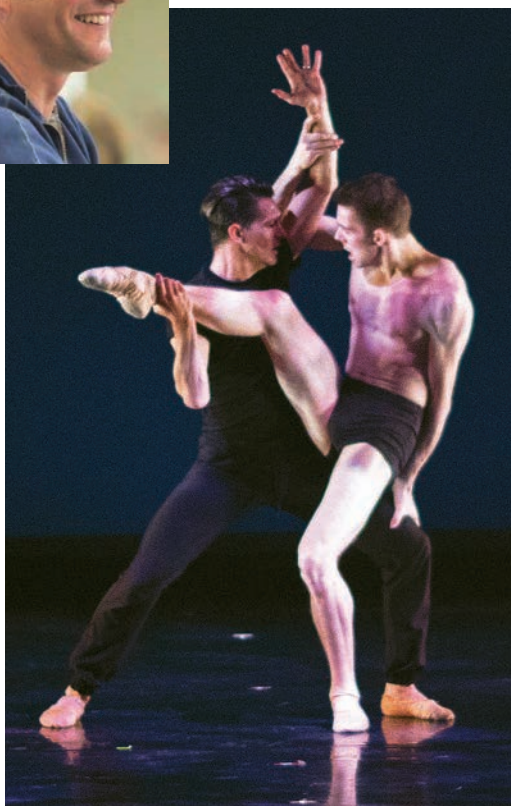
At the Esplanade Theatre Studio, local group Chowk Productions staged what the conflicting pre-show publicity had described as a diptych or triptych, but was, in fact, a merging of two solos and a duet into an hour-long offering.

In her solo, *Man. Untold.*, Sandhya Suresh examined the notion of femininity as she tried to unveil the person behind her sensuous poses and come-hither gaze. Karishma Nair’s *The Last Walk for Water* channelled the final moments of Letikiros Hailu, a 13-year-old Ethiopian girl who hanged herself after breaking a clay pot filled with water that she had walked more than 10 hours to get for her family. By the end, Suresh and Nair mirrored each other’s movements and stood back to back, as if two sides of the same coin. ▀

A Mythic Tale for our Technological Age

Alberta Ballet and Jean Grand-Maitre's *Frankenstein*

BY KAIJA PEPPER



Top: Jean Grand-Maitre
Photo: Courtesy of Alberta Ballet

Bottom: Alberta Ballet's Kelley McKinlay (Victor Frankenstein) and Zacharie Dun (the Creature) in rehearsal for Jean Grand-Maitre's *Frankenstein*
Photo: Phebe Murison

Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein* has attained mythic status since it was published in 1818. We all know some version of this dark story about a scientist who creates life from the body parts of corpses, and the horror that results when he abandons his physically repulsive creation. Left to cope alone with the mystery of existence, the creature despairs and seeks revenge on his maker.

Victor Frankenstein, the scientist, has become synonymous with his creation who, unnamed in the novel, is today typically known as Frankenstein. When choreographer Jean Grand-Maitre began to research his version of the tale for Alberta Ballet, the company he directs, this conflation of man and monster struck him as apt. The intelligent, highly civilized scientist is, after all, ultimately responsible for the destruction wreaked by his imperfect creation. "Victor played with the unnatural," says Grand-Maitre, "and there is darkness in his heart."

As for the creature, it is his complete rejection by others that turns him into a monster. "The success in creating this role will be to capture the human trapped in the monster," says Grand-Maitre.

We first spoke over the phone during the early stages of the *Frankenstein* creative process. At the time, Grand-Maitre — known for his sextet of pop music ballets set to Joni Mitchell, the Tragically Hip and others — was at the company's home base in Calgary. He would begin to work the

choreography during a two-week residency at the Banff Centre for Arts and Creativity, a 90-minute drive high up into the Rocky Mountains. He calls the centre his "sanctuary," and that's where we met in person, at the end of July, in a large rehearsal studio in the theatre complex.

Grand-Maitre was warm and welcoming to me and two other journalists who had made the trek, as well as several Banff Centre donors. We sat in a long row at the front of the studio, with Grand-Maitre's chair neatly in the middle.

The rehearsal began with an ensemble section set in a medical school classroom that involved the 12 Alberta Ballet dancers who accompanied Grand-Maitre to Banff.

The six men and six women who performed the medical students (22 dancers are planned for the scene) wore long flowing coats that stood in for the costumes, grouped around two tables representing the medical slab that will be part of the set. "Imagine there's a dead body on the table," Grand-Maitre told us, "with a professor in the middle trying to give it life."

Ballet master Christiana Bennett started the music — Max Richter's avant-garde take on the Winter section from Vivaldi's *The Four Seasons*. The dancers, in their sweep and rush of movement, channelled the energy needed by the professor for his experiment in galvanization.

Throughout, Grand-Maitre leaned eagerly forward on his chair. Casually dressed in long

denim shorts and red running shoes, he was focused and a little tense, often lightening the atmosphere with a humorous comment. Timing and trajectories were worked out, and at one point Grand-Maitre leaped up and asked for “a lower arabesque, because what I want to look at is the shoulder coming up, not the arabesque.”

The ensemble dispersed after he announced the next section for rehearsal: a pas de deux between Zacharie Dun (the Creature) and Kelley McKinlay (Victor Frankenstein). Several dancers headed over to work with participants of the Designing for Dance program [see story on page 28], while Mariko Kondo settled in a back corner where she quietly stretched.

During the scene, which brings Victor Frankenstein and his creation together on a beach, the two men sorted out the most efficient weight supports in different lifts. There are a lot of mechanics involved, but Grand-Maitre doesn't lose sight of the greater dramatic effect, telling them, “You need to keep eye contact in a way that will register to the back row of any audience.”

Dun, an Australian in his third season with Alberta Ballet, is more than six feet tall, which will help him embody a creature that Shelley describes as “of a gigantic stature ... about eight feet in height.” More importantly, his lanky body demonstrates the precise isolations needed for the “discombobulated” grace Grand-Maitre is after.

The final scene of the afternoon was the wedding pas de deux with Kondo and McKinlay. Dun settled at the side of the studio with a theraband and a foam roller, while Kondo and McKinlay, both company veterans with unforced

presence, took their places. Grand-Maitre asked us to imagine a corps de ballet behind the couple. He also explained that in this scene, Kondo's character, Elizabeth, doesn't yet know about the creature, only that something is troubling Victor.

The psychological backstory adds dramatic play to their duet. So does the score by British composer Jim Copperthwaite, a spooky, twisted waltz that propels them down the aisle. The dancers manage to make a one-armed lift that has her high in the air seem the easiest, most elegant manoeuvre in the world.

Their concentration was total, even when an informal photo shoot began at the side of the studio. Kondo and McKinlay seemed oblivious to everything except their dance, intent on creating a world in which the grace of classical ballet and the expressive force of contemporary dance come together to tell this complex story of creation and destruction.

Grand-Maitre's *Frankenstein* premiered at the end of October in Calgary's Southern Alberta Jubilee Auditorium. What we witnessed that day in rehearsal was the outline of a few scenes based on a gothic tale that, as Grand-Maitre said when we first spoke, “is even more believable today. Just look at all that's going on in genetics and with artificial intelligence. The horror comes not from blood on the stage, but from what can happen when scientists don't have a sense of social responsibility.”

Rather than recreating a period piece, Grand-Maitre's *Frankenstein* is transposed to the present in the hope it will encourage audiences to connect to issues around technological development in a more profound and pressing way. *DI*



Kyle Abraham in Motion

BY CATHY LEVY, EXECUTIVE PRODUCER, DANCE,
CANADA'S NATIONAL ARTS CENTRE



One of the great joys of my work as a dance producer is the time I spend talking with artists about their creative aspirations. It's not always obvious how these discussions translate into presentations, nor is it always possible to make that happen, but the conversations are invariably insightful. I feel fortunate to have had several one-on-one conversations with New York-based choreographer Kyle Abraham over the last few years, most recently as we shaped the repertoire for his upcoming National Arts Centre presentation.

When I first invited Kyle to the NAC in 2014, I requested his full-evening, Bessie award-winning *The Radio Show*, an evocative ensemble piece in which he himself danced. Although he had moved away from performing and was focused on other

touring works, I wanted his NAC debut to feature him onstage. I felt the piece was relevant and universal in its themes — family and the effects of Alzheimer's juxtaposed against the closing of a beloved radio station in his hometown of Pittsburgh. The show's arc allowed the audience to feel personally touched by interweaving stories, not to mention the sensational dancing and Kyle's textured choreography. I was glad he agreed, and the work was very successfully received.

I continued to follow Kyle, attending rehearsals and performances, sitting with him at other shows, chatting about his priorities and what his next project with us might be. With each encounter, we got to know each other and our individual professional realities a bit more. I spoke to several

international presenters about his work and encouraged them to pay attention. Kyle's world kept getting busier, so I knew it was important to reserve dates when we could realize a return engagement.

While continuing to present full-evening signature pieces, Kyle recently curated a mixed bill of his own and other's works, showcasing three New York choreographers — Andrea Miller, Doug Varone and Bebe Miller. His aim was to both highlight his admiration for these artists and to give his dancers the breadth of experience that comes with dancing other rep. As well, after a hiatus of nearly 10 years, he had made a new solo for himself, *INDY*.

After attending the premiere

at the Joyce in New York, I sat down with Kyle on two occasions to design his second program for the NAC. We discussed what I call the horizontal and vertical flow of the evening (something I apply to my season planning as well), that is, how do you build a coherent flow through the performance so the viewer has a connected journey, while at the same time letting each work stand on its own?

I had two requests: I wanted him to dance once again on our stage, this time with *INDY*, and I was eager to present *The Quiet Dance*, an exquisite piece from 2011 set to the late iconic pianist Bill Evans' transcription of Leonard Bernstein's *Some Other Time*.

Kyle wanted to include at least one other choreographer, reflective of his current focus with his company A.I.M (Abraham in Motion). We zeroed in on Andrea Miller's all-female trio *State*, as it was specially commissioned for A.I.M and would provide a subtle energy to the evening. Finally, we agreed that Kyle's 2017 ensemble work, *Drive*, with its full-on exuberance, would pack a wallop at the end of the program.

At our final discussion in Los Angeles, we looked at each other across a hotel lobby table, imagining these four works unfolding over an evening. He smiled that irresistible Kyle smile and said, "YES, that works."

His agreement meant a lot, and gave me and my colleagues at the NAC the go-ahead to pursue the countless ensuing details — technical and production needs, budget, timing and other logistics — with his team. I'm sure the result will be spectacular. *DI*

Kyle Abraham and A.I.M are at the National Arts Centre in Ottawa in April 2020.

Kyle Abraham in his solo *INDY*
Photo: Steven Schreiber

TORONTO DANCERS ON ROOFTOP

Alison Sutcliffe Collection, Dance Collection Danse



This image from the Alison Sutcliffe collection at the Dance Collection Danse archives was taken on an unidentified Toronto rooftop in the mid-1930s. The building in the background is the historic Bank of Commerce on King Street, an art deco beauty in the heart of the financial district completed in 1931. Now dwarfed by the modern behemoths of capitalism that surround it, the bank was the tallest building in the British Commonwealth until 1962.

When I first saw the photo, I was struck by the juxtaposition of Alison Sutcliffe's group of amateur dancers — some serious, some joyful, some distracted — reaching for the sky with this symbol of wealth behind them and yet *they* are the focus, *they* hold the viewer captive. Young dancers of the modernist age caught in a moment in time at the top of a city that was known for its upright, upright, "good" status.

But, in the 30s, Toronto supported a busy artistic scene despite the greatest global economic depression in human history. One of those artists was Sutcliffe, who taught ballet, modern and Spanish dance at the Toronto Conservatory of Music and was the director of dance at Hart House Theatre throughout the decade. She brought the Royal Academy of Dancing syllabus, German Expressionist aesthetics and Labanotation to Toronto, and embodied a spirit of innovation in her teaching and dancemaking.

— AMY BOWRING, EXECUTIVE AND CURATORIAL DIRECTOR, DANCE COLLECTION DANSE

The virtual exhibit Alison Sutcliffe: Terpsichorean Adventurer, curated by Amy Bowring, is at www.dcd.ca/exhibitions/sutcliffe. Bowring's book, Navigating Home: Artists of the NL Dance Project, was published by Neighbourhood Dance Works/DCD Press/Presse.

LETTER

from the Publisher

AS A SUBSCRIBER TO *DANCE INTERNATIONAL* almost since its beginning, I have looked forward to receiving each quarterly issue as it arrived in the mail. Watching the magazine slowly grow and expand its focus has been fascinating. Over the last several years, I have had a view from behind the scenes as president of the board of the Vancouver Ballet Society, a non-profit support organization founded in 1946 in Vancouver, B.C., which acts as publisher of the magazine. Through this, I have gained even more appreciation for the accomplishment of all who have been involved with *Dance International* over its 43 outstanding years.

The magazine has its roots as a members' newsletter, which in 1977 became *Vandance* magazine, and then *Vandance International*, acknowledging the expanded scope of its coverage, until in 1993 taking on its present title of *Dance International*. Through these incarnations, the magazine has grown from a few black-and-white pages to a richly coloured, professionally edited, printed and distributed magazine that is admired throughout the world.

The first editor, Ruth McLoughlin, was a former dancer and tireless volunteer with the VBS, who was assisted by Leland Windreich (whose day job was librarian) until the two reversed roles. Although his formal editorial involvement only lasted around three years, Lee, as he was known, contributed as a writer for much longer, including several important historical stories that he uncovered highlighting B.C. connections to the glamorous Ballets Russes.

After a brief stint by John Warren, Maureen Riches, a former VBS administrator, became the longest-standing editor. From 1985 to 2013, Maureen was influential in advancing the magazine from a community-based publication to an internationally esteemed magazine with reports and features from around the globe and good support from advertisers. In 2006, *Dance International* was called "the ballet world's top glossy" in Canada's *Chatelaine* magazine.

When Maureen retired in 2013, the VBS board appointed Kaija Pepper, a highly respected dance writer, historian and critic as the new editor. For Kaija, writing about the art form of dance, and supporting others to do so, is a passion. She was aptly described in a profile published by Dance Collection Danse as "a natural storyteller," who values "sound research, creativity and authenticity" in every piece of writing. She has taken the magazine to a new phase of critical analysis and polished commentary, as well as generously mentoring emerging writers.

Dance International is widely considered a valuable resource for its coverage of dance and dancers in British Columbia, in Canada and abroad, and the Vancouver Ballet Society is proud of this flagship program. All of us on the board feel deep regret at closing down our beautiful print publication and great frustration at the current difficult publishing climate that has made this necessary. We are so pleased that Kaija has agreed to continue with the magazine's work through its already existing website, continuing to build the legacy at www.danceinternational.org, with features, reviews and reports being posted monthly starting in 2020. ▯

MAUREEN ALLEN
PRESIDENT, VANCOUVER BALLET SOCIETY

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