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Dance is in fine shape worldwide. The holding pattern that set in after Balanchine's death back in 1983 is over at last. Choreographers of a certain age have established vital and credible voices, while young artists are forging forward with their own imaginations and ideas. So despite gloom in print publishing these days, this is still a wonderful time for dance writing — there's plenty of material to pay attention to. As *Dance International's* new editor, I look forward to working

with our articulate, passionate writers to bring you these exciting times.

Exciting ... and complex. In the 21st century, dancers are often required to do more than dance their hearts out: there's a whole lot of thinking going on. Performers and audiences are getting used to navigating their way through choreography thoughtfully, which isn't everyone's idea of a good evening out. Yet too much eye candy leaves others restless.

Art: it can make such demands! Yet it can be so much fun!

Each season, *Dance International* will continue to bring you stories across the spectrum of serious and entertaining, creating a dynamic space where dance appears in its many guises. And however compelling the present, there's much beauty unique to its time — the whole history of people and places and ways of being an artist — that we'll bring to these pages, too.

My copy of the magazine is often on the kitchen table, handy for breakfast-time reading. Wherever it lies, *Dance International* is a shout-out for dance, a rallying point for the irresistible adventure this art form is for so many of us.

Of course, the magazine is also building a complementary web and social media presence, based at www.danceinternational.org.

There are some changes in this issue we hope you'll approve: a lighter, more environmentally friendly paper stock, for one, and a gallery space on the back page, for another. Not that we've lost Michael Crabb's popular Notebook: it's moved to the centre of the magazine (page 27 in this issue).

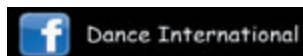
As you dip and dive into these pages, please drop us a line and let us know what resonated and what you feel drawn to challenge. Be part of the unfolding story of dance and of *Dance International*.

Kaija Pepper
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The Royal Ballet's Melissa Hamilton in
Wayne McGregor's *Raven Girl*
Photo: Tristram Kenton



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Audrey Niffenegger and Wayne McGregor

The Raven Girl Team

On the art of collaboration



Wayne McGregor is a man at the sharp end of international creativity. Resident choreographer of the Royal Ballet, the contagiously enthusiastic Englishman also runs his own contemporary dance company, Wayne McGregor | Random Dance. He's created new pieces for the world's top ballet companies, worked on a host of operas and plays, choreographed for movies, including *Harry Potter and the Goblet of Fire*, and has a plethora of other projects under his belt. Alongside his excitingly visceral style of extreme in-your-face body angles, a major factor in his success is his unlikely collaborations with people from the wider artistic world.

"I'm just curious," he says. "I just notice there are so many phenomenal people out there doing brilliant things."

| by Gerard Davis

Sarah Lamb in Wayne McGregor's *Raven Girl*
Photo: Dave Morgan/DanceTabs.com



I met up with McGregor at London's Royal Opera House in early May as he was preparing his newest Royal Ballet creation, *Raven Girl*, for its world premiere later that month. For this new opus, he called upon the considerable talents of writer Audrey Niffenegger and composer Gabriel Yared, who joined familiar team members Vicki Mortimer (set and costume), Ravi Deepres (video) and Lucy Carter (lighting).

Niffenegger is the American best-selling author of *The Time Traveler's Wife* (made into a Hollywood movie in 2009) and *Her Fearful Symmetry*, and Lebanese-born, French-based Gabriel Yared is the Oscar-winning composer of *The English Patient*,

who has many other film scores to his name, such as *Cold Mountain*, *The Talented Mr. Ripley* and *Betty Blue*.

How does McGregor determine who he'd like to work with?

"I have a list of things I love," he laughs. "I might have seen a film, for example, and I remember the cinematographer and over time the name keeps reappearing. I find if you're ambitious about who you want to work with and you've got a good idea, people tend to respond. So far, and I'll probably jinx myself here, I've not had a meeting with someone where it's not worked out even if I don't know the person and they don't particularly know the dance world. I think it works because I gravitate toward people who are also curious about doing something different."

Being brave is a notion that crops up regularly in our conversation.

"I'm open to lots of influences," he remarks. "I feel that being nervous about something is a really good thing — I like some of my process to be on edge. I tend to choose people who have a very strong voice and have particular skills they want to share — it's that interface, that rub of two things that can be really interesting."

The disparate nature of his collaborations means they don't always come together straight away and will sometimes produce surprising results. With his Random dancers he recently worked with London-based design collective rAndom International (the two groups are not related) on an installation at the Barbican arts centre called *Rain Room*.

"Originally I made a performance that people stopped to watch for 15 minutes. As soon as I finished, I knew it was totally wrong. But rather than leaving it, which would have been the sensible thing to do, I remade the piece. I turned *Rain Room* into a dance of about 30 hours' worth of unrepeated variation where the dancers would be accidentally met by audience members walking through the installation. It worked so much better!" The installation was remounted in New York's Museum of Modern Art this past summer.

McGregor has also had a highly fruitful relationship with Thom Yorke, lead singer of British rock group Radiohead.

"Thom has an amazing way of moving and it's something I'd not seen before — it's kind of natural to him, he just moves like that. My job on his music videos was to work with him so his movement had some kind of language, development and build in relationship to the songs."

The video for Radiohead's *Lotus Flower* has had more than 20 million views on YouTube, giving McGregor's choreography unprecedented exposure. What really thrills him, however, is not the vast amount of people who've watched it, but, he explains, "how many people have done their own versions. There are literally hundreds of videos where people have learned *Lotus Flower* perfectly, made their own versions or done a piss-take. People are dancing and taking the time to learn something — we're trying to collect as many as we can because I think it'd make a fantastic exhibition!"



For *Raven Girl*, he's working directly from a fairy tale written especially for him by Niffenegger. It tells the story of a girl born half human/half raven and follows her quest to be able to fly. Famous for her prose novels, Niffenegger began her professional career producing graphic novels and freely admits to having little experience of the dance or theatrical world.

"My background in dance is people like [American post-modernist composer/performer] Meredith Monk, so I'm coming from a non-ballet kind of place," she says. "However, I used to teach interdisciplinary arts at Columbia College in Chicago and the emphasis of the department was on cross-media endeavours, so it doesn't seem like a huge mental leap to collaborate with people in other fields. Sometimes being ignorant of an art form is kind of good: I'm entirely spared the temptation to have any dance ideas."

The fact that a book of *Raven Girl* would be published as part of the collaboration was important to Niffenegger. Working with regular collaborators Ken Gerleve (her studio assistant) and Sara Corbett (her book designer), in double-quick time they produced a storybook that features Niffenegger's exquisite aquatint prints (a form of etching that gives results similar to watercolour painting), published by Abrams Books in May 2013.

"I'm really happy with the book. It's funny because if I hadn't been collaborating with Wayne, it probably would have been a bunch of little gouache paintings rather than the aquatints he wanted. He definitely had a huge impact on how it looks."

She's found the experience of working with the Royal Ballet fascinating. "Being a complete lay person, I only vaguely knew what people do in the theatre. I don't know if our process has been typical, but something I appreciate is how there's been several meetings where people have come together and batted things around.

"Wayne is marvellous to work with — it's like getting a little energy transfusion every time we meet."

Recently Vicki Mortimer presented the set model and that was easy for me to comprehend because it's very visual. It was a real thrill because suddenly I could see where it was all headed and what everyone was doing to the story in order to make it danceable."

She's also discovered interesting comparisons between her writing and dance. "The great thing about words on a page is that, as a reader, you lose yourself and forget you're holding a book or Kindle. There's an immense collaboration between reader and writer and there's all sorts of imaginative tasks that the reader has to do — you're making an amazing piece of theatre in your mind. With TV or a movie, much of that's been done for you, but when watching ballet you don't need a lot of conscious thought because you're having a pretty direct experience. But afterward, just like with a book, you're left with lots of space to wonder about it."

She's loved the whole *Raven Girl* experience. "Wayne is marvellous to work with — it's like getting a little energy transfusion every time we meet — and Gabriel's music sounds great. Everybody's flowing together and making it really strong."

"I'm surprised how easy it's been," she adds. "I didn't expect fights, but I thought we'd eventually come to a point where Wayne would want one thing and me another. But because we all have very clearly defined roles, everybody's been helpful with feedback without being possessive. I think it's the lack of ego that's surprised me. I'd be really happy to do more."

Unlike Niffenegger, Yared, who's best known for his evocative orchestral film scores, has previous experience in ballet — he's worked several times in Europe with American contemporary dance choreographer Carolyn Carlson and also with no less a figure than Roland Petit, with whom he made two ballets: *Le Diable*

Amoureux for Ballet National de Marseille in 1989 and *Clavigo* for Paris Opera Ballet in 1999.

"Petit was a very respectful person and wanted me to express my music, but to express it inside his structure," says Yared. "He would send me a breakdown that was quite precise but without defining any music style. He would say 'When they dance here, I'd like something fast' or 'This is a romantic moment, I'd like something slow.' It was a nice collaboration."

The creative process with McGregor has been different. The pair of them agreed the choreographer would send him a shortlist of words that were suggestive of the story. From there, and also using Niffenegger's images as inspiration, Yared very quickly composed the music — a blend of full orchestra and electronics that has a grand, filmic quality — finishing more than an hour's worth of material in just two months.

"Wayne has this amazing ear that understands even the deepest thing in the music. Even when he rejected something he always spoke with so much intelligence and respect."

He's a big fan of McGregor's choreography, too.

"How can I define it? Wayne has such a personal language that he creates his own modernity. Now that I know him a little better I can see him in every single choreography he does — it's metal, it's fire, it's intuition, it's spiritual, it's so many things."

Yared relishes the freedom that comes with composing for dance and has a deep respect for its traditions.

"Some people turn their nose up at Tchaikovsky's *Nutcracker*, but, my God, it's a wonderful score and ballet. Of course, I like Debussy's *Jeux*, Ravel's *Daphnis et Chloé* and Stravinsky as well. I hope that more composers come back to writing ballet music, it's very important. I think the first two expressions of humanity

were probably music and dance — sometimes it seems as if music couldn't exist if it wasn't accompanied by dancing."

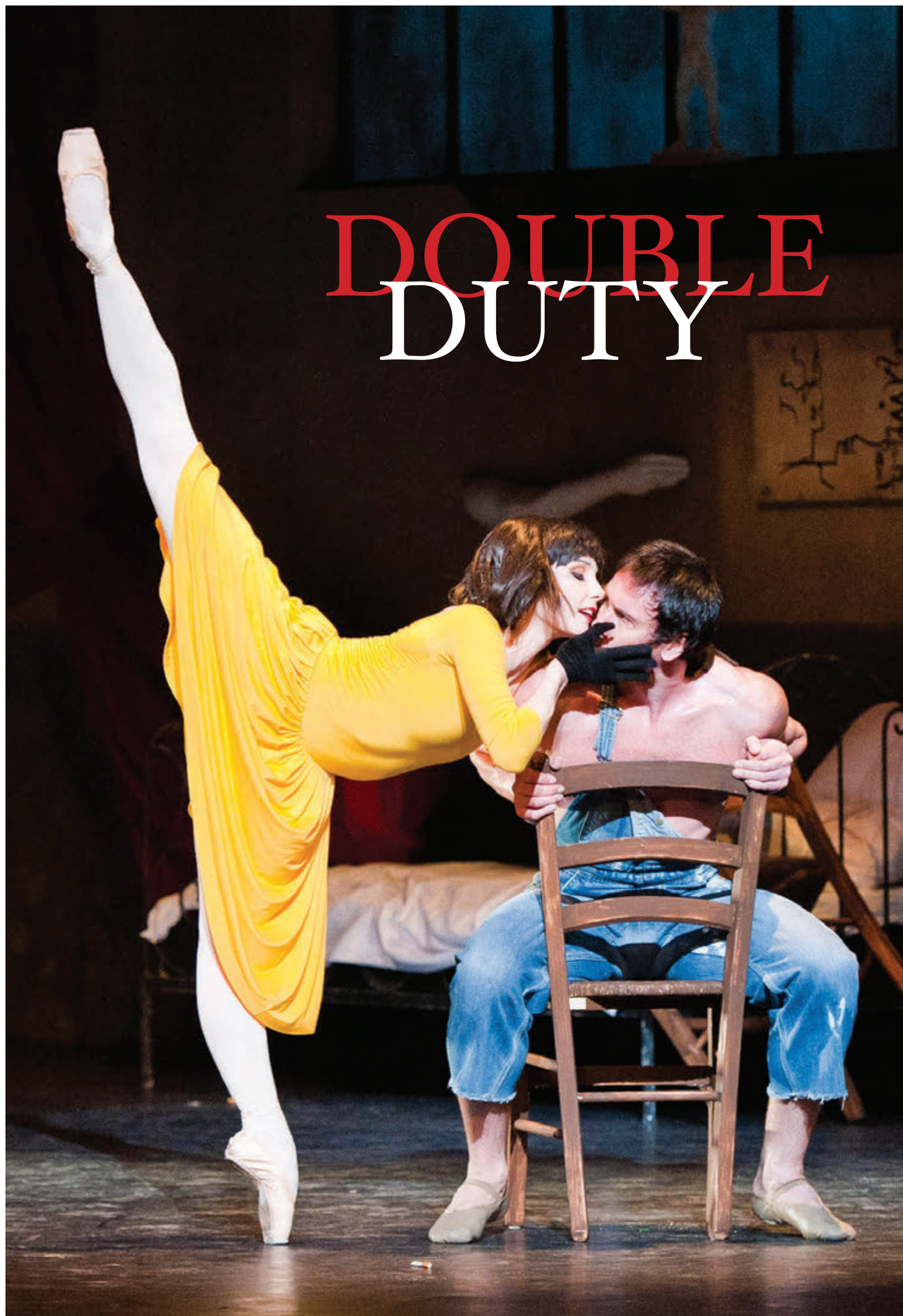
For Yared, collaboration has always been a crucial element not just in the way he works but in the way he's developed as a composer.

"The most beautiful collaboration I've had was with the film director Anthony Minghella. This was a true collaboration because he understood that I wasn't there just to put tapestry on a film and that I should be involved from the beginning. He understood my language because he was a musician as well — he read music and played Bach. Not all collaborations are happy, but I say thank you to all the people I've collaborated with because they each gave me the time and chance to go beyond what I knew. After all, it takes more than one person to make a child. This is how I felt about this collaboration with Wayne."

This spirit of embracing collaboration is something McGregor readily identifies with. "I enjoy being steeped in somebody else's world and I really try to swim in their waters. It's incredible to work with an author on a brand-new book and watch it develop and to work with a composer where you sit with him in his studio and he plays the music to you."

A few days after our interview, McGregor was sharing his enthusiasm for *Raven Girl* with a packed audience at a Royal Opera House Insight event in one of the ballet studios. He was presenting some work-in-progress choreography from the closing section of the ballet with the help of two Royal Ballet dancers, Sarah Lamb and Eric Underwood. Unusually for McGregor, the movement is highly lyrical and dominated by joyous, fluid lifts suggesting flight — but that's the thing with Wayne McGregor, you never quite know what he's going to get up to next. ▼

DOUBLE DUTY





Tamara Rojo
Photo: Johan Persson

Tamara Rojo, ballerina and artistic director of English National Ballet

In the British dance world all eyes are on Tamara Rojo, the Canadian-born ballerina who is just completing her first year at the helm of London-based English National Ballet. Does she have what it takes to revitalize a company that's been accused of playing to the gallery with overly long runs of popular favourites at the cost of artistic innovation? Moreover, can Rojo accomplish this at a time when the 63-year-old English National Ballet is facing the daunting challenge of adjusting to draconian funding cuts, while still fulfilling its costly mission to tour the kingdom?

A year is not long enough to provide an answer, but by general consent Rojo is off to a good start, particularly with the success in April of a tantalizingly titled *Ecstasy and Death* mixed bill at the 2,500-seat London Coliseum that featured Jiří Kylián's *Petite Mort*, Roland Petit's creepy *Le Jeune Homme et la Mort* with Rojo dancing the symbolic cruel mistress/death role, and Harald Lander's crowd-pleasing trip through ballet technique, *Études*. Although the ballets are all vintage of their kind, it was a shrewdly balanced program designed to showcase the dancers' versatility. They danced their hearts out, and the audience responded accordingly.

It was no secret that when Rojo was a glittering jewel in the Royal Ballet's crown of principal ballerinas, she was already eyeing the prospect of becoming an artistic director one day. When Monica Mason, Rojo's artistic director at Covent Garden, announced her impending retirement in 2011, the ballerina's name was widely mentioned as a possible successor. That job, however, went to Kevin O'Hare. But when Wayne Eagling, English National Ballet's artistic director since 2005, announced in February 2012 that he'd be quitting at the end of that season, Rojo threw her hat in the ring. It only took until April that year for the company's board to announce, to nobody's surprise, that they'd chosen Rojo as Eagling's successor.

For many, however, the only question was why Rojo, then 37 and at the peak of a dazzling stage career, would want to take on a responsibility that, even if she continued to perform as she said she intended, would cut her off from the rich and varied repertoire she commanded at Covent Garden. Surely, her rueful fans asked, Rojo could have waited just a few more years?

It was no secret that when Rojo was a glittering jewel in the Royal Ballet's crown of principal ballerinas, she was already eyeing the prospect of becoming an artistic director one day.

by Michael Crabb

Opportunities, however, arrive unpredictably, and Rojo, who'd made her name as a young ballerina with English National Ballet before moving on to the Royal Ballet in 2000, clearly viewed this as a special one.

Although born in Montreal to Spanish parents, Rojo only spent her first four months in Canada. She began dance classes in Madrid at age five and later trained with Spanish choreographer Victor Ullate, with whose Madrid-based company she launched her professional career in 1991. Spain offered no real prospects for a young dancer looking for a classical ballet career so, after having captured international attention with her gold-medal win at the 1994 Paris International Ballet Competition, Rojo accepted an invitation to dance with Scottish Ballet, then soon made her move to London.

Audiences and critics quickly recognized Rojo's extraordinary qualities, including a steely technique that was consistently placed at the service of genuine artistic expression rather than showy, look-at-me dancing. Rojo's personal beauty and emotional intensity were a magnet for audiences' eyes, but it was her gift for dramatic interpretation, notable in both the 19th-century classic repertoire and in the searing 20th-century ballets of Kenneth MacMillan, that sealed her reputation as a prima ballerina of true distinction. Her partnership with the Royal Ballet's Carlos Acosta added lustre to both their careers.

Rojo is also known for her sharp intelligence and strong work ethic. She's a voracious and wide reader. She delights in a lively argument and has a healthy streak of independence.

"You should never feel afraid of taking your career into your own hands, of taking risks or of walking away from a situation you're not happy with to start again," Rojo told me several years ago.

In 2009, as Rojo mentions in the interview that follows, she spent several weeks in Toronto, shadowing Karen Kain at the National Ballet of Canada. Rojo was already equipping herself for the day she would be a director and left Toronto with a thick binder of notes, gleaned from conversations with everyone from dancers, wardrobe staff and stage crew to company fundraisers and board members.

As Kain observed: "Tamara is a highly intelligent woman with great drive and ambition."

Rojo will need all of that and more as she plots the course she believes will eventually lead to brighter days for English National Ballet.

Michael Crabb: When did you begin to give serious thought to becoming an artistic director?

Tamara Rojo: It was at least eight years ago. I'd been asked if I would be interested in taking over the National Ballet of Spain. At that time I didn't feel I was ready, but thought to myself, "Well, if that kind of opportunity arises elsewhere in the future, I want to make sure I can do justice to the art form and the responsibilities." That's when I started to prepare.

You went to university (Rojo received an MA in Scenic Arts and a BA in Dance Arts from Madrid's Universidad Rey Juan Carlos). You joined various arts boards and were accepted into a new program for future leaders, a Rural Retreat convened in January 2008 by DanceEast in Ipswich, which led you back to the land of your birth, Canada.

Yes, because after that retreat I was selected for a career placement that allowed me to learn firsthand by shadowing an artistic director. I chose Karen Kain at the National Ballet of Canada because I wanted to work with someone who had made the successful transition from star ballerina to artistic director.

This whole opportunity was the brainchild of DanceEast's former head, Assis Carreiro, who, although born in the Azores, grew up in Canada and worked at the National Ballet.

Assis was a huge mentor and help to me. It's an amazing thing she did setting up first the retreats for artistic directors and then for future leaders. Assis was very aware that there was no formal way of preparing artistic directors, and no network. Now you have this network of directors and more of a sense of community, that somehow we are all collaborators in the great mission of dance. The legacy of those programs is going to be a very positive one for the art form internationally.

Does it take a particular type of personality to be an effective artistic director?

I'm not sure if it's a question of personality. I've met many different kinds of directors. Some are shy, some are outgoing, some are confident, some less so. But I think there are two things we all share: a complete love of the art combined with a certain pragmatism. There always has to be that reality check.

Surely you also need a certain toughness that I imagine for some people does not come naturally.

It's the hardest part of the job. I find it very difficult to give bad news; to tell a dancer, for example, they're not going to do a role they've been looking forward to. And what's particularly hard is the prospect of telling a dancer it's time to retire because I know how painful that must be. The only way you can do these things is with honesty, respect and care.

You are not only English National Ballet's artistic director: you're also its most celebrated principal dancer. How does that change things in terms of being director?

Well, I haven't done it the other way so I really can't compare, but there are certainly some positives. I'm in class and rehearsal every day. I'm very present in the studio and very accessible. I am there with the dancers all the time. There's constant communication. Also, every decision I make as director affects me, too, as a dancer, so I have to live what I preach.

I made the decision to keep dancing because for one thing the board wanted that and because, although English National Ballet has many talented dancers, they hadn't been given the media profile that I had. So, in terms of getting people to notice the company again, to get audiences to come, to follow us, to become friends and supporters, it was important that I was visible.

And you have a lot of dancing left in you!

I hope so, but you never know. It has a lot to do with physique and injuries. As a dancer I am very aware. I take extra care. I do much more preparation. But there are some positives to being an older dancer. I don't actually need so many rehearsals and at this stage you stop trying to please everybody. You stick by your artistic decisions.

It still must be quite a burden balancing these two responsibilities.

I try to be sensible about it, but, yes, at the moment it is a very busy job. I'm often working 15- to 16-hour days, but I was very aware that would happen. And English National Ballet is dealing with a difficult moment right now in terms of the economy and reductions in its Arts Council funding. But I believe with hard work, intelligence and passion we can get through this. I can see an end, a point where hopefully things will get a little easier.

Right now, however, this must place a restraint on your ambitions.

It is a huge restraint, but I came with very realistic expectations. And it helps that I was part of the company before. I understand the touring. I understand the regions. I understand the public and respect it. I'm still very much committed to our responsibility to bring the best ballet to cities throughout the U.K.

Of course, we can all dream. I'd love to have a new full-length every year as well as three shorter pieces. But in a way the crisis is an opportunity to change the way we behave. We're putting a lot of effort into attracting more sponsorships, developing co-productions with other companies and other strategies that will help us not to be so dependent on public subsidy, while still continuing to tour.

The fact is that the structure of ballet is broken. Companies used to be able to make money touring. Now they tour and they lose money. That's something that as an industry we really have to reflect upon. How long can we continue to invest in losing money? It's a big question.

Yet, surely touring is fundamental to English National Ballet's mission.

Yes, of course. And when you give so many performances it's

possible to offer chances to younger dancers in leading roles so they can grow into them. Last year we gave more than 40 performances of *The Sleeping Beauty*. It's a luxury to have that many. You can't grow into a role with just one or two shows. Historically, it's the reason English National Ballet has always been able to develop artists, to take them from the schools and groom them all the way to principal rank.

However much you felt prepared, were there still some surprises on your arrival?

Mostly good surprises! I had not anticipated just how willing the dancers would be to embrace change, how happy they were to be under a new vision and how willing to try new things, to collaborate with new choreographers, to put themselves in situations that are not necessarily the most comfortable, but to go for it because they know there's a long-term plan and something creative happening.

Secondly, there's the passion the support team and management have for the art form. They commit so much and that was a wonderful surprise. I suspect that most dancers are not aware of the huge dedication the management has and how little reward they get in return. We, the dancers, are the ones who get all the applause and people celebrating our talent. But it's the people behind the scenes that make it all possible. ▼

"I'm very present in the studio and very accessible. I am there with the dancers all the time. There's constant communication. Also, every decision I make as director affects me, too, as a dancer, so I have to live what I preach."



Tamara Rojo and Matthew Golding in English National Ballet's *Swan Lake*
Photo: David Jensen



Carla Körbes

Infinite

Carla Körbes in William Forsythe's
In the Middle, Somewhat Elevated
Photo: © Angela Sterling

by Rosie Gaynor

At 15, with performances of *Don Quixote* and *Apollo* already behind her, Carla Körbes walked into her very first class at the School of American Ballet. She spoke no English. “Suki [Schorer] was teaching,” says Körbes. “And so I do my first position. And all I hear is: ‘Aaah! Aaah! Aaah! Aaah!’ and Suki comes running toward me. And I’m thinking: ‘We haven’t even started and I’m getting corrections already?’”

By the end of the week, however, the school asked this young Brazilian to stay for the year. By the end of that year, New York City Ballet’s director, Peter Martins, was reportedly already discussing with faculty whether to hire Körbes immediately into the company.

How is that possible? A recent *Vanity Fair* article notes that even at that young age Körbes had an inescapable sophistication, describing how “she seemed to breathe different air from other dancers and to be saying something essential through her movement.”

Körbes is definitely sophisticated when she walks into the library at Pacific Northwest Ballet (the company where she has danced since 2005) for our interview. She is stylish, her gorgeous blonde hair perfectly trimmed, one hand cradling her tiny fox terrier, Bella. But, as we approach the table to sit down, she pulls a chair over so that we can talk more cozily. This is evidence of the natural generosity, I think, that her longtime mentor Peter Boal sees in her dancing. “It’s great people that come through on the stage,” he says. “Individuals.”

As Körbes tells me the story of her career, she is open and funny, not a perfect ballerina princess, but a real, complex human. Myriad energies and emotions flicker through her Portuguese-inflected words.

Körbes started pre-ballet in her hometown, São Leopoldo, when she was three, and she was already on pointe when, at 11, she attended *Swan Lake* by Ballet Vera Bublitz. Watching guest artist Nikolaj Hübbe and a local dancer perform, Körbes knew she wanted to be a ballerina. She enrolled at Bublitz’s school in Porto Alegre. By 14, she was dancing a full *Don Quixote* there (give or take a few fouettées). Later that year, she danced *Apollo*, with a guest star from New York City Ballet, Boal.

Possibilities



Above: Carla Körbes and Seth Orza in Jean-Christophe Maillot's *Roméo et Juliette*
Photo: © Angela Sterling

Left: Carla Körbes in Balanchine's *Élégie*
Photo: Erin Baiano

Boal recalls their first run-through together. There was no preparation, he says. They just started dancing. Even though Körbes had learned her part by video, “it was seamless. Nothing went wrong. I had about three things to say — only three — and usually I have 30!” He recognized her talent was “huge” and suggested she try the School of American Ballet. She had trained in Vaganova, but he felt her aesthetic fit the Balanchine repertory, as did her physicality and her proportions. Plus, he said, “she breathed the music.”

A perfect match? Körbes had to make numerous adjustments when she arrived at the school: Balanchine arms, closed-heels first position, crossed tendus, spotting front, turn preparations, different jumps, faster jumps. And then there was the Balanchine hand. To achieve that open, relaxed hand, they had her hold a ball. “For six months,” she says wryly. “Through barre. It was pink. I think, probably, it’s usually kids who hold the ball.”

One lesson Körbes learned in Brazil came to her rescue repeatedly. “Even if you don’t know the combination in class,

my teacher, Giane Teixeira, would say, ‘You keep going, because that’s what we remember ... Even if you’re wrong.’”

No English? New steps? Körbes just kept going. “They’re all like: ‘OK ... crazy girl over there ...’” It took about a year to feel caught up, although fast jumps continued to elude her. She ended her first year with leads in the workshop performances and a Danilova Scholarship so she could return the following year.

And then? A major foot injury sidelined Körbes for 12 months. Coming back was horrible, she says, with frustrating setbacks throughout the following year. Soon, however, she was getting leads in the workshop again, receiving the Mae L. Wien Award for outstanding promise — and getting into New York City Ballet.

There was just one problem: her foot hadn’t fully recovered. “It was a dream come true,” says Körbes, “and then I had to tell them my foot was hurting.” Martins suggested she go back to school, but she stayed and persevered.

That was in 1999. Two years later, she filled in for Darci

It was in a Vail review from August 2012 that the *New York Times*’ Alastair Macaulay wrote of Körbes: “There’s no question that she is one of the finest ballerinas appearing in America today; some think her the finest, and last weekend I felt in no mood to contradict them.”



Kistler as Titania in *A Midsummer Night’s Dream*, earning excellent reviews in the *New York Times* for her lyricism. Boal was at her debut — onstage as her Oberon. He calls her performance amazing. “That role suited her. There’s all this acting and lushness that comes to her naturally.”

Learning fast also came naturally to Körbes, so they kept pulling her out of corps rehearsals to dance lead roles. A few times she performed a work the same day she learned it; several times she was thrown in a week before. “They worked me to the bone,” she says. “But I loved it. I had good moments at New York City Ballet. I had beautiful moments.”

One not-so-good moment — “the most terrifying moment of my career” — happened in Balanchine’s *Episodes II*. Webern’s 12-tone score is hard, and Körbes learned the choreography with piano on the day of the show. “The curtain goes up ... and the orchestra comes up ... and I’m thinking: ‘What *is* this music?’ And it’s twice as fast!”

She followed her partner, but eventually he left the stage for her solo. “I swear to God, I have no idea what I’m doing. And I’m lost. So I’m doing piqué arabesques ... and this girl in the wings is going: ‘You’re wrong!’ I keep going. I’m sweating. I’m terrified. I’m thinking: ‘I’m fired. I re-choreographed Balanchine. At Balanchine’s home.’ I thought they were never going to give me a role again.”

They gave her plenty — even *Episodes* again — and eventually promoted Körbes to soloist. Typecasting and big-company dynamics began to take their toll, though, and doubts about her abilities began to plague her, undermining her confidence. When Boal moved on to serve as artistic director of Pacific Northwest Ballet in 2005, he invited Körbes along. She said yes.

Carla Körbes in Kent Stowell’s *Swan Lake*
Photo: © Angela Sterling

Right away, Boal began casting Körbes against type. Watching performance tapes of her “jumpy” solo in *Symphony in Three Movements* horrified her, but she was happy. “It takes *doing* to become good at something,” she says. “I knew that it could be better, but I wasn’t strong enough.”

The increased strength came, in her legs and core, through hard work in class and with Pilates coach Michele Miller. Turns, jumps and the co-ordination necessary for fast movement came, too.

Körbes also grappled with styles. Two angular Forsythe works presented challenges early on. For *In the Middle, Somewhat Elevated*, she sought extra coaching from former Pacific Northwest Ballet dancer Anne Derieux, and it worked. “Carla owned *In the Middle*,” says Boal of her performances. “This wasn’t the Carla I had known. To see her take that role with such aggression and power was really impressive.”

Boal says he doesn’t think there’s any role she can’t do now. His favourites for her are “the shockers,” like Anita in *West Side Story*. In New York, the blonde Körbes had always danced a Jet. Her Brazilian spirit was more attuned to the Puerto Rican Sharks, though, and she longed to play Anita. In Seattle, she got the chance.

Anita sings; Körbes does, too. Her parents are singers, and music played a huge role in her family life. Pacific Northwest Ballet music director/principal conductor Emil de Cou appreciates her musicality. He says: “When I conduct for Carla, it is less like accompanying a dancer and more like collaborating with a wonderful musical partner. She phrases a little before or a little after the music in the same manner of a great classical pianist or jazz singer.” In the audience, you can feel this delicate phrasing and its harmonics. Boal notes: “She has that ability to move her leg and then show that sort of resonance after the movement.”

The last thing standing in Körbes’ way of breaking type was

her beautiful, natural sophistication. In Jean-Christophe Maillot’s *Roméo et Juliette* in Seattle last February, she ditched it. Four years earlier, barefoot in Act III, she had been beautiful and touching. This time, she was raw, vulnerable, radiating agony. “That’s the thing about dance,” she says. “Last year was very difficult in terms of my personal life. I was heartbroken. When I change as a human being, my dance also changes.”

When I ask Boal what he’s doing to prevent other companies from poaching this 32-year-old dancer, he holds up two crossed fingers. “I try to let her go for exciting projects,” he says. For summer 2013, those included *Swan Lake* at Royal New Zealand Ballet, plus Vail International Dance Festival.

Körbes has danced at Vail every summer since 2007, when she performed with Pacific Northwest Ballet and with Morphoses in that company’s inaugural performances. Damian Woetzel, the festival’s director, enjoys working with her and talks of her versatility, subtlety and magnetism. This year, her Vail schedule included a Brian Brooks premiere and Pacific Northwest Ballet’s new Wheeldon piece. Last year, Woetzel revived *Élégie* for her. “Carla’s performances in *Élégie* are among my favourites,” he says. “She bends time; the solo is only four minutes, but she makes us feel like we have had an emotional journey of great depth simply by the power of stillness and the beautiful clarity of her dancing.”

It was in a Vail review from August 2012 that the *New York Times*’ Alastair Macaulay wrote of Körbes: “There’s no question that she is one of the finest ballerinas appearing in America today; some think her the finest, and last weekend I felt in no mood to contradict them.”

When Körbes works with students, she likes to teach about choices. She tells them they can pick — how they want to look, how they want to dance. “There are,” she says dreamily, “infinite possibilities in ballet.” One can say the same about Körbes. ▼



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A flamenco dancer is captured in a dynamic pose, wearing a vibrant red dress and a large, flowing red shawl (mantón) that billows around her. Her arms are extended, and her head is tilted back, conveying a sense of passion and movement. The background is a solid black, which makes the red of the dress and shawl stand out prominently.

Fabulous Flamenco Dresses

María Pagés and
Esmeralda Enrique
on polka dots and
the colour blue

| by Karen Barr



I had my first flamenco dress when I was six months old,” says flamenco artist María Pagés. It was a frilly white dress, with tiny red polka dots. Born in Seville in 1963, in the southern region of Andalusia, Spain, this was her heritage. Families from the region start the design and construction of a girl’s flamenco dress the moment she is born.

The flamenco dress has humble beginnings. It was originally the clothing of working Andalusian country women. Made of simple cotton percale, the dress was constructed with one to four flared flounces at the hem, and worn with an apron at the waist. Traditional dress colours include black and red. Polka dot was, and still is, the most popular pattern. The tale is that Gypsies, once upon a time, had sewn small bits of mirrors into their clothing to ward off the evil eye. Polka dots are the result of this superstition.

Pagés still loves that little polka dot dress, but today both her costumes and dancing have traded pure tradition for a nod toward the contemporary.

She began her professional career at age 15 with the Antonio Gades Dance Company. Appearing in films by Carlos Saura and in *Riverdance* with Michael Flatley led to international recognition. Presently, María Pagés Compañía, founded in 1990, is finishing up an impressive 2013 tour that included Canada, Germany, Hong Kong, Japan, France, Norway, Russia and Portugal. Three different productions are touring simultaneously: *Sevilla* (2007), *Autorretrato* (*Self-Portrait*, 2008) and *Utopía* (2011).

Pagés is not only the lead dancer and choreographer for her company, she also designs all the costumes. Her dresses are often traditionally cut, but they are also works of original contemporary art. Case in point: her costumes for *Autorretrato*. She created this work after Mikhail Baryshnikov asked her to dance at Baryshnikov Arts Center in New York. He suggested she focus on a self-portrait through dance, and *Autorretrato* was born. It’s a very personal piece and the costumes all hold special meaning to her. Colourful and lavishly artistic, it’s hard to imagine that each dress began from a simple bolt of white Lycra fabric.

“I work with magicians,” laughs Pagés, referring to the textile artists María Calderon, who works on dying and printing the materials, and Monica Calderon, who hand-paints them.

Pagés had very specific requests for her *Autorretrato* design team. In one section, she dances to a poem, *Lullaby of the Onion*, by Spanish poet Miguel Hernández. For this costume, Pagés collected the skins of multiple Spanish onions, as an example of the depth of colour and gradation she envisioned. The result was an asymmetrical flamenco dress that starts off black at the top, lightens to burgundy and ends with soft petal-pink at the hem.

While working on the choreography — which includes a comedic section when a number of mirrors roll toward Pagés, as if giving chase — her mind turned to visual artists, such as Vincent Van Gogh, who famously painted his own portrait. A classic flamenco dress that meets post-impressionism was designed. “I call this one La Bonita!” she exclaims, which means “the beautiful” in Spanish. The costume, dyed in background colours of Provençal mustard yellow and dark green, has hand-painted stylized sunflowers and irises, a tribute to the Dutch artist.

The dress is complemented with a traditional, large, black Manila silk shawl, or manton, which is hand-embroidered with gold flowers and long pieces of hand-knotted gold fringe. Why the Manila influence in flamenco? The Philippines was colonized by Spain in the 16th century, and Mexican ships en route to Spain stopped there to procure products for trade. The fabric traditionally embroidered with dragons and other symbols of good luck was changed to flowers and birds to reflect Spanish tastes. In her final number, Pagés swirls the shawl like a matador does his cape.

Pagés admits to sometimes designing the costume first and imagining the choreography around it. Such was the case with the dramatic red dress featured in her production about the fantasy of immortality, *Utopía*. It is a contemporary, tight sheath dress with long, tight, nylon see-through sleeves. The hem is cut in a wide circle, and the fabric billows out in rivers of red at her feet.

Pagés likes to see the female dancers in her company dressed in retro style. Crisp white shirts and black tight skirts to the knee reflect the lady-like look of her childhood dance instructors in Seville. The male dancers are dressed traditionally in high-waisted tight black trousers and short black bolero jackets.

Esmeralda Enrique, also Spanish born — in Barcelona, to Andalusian parents — began her career by touring North America with José Greco’s popular company in the 1960s. Later, with Paco Ruíz, Miguel Sandoval, Antonio del Castillo, Sara Lezana and Cristóbal Reyes, she toured Europe, the Middle East and Mexico. Esmeralda Enrique Spanish Dance Company, based in Toronto, was launched in 1982, the year she moved to Canada. That same year, she also founded the Academy of Spanish Dance.

Enrique, like Pagés, choreographs, performs in and designs the costumes for her company’s productions. She keeps in mind the demands of the choreography and also the comfort of her dancers. While Pagés leans toward contemporary costuming, Enrique is almost purely traditional. When she does venture beyond this, the results are subtle.

María Pagés in *Utopía*
Photo: Hiroyuki Kawashima

Aguas/Waters was created to celebrate the company's 30th anniversary in 2012. In a striking ensemble number, Enrique and the female dancers wear tight, sleeveless, polyester flamenco dresses. The fabric is carefree and does not require ironing.

Enrique is in deep sapphire blue, while the ensemble wears dark tones of purple, burgundy and green. There is a beautiful blouse underneath each dress of a cream cotton eyelet. The rounded collar is stiffly pleated. The sleeves are tight and end just above the elbow, where a circular pleated cuff flares out.

As for Enrique's personal style, she says: "I can't be without sleeves." She is specific about them, adding, "Not too full, not too wide and not too heavy." She loves the beautiful finished look the sleeves create, but doesn't want them in the way when she dances, or weighing down her expressive arms.

Unlike the male dancers in most flamenco productions, her men wear solid colours of any tone. In *Aguas/Waters*, the men are in light purple jackets, a pastel-inspired departure from tradition. But the musicians always appear in black.

Enrique's favourite colour is blue: "It has been appearing a lot in my costumes over the last few years." In *Aguas/Waters*, she wears a royal blue bata de cola, a tight-fitting skirt or dress with a long train (cola is the Spanish word for tail). The length, measured from the seam at the back of the waist to the tip of the tail, is approximately the same height as the dancer. The skirt is constructed of six panels and is entirely lined with tulle or another stiff fabric. This helps to keep it weighed down, as do the multitude of ruffles. Enrique's version is a skirt and vest of polyester georgette, with a sheer blouse.

Her newest production, *Portales (Doors)*, premiered at Harbourfront Centre in Toronto last April. Enrique explains the work by saying, "It's about the doors that open when one door closes." This optimistic outlook may explain the brightly coloured costumes. In one number, Enrique wears a flame-red blouse and skirt. Onstage it appears to be a traditionally cut flamenco dress. The sleeves of the blouse are tight to the elbow, then flare out. But the skirt is not the classic straight pull-on; it is a wraparound with several ruffles. She has worn this ensemble onstage before, but for *Portales* added a red fringe that is interspersed in the skirt ruffles. The neckline pulses with even more red fringe that moves to the beat of the

music. Both *Agua/Waters* and *Portales* will be touring Canada (in Ontario and Quebec) this fall.

Shoes, of course, are integral to flamenco. Where would the dance be without the rhythm of the feet? Encased in shoes that help carry the sound, the feet take a beating, and flamenco shoes may be the most important consideration for the dancer. There are nails in the heels and toes, although practice styles can be bought without nails to be kinder to non-wood surfaces. The shoes have buckles or ties across the ankles to keep them in place, and the dancer must choose the material: leather, suede or synthetic. Traditional colours echo that of traditional costumes: red or black.

Pagés' first pair, when she was a little girl, had polka dots, like her dress. Today she sticks to mainly black. She does occasionally wear red with wooden heels. When she was creating her production of *Sevilla*, however, Pagés was feeling nostalgic and wore shoes with hand-painted polka dots.

Flamenco heels are generally between one and three inches high. But there is also the style of heel to consider. The cubano has the greatest width, providing the best stability for dancers without a lot of experience. Then there is the standard heel, for dancers with greater skill. Finally, the thinner curved currence heel is for the professional dancer. Male dancers traditionally wear ankle boots, but there are now conservatively styled, fully enclosed lace-up shoes on the market.

Enrique wears professional custom-made flamenco shoes from Senovilla, a company in Madrid. She prefers the Carmen style in leather. The shoe is not completely open on top, but has an instep grip of leather and laces to help fasten the foot in. The heels are the currence style, two inches high, and made of rosewood. Incidentally, this type of wood is also used to design musical instruments.

Both Pagés and Enrique, strong women in charge of their own companies, have the option of choosing what is worn onstage. Enrique's costumes are the embodiment of classic flamenco, with an elegant glamour, adorned with ruffles and flounces. Her look represents tradition and history. Pagés reimagines the flamenco dress — dyes it, paints it, embroiders it — to create an original fantasy. Their styles are very different, but both are authentic flamenco expression. ▼



Above: María Pagés Compañía in *Autorretrato (Self-Portrait, 2008)*
Photo: Hiroyuki Kawashima

Left: Esmeralda Enrique in *Aguas/Waters*
Photo: John Lauener

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OVER 35 YEARS OF EXCELLENCE

Willem Dafoe and
Mikhail Baryshnikov in
The Old Woman
Photo: Lucie Jansch



Baryshnikov in Play with Dafoe

Mikhail Baryshnikov — the Russian ballet star who has pursued acting in films, including *The Turning Point*, and TV, notably *Sex and the City* — was acting onstage at the Manchester International Festival in July. Baryshnikov co-starred with film and stage actor Willem Dafoe in *The Old Woman*, an absurdist play directed by experimental American theatre director Robert Wilson. The play, co-produced by Baryshnikov Productions, is an adaptation of the work of the same name by Russian author Daniil Kharmis, who wrote his obscure, polemical novella in the 1930s. *The Old Woman* follows the story of a struggling writer who cannot find peace with himself.

275 Years for Vaganova Ballet Academy

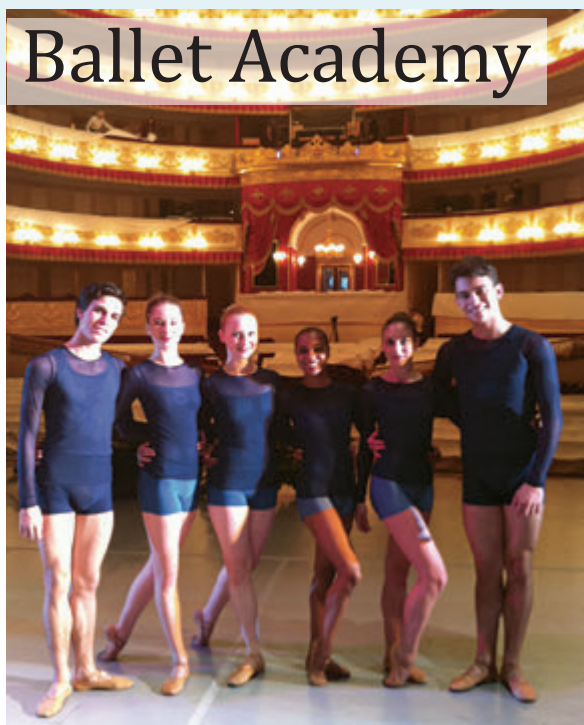
With a list of graduates from Nijinsky to Pavlova, Zhakarova to Lopatkina, the Vaganova Ballet Academy has every reason to celebrate its 275th anniversary. Now boasting facilities that run the complete length of the famous Rossi Street in St. Petersburg, with additional new studios, as well as a newly renovated theatre, library and church, or spiritual centre, the school — named since 1957 after the great ballet educator Agrippina Vaganova — showed itself to be in fine fettle at the four-hour gala that closed the celebrations in June.

The gala showcased current students from all levels, as well as several stars of the Bolshoi and Mariinsky theatres who are recent graduates. Six partner schools also participated: the Royal Ballet School in London, Royal Danish Ballet School, Bolshoi Ballet Academy, Hungarian Dance Academy, Palucca University of Dance Dresden, Perm State Choreographic College and Novosibirsk State Ballet School were invited to share in this festive week with joint classes and tours of the school, and to perform in the gala.

While observing the Vaganova Ballet Academy classes, the unmistakable Vaganova training was in full evidence, featuring steely strength combined with the most expressive use of the arms and upper body. At the gala, the school presented an excerpt of Nacho Duto's *Na Floresta*, showing their openness to contemporary work and style.

Under the artistic direction of Altynai Asylmuratova and with the work of the dean, Vera Dorofeeva, not only are standards being held high, but praise must be given for the continued evolution of the school both artistically and with its renovated facilities.

— Jason Beechey, Rector, Palucca University of Dance Dresden



Students on the stage of the Alexandrovsky Theatre after the gala
Photo: Jason Beechey

Sandra Laronde, Red Sky Performance's founder and artistic director, has received the 2013 Victor Martyn Lynch-Staunton Award from the Canada Council for the Arts. The award recognizes outstanding mid-career artists.

Laronde won for her work as a creative leader, director and choreographer with Red Sky, a leading company of world indigenous performance in dance, theatre and music.

"In the 13 years since Red Sky's inception, it has been exhilarating to spearhead a Canadian company onto the national and international stages," says Laronde.



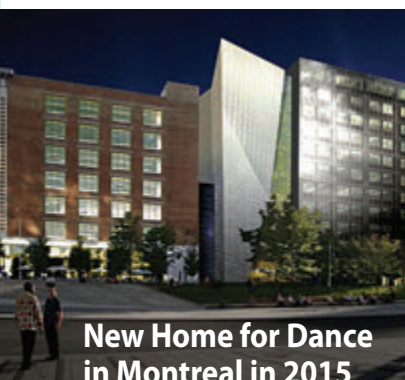
Red Sky's Founder Recognized

New Centre for Dance Therapy

Les Grands Ballets Canadiens de Montréal has launched the National Centre for Dance Therapy to promote the beneficial effects of dance on the wellbeing of individuals. It also aims to offer new career opportunities to professional dancers in transition.

The first project of its kind by a cultural company, the National Centre for Dance Therapy is also the only one in the world offering three interconnected services: dance and movement therapy, clinical research and Canada's first graduate-level dance therapy training program.

"By bringing together a variety of experts and leaders in their fields, the [centre] will allow Les Grands Ballets to take on an important socio-economic role, in addition to their cultural role," says Christian Sénéchal, director of the new centre.



New Home for Dance in Montreal in 2015

Four major players in contemporary dance in Quebec will soon be under the same roof. École de danse contemporaine de Montréal, Les Grands Ballets Canadiens, Tangente — Laboratoire de mouvements contemporains and Agora de la danse will all be moving to a new hub for dance called Espace Danse Québec.

In addition to private fundraising, the Quebec government is providing financial support for the construction of the new rehearsal, research and performance space, which overlooks the Place des Festivals of the Quartier des spectacles.

The new dance studios will improve rehearsal conditions for the dancers, while a new production studio will be devoted entirely to creation. There will also be facilities for strength training, physiotherapy and relaxation, which go hand in hand with Les Grands Ballets' new National Centre for Dance Therapy.

Top 25 Canadian Immigrant Awards

Wen Wei Wang has been recognized as one of the RBC Top 25 Canadian Immigrants of 2013, by *Canadian Immigrant* magazine. Wang was honoured for his inspirational achievements and contributions to the dance scene in his adopted country since leaving his native China in 1991.

Wang initially intended to return to his homeland, but his trip turned into a seven-year stint with Ballet BC in Vancouver, even though he spoke little English.

The lack of opportunity to fulfill his dream in China — to start his own dance company — was a large factor in Wang's decision to stay in Vancouver. Today, as artistic director and choreographer of Wen Wei Dance, his immigration journey, from his past life in China to his settlement in Canada, often inspires his work, such as his most recent piece for six dancers, *7th Sense*.

He explains that, after he immigrated, it was a disorienting period. "I was in a very dark place, not understanding the people around me. So I had to learn to read people."

Wang says he developed a sort of "seventh sense," which he describes as "what we mean when we say we have a gut feeling. You can't explain it, but you know anyway."



Wen Wei Wang
Photo: Shin Sugino

Filling Pina's Shoes



Lutz Förster

Four years after the death of choreographer and dancer Pina Bausch, Lutz Förster has taken the helm at Tanztheater Pina Bausch in Wuppertal, facing the challenge of breathing fresh energy into a steadfast tradition.

Bausch, whose style was closely aligned with German expressionist dance, was an icon of dance-theatre, awarded profusely for her work and sought-after around the world.

As a longtime confidante of Bausch and an expert on her practice, theory and choreography, Förster — who will serve as director until 2015 — is a good fit to help preserve Bausch's legacy. She recruited Förster in 1975 to her ensemble, and he danced in nearly every piece, lingering in people's memory thanks to his extraordinary stage presence.

Förster is not a choreographer, and has no plans to add new pieces to the repertoire. He has been busy preparing for the company's 40th anniversary festival planned for this autumn.

In Brief

Benoit-Swan Pouffer has resigned as the artistic director of Cedar Lake Contemporary Ballet to pursue other opportunities, after serving as the New York-based company's director since 2005.

Ballet San Jose has named former American Ballet Theatre principal dancer **José Manuel Carreño** as its artistic director, succeeding Wes Chapman. Principal ballet master Raymond Rodriguez has been named associate artistic director.

In Toronto, **Santee Smith** of Kaha:wi Dance was awarded the 2013 Dora Mavor Moore Award for Outstanding Choreography in the Dance Division for *Susuriwka – willow bridge*.

The National Ballet of Canada has added two new positions of choreographic associates to the roster, which will be filled by principal dancer **Guillaume Côté** and **Robert Binet**, a choreographic apprentice with the Royal Ballet.

American Ballet Theatre has named former principal dancer **Keith Roberts** to the post of ballet master.

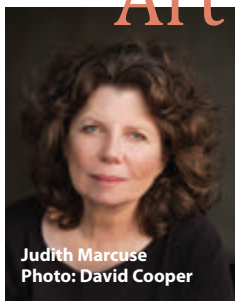
The National Ballet of Canada is launching dance and fitness classes for adults and teenagers called In Studio in September 2013. It will offer beginner to professional classes in a wide array of disciplines, including ballet, jazz, contemporary and dancefit.

San Francisco Ballet will perform at Les Étés de la Danse Festival in July 2014 in Paris; the company last performed in the French city during the inaugural festival in 2005.

The Royal Winnipeg Ballet's *Moulin Rouge — The Ballet*, choreographed by Jorden Morris in 2009, was filmed this summer in high-definition and digital surround sound for release in 2014 in Cineplex theatres.

Edmund Stripe is the new artistic director for the School of Alberta Ballet.

Art for Social Change



Judith Marcuse Projects has launched a five-year, national research program on art for social change in Canada. Based at Vancouver's Simon Fraser University, the initiative developed out of the work of the International Centre of Art for Social Change, a partnership formed by Judith Marcuse Projects and SFU in 2008.

The \$2.5 million initiative, funded by the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada, reflects the burgeoning interest in utilizing the arts as a powerful and practical vehicle for achieving positive change in communities. Projects will involve arts-based dialogue, performing, visual arts and social circus, as well as the creation of a learning institute.

Long-forgotten Images of Rambert



When Rambert Dance Company moved from its old London headquarters to their new one, photographs documenting the company's 87-year history were rediscovered and catalogued for the first time.

The photographs depict a young Marie Rambert in Warsaw in 1900, a photo of her in 1915 with the small company of dancers she and her husband, Ashley Dukes, brought together in their half-finished Notting Hill venue, the Mercury Theatre, as well as other photos of dancers in rehearsals and onstage at the Mercury.

New TV-inspired Company



Los Angeles-based contemporary dance company Shaping Sound is a new kind of dance organization, one put together from dancers involved in TV reality shows.

The company was formed by dancer and choreographer Travis Wall, who appeared on *So You Think You Can Dance* in 2007 and later returned as a choreographer, along with fellow SYTYCD alum Nick Lazzarini, Cirque du Soleil choreographer Teddy Furance and *West Side Story* cast member Kyle Robinson. The televised docuseries

All the Right Moves followed the foursome as they endeavoured to form the company. Recently, coinciding with the 10th anniversary of SYTYCD, Shaping Sound embarked on a North American tour.

Obituaries

Frederic Franklin in Agnes de Mille's *Rodeo*
Photo: Maurice Seymour



Robert Lindgren
Photo: Courtesy of Dance Collection Danse

FREDERIC FRANKLIN

He probably didn't think of it that way, but if Frederic Franklin had been writing his own obituary he could hardly have summed up his life better than in a 2006 interview with National Public Radio: "I've always loved what I've done. I had a talent and I've stretched it and used it and done everything I can with it."

Franklin, who died May 4 at age 98, was one of ballet's most enduring luminaries. Born and reared in Liverpool, he began modestly as a teenaged tap dancer performing in Paris while also honing his ballet technique. Franklin returned to England in 1935 to join the company of Alicia Markova and Anton Dolin. There he was spotted by Diaghilev's former protégé, the choreographer Léonide Massine, who invited Franklin to join Le Ballet Russe de Monte Carlo.

It was a major turning point for Franklin because when the Second World War erupted in 1939, the troupe established a new base in the United States and he chose to go, too. Franklin was thus removed from the emerging British ballet scene and instead became a key figure in the evolution of an indigenous ballet movement in North America.

Franklin was a charismatic performer, handsome, manly and versatile, a compelling advocate for the legitimacy of male ballet dancing.

As the Ballet Russe made its epic, pioneering tours — "we were in the covered wagons of the ballet in this country," Franklin liked to recall — he became one of the troupe's star attractions, particularly as the longtime partner of Russian ballerina Alexandra Danilova. Even in its grainy, flickering archival images, the 2005 documentary, *Ballets Russes*, captures the glamour of their partnership.

Nowadays, Franklin would probably be considered a demi-caractère dancer, but in his Ballet Russe years, which with a brief interruption continued until 1957, he was called on to do almost everything, from classical princes to dramatically encrusted character parts. He created roles in works by Ashton, Balanchine and Massine. Franklin was the original Champion Roper in Agnes de Mille's evergreen *Rodeo*. During a break from the financially troubled Ballet Russe when he and Mia Slavenska toured their own troupe, Franklin created the role of Stanley in Valerie Bettis' *A Streetcar Named Desire*, the first ballet adaptation of Tennessee Williams' play.

With his principal performer years behind him, Franklin, who'd also served the Ballet Russe as ballet master, was much sought after as a teacher and, with his almost photographic memory, as a répétiteur.

From 1957 Franklin co-directed Mary Day's Washington Ballet and in 1969 established the National Ballet of Washington, remaining until it foundered five years later. He also had a long and close association with Cincinnati Ballet.

Universally loved for his generous, outgoing personality, Franklin also continued to appear in character roles — among them Dr. Coppélius, Madge, Friar Lawrence and Drosselmeyer — well into his 90s.

Among the awards and honours Franklin particularly treasured was a British CBE (Commander of the Order of the British Empire), bestowed by the Queen in 2004.

— MICHAEL CRABB

ROBERT LINDGREN

"Not many high school drop-outs end up as deans in academic communities. And few teenaged Canadian males become smitten with the compulsion to study ballet, least of all if they happened to live in Victoria, B.C., in the years of the Great Depression."

That's how critic Leland Winreich introduces Robert Lindgren in his collection of essays, *Dance Encounters*. Lindgren — who died on May 10 at his home in Winston-Salem, North Carolina, at age 89 — was one of eight British Columbian dancers hired by post-Diaghilev Ballet Russe companies. All had studied with June Roper in Vancouver. Lindgren's first teacher was Victoria's Dorothy Wilson, whose 1936 production of *Copélia* hooked him on dance.

His made his first professional appearance when Ballet Theatre (now American Ballet Theatre) toured to Vancouver in 1943, and was short several soloists because of passport problems. Lindgren was recruited to appear as the American boy in Léonide Massine's *Boutique fantasque*.

In 1945, he successfully auditioned for the Ballet Russe de Monte Carlo, impressing ballet master Frederic Franklin. Lindgren distinguished himself in such roles as the Golden Slave in *Schérazade*, the Peruvian in *Gaité Parisienne* and the Champion Roper in *Rodeo*. He partnered the great ballerinas of the age, Alexandra Danilova, Mia Slavenska and Maria Tallchief among them.

Lindgren and his wife, Sonja Tyven (also a Ballet Russe de Monte Carlo dancer), joined Balanchine's New York City Ballet in 1957. When they retired from dancing, the couple opened a school in Phoenix, Arizona. They had two daughters.

In 1965, Lindgren was founding dean of the School of Dance at the University of North Carolina School of the Arts. He also founded North Carolina Dance Theatre.

— KAIJA PEPPER

Maria Tallchief as the Firebird



MARIA TALLCHIEF

Considered the first American prima ballerina, Maria Tallchief died in April in Chicago at the age of 88. The daughter of an Osage Native American father and a Scotch-Irish mother, she was also the first Native American to hold that rank.

Tallchief was also a muse, and former wife, of George Balanchine. It was the title role of his *Firebird* — one of many Balanchine created for her — that became her signature piece. Other Balanchine roles she is remembered for include the Coquette in *La Sonnambula*, the Fairy in *Le Baiser de la Fée*, Sanguinic in *The Four Temperaments*, the virtuoso ballerina in the first movement of *Symphony in C* and the Sugar Plum Fairy in *The Nutcracker*.

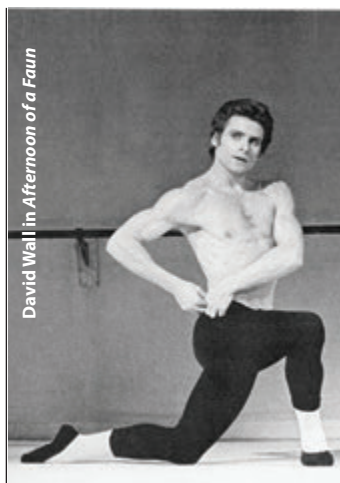
In Los Angeles, Tallchief studied with Ernest Belcher (father of Marge Champion, a star film dancer), and then with Bronislava Nijinska (a former choreographer with Diaghilev's Ballets Russes). In 1942, at the age of 17, Tallchief joined the Ballet Russe de Monte Carlo, and two years later Balanchine arrived to choreograph. She went with him to launch New York City Ballet, and it was her talent and glamour that helped establish the new company.

With American Ballet Theatre (1960-1962), Tallchief danced such dramatic roles as the lead in Birgit Cullberg's *Miss Julie* and Caroline in Antony Tudor's *Jardin aux Lilas*. At the age of 40, she retired from the stage.

Tallchief is survived by her daughter, poet Elise Paschen (from her third marriage to Henry Paschen), and two grandchildren.

— MARGARET JETELINA

David Wall in Afternoon of a Faun



DAVID WALL

One of the Royal Ballet's most outstanding dancers, David Wall died of cancer at age 67. Wall was widely known for creating the role of Crown Prince Rudolf in Kenneth MacMillan's *Mayerling*.

Born in London, he auditioned for the Royal Ballet at age 10, after a primary school teacher noted his natural dancing talent. He was accepted and upon graduating in 1963, he joined the touring section of the Royal Ballet.

Wall's first leading roles came in his second year, and included the Young Man in Frederick Ashton's *The Two Pigeons* and the Rake in a revival of *Ninette de Valois' The Rake's Progress*. Then came Colas in *La Fille Mal Gardée* and Siegfried in *Swan Lake*.

At age 20, he was promoted to principal, the youngest the Royal Ballet had then seen. In 1970, Wall moved from the touring company to Covent Garden as one of the company's leading men.

Wall retired from dancing in 1984 and joined the Royal Academy of Dance as assistant director, eventually becoming director. In 1995, he joined English National Ballet as ballet master and retired from there in 2011.

Wall is survived by his wife, his son and daughter, and grandchildren.

— MARGARET JETELINA



Anna-Marie and David Holmes
Photo: Anthony Crickmay

DAVID HOLMES

When David and Anna-Marie Holmes danced with the Kirov Ballet in 1963, they made news as the first North Americans to appear with the legendary company (now called the Mariinsky Ballet). Their Russian debut was in Vasily Vainonen's *Flames of Paris*.

David Holmes — who died on May 4, age 77 — began classical ballet training in his hometown of Vancouver, British Columbia, with St. Petersburg-born Lydia Karpova. That's where he met Anna-Marie Ellerbeck, who he married in 1960 (they had one daughter and divorced in 1984). It was while the virtuosic duo were members of the Royal Winnipeg Ballet that they received an invitation to Russia, resulting in their guest appearances with the Kirov.

Afterward, David and Anna-Marie Holmes were in demand throughout Europe and North America. They can still be seen dancing — in stunning slow motion — in the National Film Board of Canada's *Ballet Adagio* (1971), directed by the great Norman McLaren. The NFB's *Tour en l'air* (1973) by Grant Munro provides an inside view of the two dancers. David Holmes retired from dancing in the mid-1980s.

In 2012, Holmes and his second wife, Kathleen, produced a lavish local *Nutcracker* on the Sunshine Coast of western Canada, where they lived with their two daughters. The eight performances were sold out before it even opened.

— KAIJA PEPPER



Two very different countries, two distinctly different choreographers, their only common ground an avowed desire to make ballet accessible to people from all walks of life. Call them popularizers if you like, but Canadian-born David Nixon, artistic director of England's Northern Ballet since 2001, and Russia's Boris Eifman have, on different scales, enjoyed remarkable success — at least with audiences, if not always with critics.

Watching recent works by each choreographer within the space of a month underlined how easy it is to be snobbishly dismissive of crowd-pleasing ballets while forgetting their genuine entertainment value — apparently a forbidden attribute in more exalted dance circles — and general contribution to the ecology of dance.

Few choreographers today command the devoted international fan base enjoyed by Eifman. Through constant touring, his St. Petersburg-based Eifman Ballet has become Russia's most ubiquitous ballet brand, one radically distinct in its hyper-physical contemporary style from the venerable Mariinsky and Bolshoi companies. Eifman Ballet's trademark is the 67-year-old founder's distinctive genre of dance drama, heavy on emotional angst and psychological dysfunction, yet delivered with a vigour, originality and theatrical flair that routinely generates rapturous ovations. Such was the case in late May when the company made a rare side stop in Canada during one of its annual U.S. tours to present three close to sold-out performances of Eifman's *Rodin* at Toronto's 3,200-seat Sony Centre.

Eifman tends to use historical and literary sources as a springboard for his ballets. His *Anna Karenina* takes huge liberties with Tolstoy. *Russian Hamlet* uses Shakespeare's hero as a metaphorical parallel in a ballet about Paul, the ill-fated son of Catherine the Great. *Red Giselle* is only tangentially about the famous Romantic ballet; its real subject is the personal tragedy of legendary Russian ballerina Olga Spessivtseva. *Rodin*

draws on the true story of the French sculptor and his passionate yet ultimately tragic relationship with Camille Claudel — variously his student, mistress, muse and artistic collaborator.

Eifman's objective is to use Rodin and Claudel as archetypal symbols of how artistic genius often comes at a personal price. In his reading, their love — even putting aside Rodin's continuing relationship with an earlier mistress — was doomed by inevitable artistic jealousy.

Eifman's approach is typically swift-moving as scene follows scene without any regard for narrative cogency. It's raw passion he's after and Eifman's splendid dancers deliver it in his hallmark blend of ballet classicism and visceral modernism. At times, particularly in the large ensemble numbers — Eifman even finds an excuse to throw in a cancan — *Rodin* has the brash energy of a Broadway show. It is full of theatrical twists and surprises, notably when Eifman conjures familiar Rodin sculptures from living flesh.

And, yes, it's sometimes clichéd and consistently overwrought, trumpeting Eifman's gloomy take on artistic genius to a not always plausibly selected pastiche score of mostly familiar music by French composers of Rodin's era. It's over the top, in some ways unsophisticated, but there's no denying the ballet's capacity to galvanize an audience who care nought for the scathing reviews Eifman often draws, especially in the U.S.

Nixon's star shines in a more constricted firmament. His Northern Ballet, originally based in Manchester but for many years now headquartered in Leeds, was founded in 1969 by Canadian-born Laverne Meyer with the aim of touring small theatres with an original repertoire of new works. Following Meyer's departure in 1975, the troupe expanded. Its mission shifted toward bringing original full-length works to underserved audiences, a direction Nixon, who'd previously headed BalletMet, Columbus, has seen fit to follow.

No other ballet company tours as much within Britain as Nixon's. It has

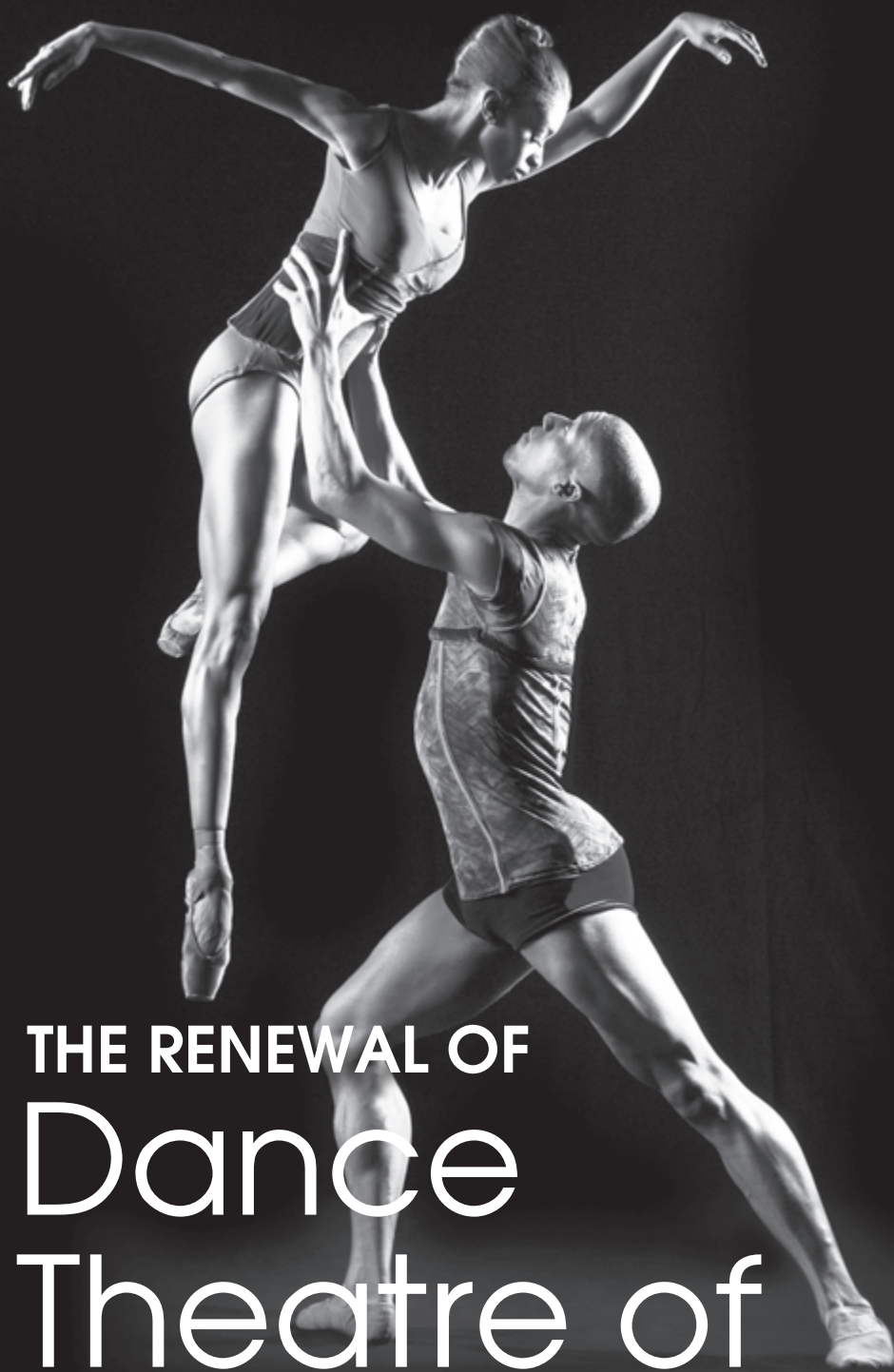
built loyal audiences in many of the cities and towns it regularly visits and is justly credited with raising the profile of ballet in the U.K. Watching Nixon's latest work, *The Great Gatsby*, at a lovely theatre in the planned city of Milton Keynes about an hour north of London, it's easy to understand the company's popularity.

Nixon, more than a decade Eifman's junior, has largely built his choreographic reputation on ballet adaptations of literary or operatic classics with marketable titles — *Dracula*, *Beauty and the Beast*, *Peter Pan*, *The Three Musketeers*, *Carmen*, *Madame Butterfly* and many others. Perhaps he thought the imminent release of a new *Gatsby* movie was an opportune moment to make a ballet based on F. Scott Fitzgerald's languorously depressing novel. What Nixon may not have foreseen was how challenging it is to convey through movement the emotions Fitzgerald so carefully etches in words. As a result, we tend to get left with the shell of the plot, but with much less of the emotional meat that makes the torrid novel almost palatable.

That said, within its limits, *The Great Gatsby* is a superbly produced, vividly danced work that evokes the tawdry glamour of moneyed pre-Great Depression New York society. Nixon designed the costumes and Jérôme Kaplan the sets. Together they have created a sumptuous spectacle. Nixon's selections from the music of British composer Richard Rodney Bennett have both the jazzy rhythms and darker lyrical undercurrents the plot requires. So, all told, not a great ballet, but a thoroughly respectable one that audiences can easily enjoy.

One hopes the accessible works of choreographers such as Eifman and Nixon will spur audiences to explore more widely as they become attuned to the conventions of dance. Yet dance comes in many forms, and peoples' tastes will always differ. Eifman's and Nixon's companies clearly fill a need and satisfy an appetite and, on their terms, do so with as much finesse and professional excellence as many others. ▼

Ashley Murphy and Davon Doane
in John Alleyne's *Far But Close*
Photo: Rachel Neville



THE RENEWAL OF Dance Theatre of Harlem

Virginia Johnson's return

by Lewis Whittington

Virginia Johnson
Photo: Rachel Neville



For three decades, Dance Theatre of Harlem (DTH) was the premier African-American ballet company in the United States. With 44 dancers who toured the world, as well as a respected school, DTH broke down race barriers in classical dance.

The company was created by Arthur Mitchell, the first African-American ballet star, who debuted with New York City Ballet in 1955. In 1969, Mitchell, along with ballet master Karel Shook, started DTH out of a garage in Harlem (near where Mitchell grew up) in order to train African-American dancers who would otherwise be shut out of the then mostly segregated world of classical ballet.

After enjoying huge success artistically, culturally and commercially for 35 years, in 2004 DTH faced a fiscal and administrative meltdown, which resulted in the performing company disbanding. During the shutdown, the company maintained the school and established a small troupe, DTH Ensemble, for educational outreach and performances. By 2009, Mitchell was plotting the return of the full company and asked Virginia Johnson to take over from him as artistic director.

Johnson, who had been a prima ballerina with DTH until 1997, had become senior editor at *Pointe Magazine*.

Johnson frankly admits, however, “We didn’t get all great reviews. In fact, we got some ‘I hate it’ reviews, but, you know what, New York was a rite of passage and it brought the dancers to a level of realization that this is the big time.”

“I’d had a fabulous career, but considered my days at DTH over. Then Arthur Mitchell called and said he wanted me to take his place. I should have probably taken time to think about it, but I realized how important it was to me to continue his legacy. Not just that I missed DTH, but how much I believed in it as an important part of American culture. I just felt that if he was asking me to do it, I had no choice but to say yes.”

During the company’s hiatus, the continuation of the school and the founding of the DTH Ensemble kept the core of the operations going. Johnson explains, “The DTH Ensemble was a way to get dancers together, and also a way to say, ‘Hey, we still exist.’”

“The wonderful thing was that these dancers were able to go to places that the full company could not. They went to small black colleges and universities and many places in the south that might have never seen a ballet company, much less a black ballet company.”

This representative mini-company proved a crucial thread to the eventual return of the fully operational DTH, with eight dancers from the Ensemble matriculating to the principal company. Ten more were found by auditions.

However, Johnson was shocked at how few African-American dancers attended those auditions. It was a reality check pointing to the continued industry-wide problem of too few minority dancers in ballet. Now, Johnson is philosophical about the situation: “I realized, well, this is what Arthur Mitchell faced in the ‘60s.” As to what she was looking for in the dancers, Johnson says that the final cut came down to each one’s “unique combination of technique, training, desire and the ability to change, to be challenged.”

Johnson, along with the company’s creative team and educational wing — still working out of the studios in New York on 152nd St. in Harlem — has reactivated the entire operation, piloting the company back to its previous excellence, albeit with a reduced roster of 18 dancers.

In the first season, except for having a live orchestra, DTH’s return tour met all of the choreographic goals they’d hoped for, says Johnson. “The most important thing for us is to present a

mixture of styles — to have the classical, the neoclassical, to have contemporary works, to have African-American-themed work.” The 10 ballets the company had to learn in just 10 weeks gave them exactly that.

When we spoke in Philadelphia last May — where DTH played to mostly packed houses at the Annenberg Center for the Performing Arts — Johnson couldn’t hide her joy over the way the dancers were making the most of the tour dates, which she saw as vital “blocks” in building the new company’s presence. The tour, which started in Louisville, Kentucky, in October 2012, had taken them across the United States, and was set to conclude in Izmir, Turkey, at the end of June.

A crucial stop was performing at home in New York after such a long absence from the stage. Johnson says: “New York was on our map from the start and actually the performances went by really fast. I’m so happy that we were at the Rose Theatre [an 1,100-seat venue at Lincoln Center], a great size for who we are now.”

Johnson frankly admits, however, “We didn’t get all great reviews. In fact, we got some ‘I hate it’ reviews, but, you know what, New York was a rite of passage and it brought the dancers to a level of realization that this is the big time.”

“Every day is a step forward, and, of course, we’re performing and there to be judged. We have a difficult ballet like *Agon* in our rep because when DTH was founded, George Balanchine was our godfather and the first ballet he gave to us in 1970 was *Agon*. As if we could dance it. The *New York Times* didn’t say it was terrible, but they did say it wasn’t up to snuff. The dancers were crushed, but they came back from that and they got better. Wait until next year!”

One of the featured pieces that presented them at their best was *Gloria* by American choreographer Robert Garland, who trained as a dancer in Philadelphia with Joan Myers Brown and performed with Philadanco. Garland was the first resident choreographer at DTH under Mitchell.

Yet critical reaction to the ballet ran the gamut. The *Seattle Times*’ Michael Upchurch wrote: “There’s little to say about *Gloria*, a prettily patterned and vaguely ‘spiritual’ ballet set to music

by Poulenc.” In contrast, Brian Seibert in the *New York Times* called the work “heartening” and “beautiful.”

Another new work created on the company and likely to become a signature piece was *Contested Space*, by Seattle-based choreographer Donald Byrd. The mixed genre of movement and quick stylistic changes from section to section are difficult but, as Johnson says, “it creates a unique dance landscape.” It proved to be a stunning closing piece during the tour.

Speaking by phone from his studios in Seattle, Byrd recalls that creating such a challenging piece was tough on the young troupe, but, he jokes, “What about how tough it was on me?”

“The dancers were resisting a movement language that deviated so much from what they were used to doing classically,” he says. “I didn’t expect them to do some of the technical aspects right away, but I needed them to be open-minded. Once they gave in, they seemed to discover things they didn’t know they could do.”

The piece is now a favourite among the dancers. Its mix of pointe work and contemporary invention shows the personality of the individual dancers as well as the theatricality of the new ensemble.

Brenda Dixon Gottschild, author of many books on African-American dance history, is impressed at the new DTH’s promise. “It’s so interesting to see the company with Virginia directing. The program we saw in Philadelphia was so well curated, for instance ... with a range of modern and ballet.”

She adds: “Though it’s a young company again, these are accomplished ballet dancers who are obviously able to manipulate an African-American heritage in dance. I don’t say that because of their ethnicity, but in the sense of there being a movement heritage that we all inherit, black, white or brown, as American dancers. I’ve written about the [influence of the] African diaspora in Balanchine’s work. And there is such an Africanist presence in Garland’s piece. *Contested Space*, too, I think, really played with the balance of ballet and blackness.”

Due to poor health, Mitchell has not seen the new company perform onstage. But, Johnson says, he is “very happy that the company is back. Many of us working behind the scenes danced together: we know what Dance Theatre of Harlem is about because we lived it and Arthur Mitchell’s stamp is on us and the vision around what the organization is about is always there. Now it’s our job to carry that vision forward.” ▼

by Gilles Jobin

Translated by Selby Wynn Schwartz

FREEDOM TO MOVE

When dancers occupy the Arab street

If the Arab Spring unleashed an impressive wave of political tumult, another revolution is happening now: an uprising of the body, channelled through dance. In the streets of Tunis and Cairo, where bodies and movements demand freedom and democracy, we are witnessing how democratic space can be symbolically reclaimed through dance. B-boys, b-girls and modern dancers find themselves together in the streets, gathering in the marketplaces or during protests — sometimes in a cloud of tear gas — to defend their freedom. Suddenly, it is the silent, evocative power of dance that is now at the centre of the struggle for democracy in the Middle East and North Africa.

When Basma Khalfaoui, the widow of Tunisian union activist Chokri Belaid (who was assassinated in February 2013), spoke to journalists in Geneva, Switzerland, a few weeks after her husband's murder, she declared that “young people in Tunis are now using dance as a mode of political resistance in the streets. This is the kind of action we want to support.” These bodies convey a message; their dance is a sign of their demands. As Khalfaoui knows, dance gives the youth of her country a voice.

But why would dance become so central to the debate over democracy in Tunisia and other countries touched by the Arab Spring? Is it because the evocative potential of dance raises questions that transcend politics as usual? Does a wordless body in motion say more about the notion of freedom than a fiery speech can? Corporeal language seems

to express something symbolic in this context, something beyond the reach of words.

In May 2011, several Tunisian dancers and artists formed a group called Art Solution, a cultural association designed to promote the connection between dance, street art and democratic freedom. Dance is not prohibited in Tunisia, but it is already outlawed in Iran — the context is different, but the threat is quite real: when self-expression in public spaces is limited, performances in the public sphere are soon menaced as well. And Tunisian Salafists, some of whom believe in a strict form of conservative Islam, have attacked artists. In an interview with *L'Orient – Le jour* (*The Middle East Daily*), Bahri Ben Yahmed, a member of Art Solution, explained that the idea for the group's performances, which are filmed and circulated widely on YouTube, came from a violent incident last year. On March 25, 2012, Salafist protesters attacked artists on the main avenue of Tunis, Bourguiba Avenue, as they were giving an outdoor performance in honour of the International Day of Theatre.

“This date is etched into the spirits of Tunisian artists,” Ben Yahmed says. As the Salafists threatened the artists, yelling at them to stay inside the theatres and not venture into the streets, he recalls, “We were shouting at the Salafists: ‘You go back inside your theatres! The street belongs to us!’ But we were afraid they would lock us up, or cut us off from the world, or forbid everyone to attend performances. Our whole initiative is based on standing up and say-



Bahri Ben Yahmed in Art Solution's performance/
action in Tunis, Africa
Photo: Omar Frini

ing no to these repressive practices. And the street still belongs to us! These [performances and] videos express an act of resistance against censorship. We are directly confronting the Salafists, and art is our only weapon.”

Ben Yahmed's words echo those of Afshin Ghaffarian, a young, self-taught dancer from Iran, who was forced to flee political persecution in his country in 2009. When he arrived in Europe, he declared proudly, “Dance is my weapon.”

In response to these attacks, Art Solution organized a series of urban performances by young dancers — from b-boys and b-girls to dancers trained in Western contemporary and modern techniques — set all over the city of Tunis. In the Old Medina, people passing in the street joined the dancers as the cadence of the darbouka (a Tunisian drum) drew them in; a pas de deux unfolded in Kasbah Square in front of a police car, to a recording of the Nigerian vocalist Iyeoka Ivie Okoawo's song *Revolution*. Art Solution called the project *Danseurs Citoyens* (Citizen Dancers) and the performances became an internet sensation titled *Je danserai malgré tout* (*I will dance in spite of everything*). These artists refuse, as they explain, "to give in to the forces of censorship and repression" that are gaining ground in Tunisia; "in spite of everything," the dancers will persist. And they simply cannot imagine a revolution that denies the body, a homeland where dance no longer has the right to exist. Dance is their mode of self-expression, and they want to preserve it at all costs.

This phenomenon — engaging urban dance in the fight for democracy — seems unique in the history of dance. Although in the past choreographic works such as Kurt Jooss' anti-war *The Green Table* have been staged in theatres, and although dance forms like capoeira and salsa have been used within communities to express resistance or solidarity, the activist use of urban dance — in the city streets themselves — is a new development.

Historically, in fact, dance has often been utilized as propaganda for those in power. Ballet has its roots in the court of King Louis XIV, where it served as a public display of his power and majesty. In the 20th century, both the Third Reich in Nazi Germany and communist regimes used — and abused — dance's potential to evoke *mens sana in corpore sano* (a sound mind in a sound body).

Under Hitler, for example, dance served as an expression of the mystical spirit of the German "race" as well as a way to shape idealized bodies. As dance scholar Victoria Phillips Geduld has shown, the Communist-affiliated New Dance Group in New York (whose slogan was also "The dance is a weapon") staged ideological dances that impacted American and Soviet politics. Many avant-garde artists viewed dance as liberating both body and mind, but the officially approved status of "professional" dance in the West limited its popular appeal: it was seen as an elitist form.

With the rise of urban dance at the end of the 20th century, and with the instantaneous global circulation of MTV and then the internet, dance has become a mass form of popular expression. Urban dance first emerged from the inner cities. As it caught on all over the planet, young dancers in the Global North and Global South found a common identity, an "idea of unity" free from the moral constraints of their societies. These days, urban dance operates beyond cultural barriers and transcends traditional geography. Like a set of capillaries bringing fresh blood to the extremities, urban dance now links the youth of different communities across borders, connecting them to the global movements of their generation. ▼

Sud Sud

In early May 2013, the non-profit organization Sud Sud invited the Tunisian dancers of the Art Solution collective to present their urban performances in Geneva, home to the UN Commission on Human Rights and a centre of Calvinism in the 16th century. Geneva is both a city of human rights and a place with a history of prohibiting dance during the Protestant Reformation.

Sud Sud — a division of my dance company, Cie Gilles Jobin — supports global artistic exchange and outreach. We wanted to give these dance activists an international platform and co-ordinated the performances with the Swiss celebration of UNESCO's International Dance Day.

In showing our solidarity with these artists, we choose to be part of this symbolic history. We recognize that dance is as powerful as it is wordless, and that progress is only possible when bodies are free to move.

— GILLES JOBIN

**This article originally appeared in French in Libération, on April 16, 2013, with the title "Les danseurs occupent la rue arabe." The translation is published here with the kind permission of Gilles Jobin and the publishers of Libération. Gilles Jobin would like to thank Selby Wynn Schwartz and Pedro Jiménez Morras for their contributions to this version, which has been extended and edited for Dance International.*

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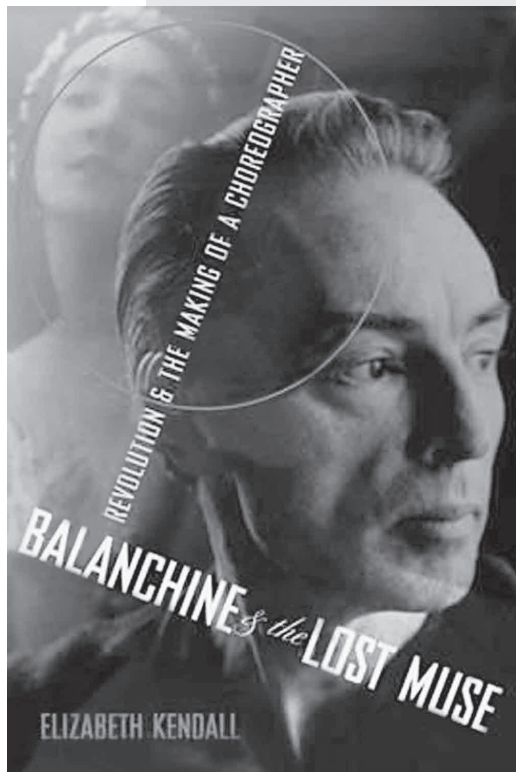
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Mediawatch

In praise of ballet training



Excerpt from *Balanchine and the Lost Muse: Revolution and the Making of a Choreographer*

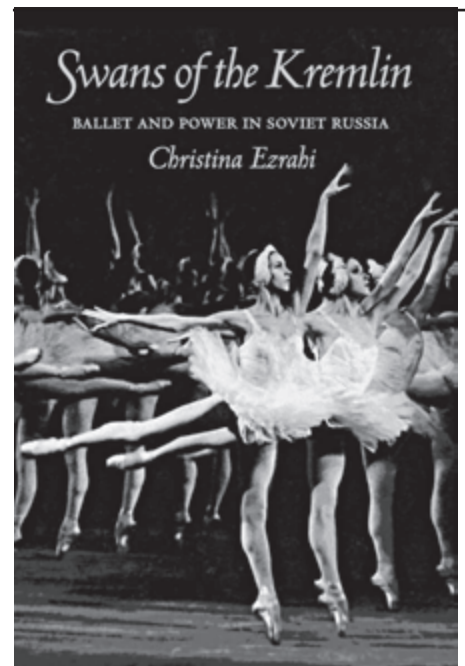
by Elizabeth Kendall, Oxford University Press, 270 pages, \$35 Cdn., www.oup.com

if done wisely, seems to increase the charged interior space of a body, infusing the psyche with something like an urge to cover great distance, to show by means of ballet's ritual motions all the energy that's lodged inside. The effect of good ballet training then and now is that it bypasses thought — or *becomes* thought, not analytic thought but the kind that's bound up with emotion. Emotional energy flows into turned-out positions, and the child feels she can stretch farther, move bigger, matter more in the world. It's as though a young body is gradually opened up, not just to the flow of movement but to a more buoyant and effective being. Anything unresolved — frustration, anger, yearning — can be loosened and let go in a ballet combination, swept into the energy of motion and the exultation of self-mastery. ”

QUOTABLE

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“The little girls began to acquire the straight backs and proud heads of future dancers, and the articulate legs, pointed feet, and fierce physical and mental concentration they also needed for the stage. They began to balance on one leg, turn cleanly, fit their gestures to the music — and to experience something that's hard to put into words. As the bodies of those ten-year-olds found a new alternative ‘home’ in the turned-out leg and hip position, a sensation of power resulted, almost of enlightenment. Ballet's retraining of muscles,




Swans of the Kremlin: Ballet and Power in Soviet Russia

by Christina Ezrahi, University of Pittsburgh Press, 2012, \$27.95 US

More than two decades after the fall of the Soviet Union, Israeli researcher Christina Ezrahi lifts the now imaginary Iron Curtain in her book, *Swans of the Kremlin: Ballet and Power in Soviet Russia*, to peek at the imperial world of the Soviet ballet, a world so secretive and tight-knit, so contradictory and fascinating, that few have the ability to assess or understand it.

Ballet's political history of that period does not need explanation from within, but a thorough examination from the outside, and that is precisely what we get from Ezrahi. She neither pretends nor wants to be an insider; instead, she

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carefully lays the facts and draws her own conclusions about the convoluted and symbiotic relationship between the state's power and the arts. "Can content be found in nonverbal, nonrepresentative art? This artistic question acquired a particular urgency in the environment of a state that was increasingly trying to use art as a vehicle for expressing the verbal content of its political propaganda," she writes in the chapter devoted to ideological pressure.

The world of Soviet ballet was an enclave inside the terrifying and all-powerful state machine, and dealt with its encircling forces through cunningness, political intrigue and excruciating political blows from the famous ballet defectors. From the initial struggle for its very existence following the Russian Revolution in 1917 to the Stalinist purges of the 1930s and 1940s, ignorance of Khrushchev's years, and Brezhnev's stagnation, Russian ballet carried on with imperial traditions of servitude and artistic excellence. "Artistic innovation that challenges Soviet cultural ideology," writes Ezrahi, "should not be equated to outright political opposition to the Soviet system as a whole ..."

The prescribed rules of Social Realism, the governing artistic movement of the Soviet Union — so convoluted and entangled in ideology that it often contradicts itself — led to the creation of some of the most memorable and influential ballets of the 20th century, namely Leonid Lavrovsky's *Romeo and Juliet* and Yuri Grigorovich's *Spartacus*. But Ezrahi is neither a dance critic nor a dance writer, and while she analyses power games within the Soviet art of ballet, Ezrahi avoids contributing to the discussion of artistic value and legacy of Soviet ballet dancers, teachers and choreographers. She uses the great Leonid Iakobson as an example of a highly individualistic artist struggling within the confines of the system, but Iakobson's lasting influence on the development of Russian/Soviet choreography is not discussed.

Ezrahi pays much attention to the fact that Soviet ballet, along with classical musicians and folk dance ensembles, had become a powerful ideological tool in the U.S.S.R.'s struggle for world domination during the Cold War. "Tours abroad were a matter of state," she observes, providing a carefully constructed explanation of the disproportionate importance the Soviet Union paid to its ballet. While opera dominates opera houses in the rest of the world, in Russia it is ballet that to this day continues to be the main attraction.

— REGINA ZARHINA

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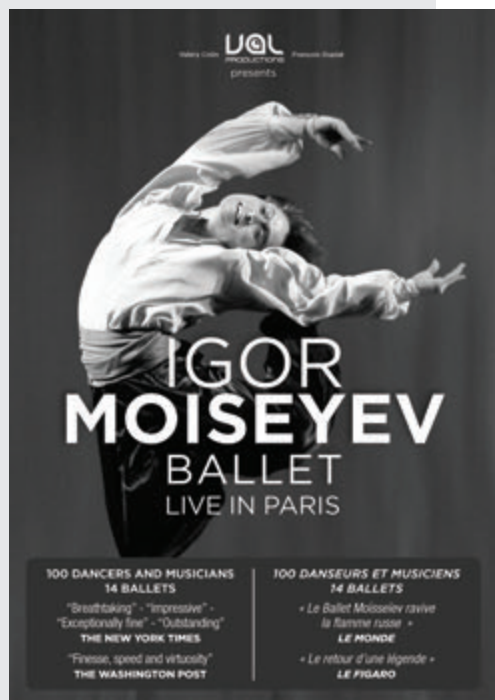
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Igor Moiseyev Ballet Live in Paris
107 minutes, \$29.99 Cdn.,
www.belairclassiques.com

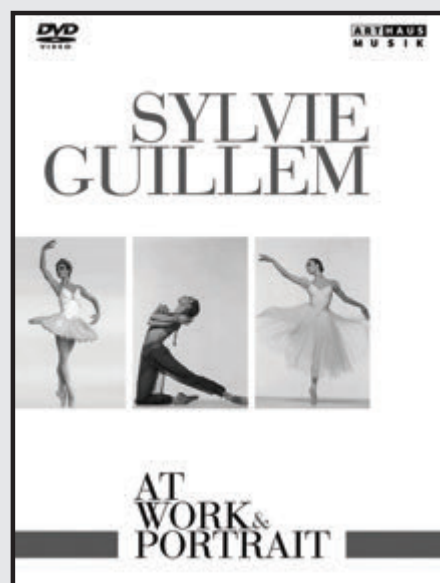
The dancers are fiendishly high-spirited as they kick, stamp and whirl in boots and heeled shoes. This DVD of Igor Moiseyev Ballet at Paris' Palais de Congrès features 14 fabulous dances of distinct colour and rhythm. All choreography is by Igor Moiseyev, who founded the company in Moscow in 1937.

Moiseyev died in 2007, aged 101. His State Academic Ensemble of Popular Dance — as the group of 70 dancers and 35 orchestra members is also called — is now directed by Yelena Shcherbakova.

Some scenarios are inspired by village life, such as *Summer* from *Russian Dances*, with the women and men moving like silk and fire. One is based on political events: *The Partisans* is a tribute to the mountain people of the northern Caucasus who fought the Nazis. Here, men in long black capes glide mysteriously around the stage, and then return wielding swords and rifles. There's also a familiar Ukrainian hopak in a splendid finale.

The infectious dances are inspired by folk traditions from around the world, including a jota from Spain that had me whistling along.

— **KAIJA PEPPER**



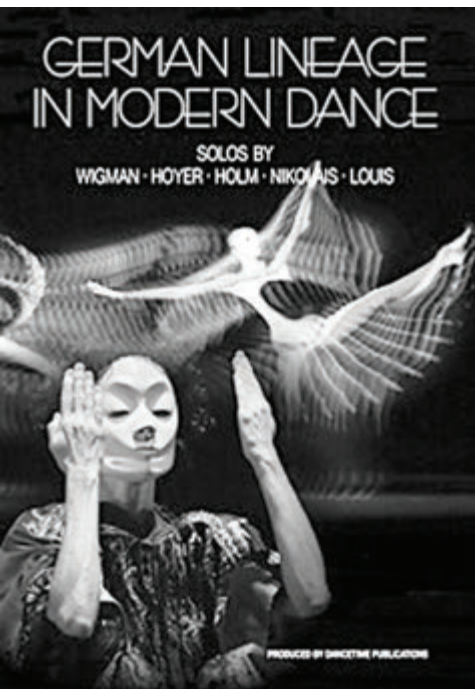
Sylvie Guillem: At Work and Portrait
104 minutes, \$47.99 Cdn.,
www.arthaus-musik.com

Sylvie Guillem has been a global superstar for the past two decades, and it's easy to forget how much controversy she created initially, with her sky-high extensions and adaptation of roles to suit her own interpretations. These two DVDs provide fascinating glimpses of Guillem at the start of her career, packed with superb footage of her dancing in *Swan Lake*, *Raymonda* and *Manon*, as well as in newer works by Forsthye, van Dantzig, Béjart and Ek.

André S. Labarthe's *At Work* was filmed in 1987, when Guillem was a young star at the Paris Opera Ballet. Her role within a hallowed institution is reinforced throughout with lingering views of the Palais Garnier where the company is based. Shot in cinema vérité style, the hushed narration sometimes felt voyeuristic as the invisible narrator follows Guillem from class to rehearsal and performance like a star-struck fan. The film ends with unexpected tenderness with the revelation that Guillem is not, in fact, made of steel: we see her in a rehearsal, exhausted and in pain, the sympathetic rehearsal director interrupted by an announcement summoning her to a photo shoot.

Six years later, in Nigel Wattis' *Portrait*, Guillem talks frankly about her approach to ballet, her famous exit from the Paris Opera, her culture shock in London and the experience of being on stage. *Portrait* is a glossier and more conventional documentary than *At Work*, offering perceptive commentaries from choreographers, critics and administrators. Together the DVDs provide a satisfying profile of this exceptional dancer.


— **HEATHER BRAY**



German Lineage in Modern Dance: Solos by Wigman, Hoyer, Holm, Nikolais, Louis
58 minutes, \$49.95 US,
www.dancetimepublications.com

The vitality and depth of early German modern dance is often forgotten in North America: remembering those iconic women from the United States — Isadora and Martha Graham among them — tends to keep us busy. There is also a dearth of good DVD material readily available to support a European focus, something I discovered while researching for my recent course offering in dance history. Betsy Fisher, a professor at the University of Hawaii, has put together a helpful introduction to a trio of German greats — Mary Wigman, Dore Hoyer and Hanya Holm, including reproductions of solos by all three that she dances herself (a version of Wigman's seminal *Hexentanz*, or *Witch Dance*, is among them). She ends with Americans Alwin Nikolais, a student of Holm's in the 1930s, and Murray Louis, his artistic and life partner (Fisher danced in Louis' company in the 1980s), to illustrate the link between German expressionism and American abstraction presented on this informative educational DVD.

— **KAIIJA PEPPER**



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Vancouver

by Kaija Pepper



The spirit of Nigel Charnock — the delightfully wicked, devilishly funny British dancer who died last year from cancer — haunts *Highgate*. Not the famous London cemetery, but the theatre-dance piece named after it by Vancouver's own arch-nemesis of the po-faced, Tara Cheyenne Friedenberg. Charnock brought his manic, confessional stand-up comedy and dance here twice in the 2000s, and Friedenberg, like many of us, took notice; he was her collaborator on *Highgate*, a Victorian-styled spoof on life and death that premiered on April 30 at the Vancouver East Cultural Centre.

It's her fourth full-length comedy. The early works were solos; this time, there's a supporting cast, with Friedenberg taking on two of the six roles. Undertaker Mr. Stone — the petite Friedenberg in spats, top hat, frock coat and undershorts — presides over the 75 minutes. With an enthusiastic Irish accent, Mr. Stone welcomes members of the audience as they enter. We learn later he's not just being friendly: he's sizing us up for coffins, eager to fit the smallest to the most buxom client. Mr. Stone is part Dickensian monster, but also part endearing leprechaun, all smiles and twinkling hands and feet.

Friedenberg is also Mrs. Graves, now with an enthusiastically English accent (think Maggie Smith in her broadest moments), wearing a black mourning dress that is nipped and tucked and coaxed into a stupendous display of fabric by designer Alice Mansell. Mrs. Graves is here to "ease our transition," and on this ghoulish conceit the piece is built. We in the audience are soon to be deceased, and what fiendish fun Friedenberg makes of it!

Mrs. Graves is assisted by her son, a half-conscious boy in cap and short pants (Justine Chambers). Boychild lurks with head down, arms and legs dangling at sad, defeated angles, a disappointment to his mother, who wanted a girl.

Susan Elliott, Alison Denham and Bevin Poole are the nearly dead who Mrs. Graves couldn't quite bear to part with. Their mourning dresses are joined at the skirts, transforming them into a three-headed, multi-limbed monster. When they lie on their backs, legs up in the air, black stockings, garters and bare thighs are revealed, adding an erotic note.

The choreography is built on story and character, though now and then pure dance prevails. In the final quartet between Boychild and the trio, character-driven movement and abstract dance are in exciting balance. Ringing his soundless bell, Boychild approaches them for a waltz, partnering all three at once. Then,

lurching into a twisted arabesque, Boychild takes his extended leg out to the side, out and over until it wraps around Poole's neck in a stranglehold. She collapses. The other two are dispatched in quick succession. It's a macabre tour de force, especially for Chambers, who brings ghoulish intensity to Boychild, insinuating her limbs into the deadly choreography.

A few days earlier, on April 25 at the Queen Elizabeth Theatre, we had the tragic version of life and death when Ballet BC premiered José Navas' 2013 take on the 19th-century story ballet *Giselle*. In the original, Giselle and Albrecht fall in love, and Hilarion is the jealous gamekeeper in love with Giselle. Here, Hilarion loves Albrecht, who returns the affection, but is also drawn to Giselle. The love of the two men prevails, and Giselle slits her throat with a knife.

Navas, a cool, Cunningham-based contemporary choreographer, is less inspired by character than by the emotional energy created by pure movement, and his *Giselle* features a dynamic corps. In the first half, they wear black suits, the women also in black pointe shoes, coming together in male/female duets of precise energy and definition. In the second half, everyone is in socks, and designer Linda Chow has men and women in sheer white dresses that evoke Romantic tutus. The corps — augmented to 18 with guests and graduate students — create a beautiful blizzard of leaps and spins, the atmosphere charged with the straightforward passion of arms and legs in close proximity.

The lead characters are just sketched in, but the cast's commitment to these broad strokes was very fine. On opening night, Alexis Fletcher's Giselle was a fiery young woman who pounced on the chance to fall in love, while Connor Gnam's Albrecht was a princely dreamer unable to decide between her and Hilarion. On the second night, Maggie Forgeron's grounded, thoughtful Giselle was surprised by love, and Alexander Burton's Albrecht was eager to love her — and also to love the commanding Hilarion (Gilbert Small both nights). Makaila Wallace's Myrtha (also both nights) was regal in diaphanous trousers, not a frigid Queen of the Wilis, but a warm peacekeeper.

Adolphe Adam's dramatic score for *Giselle* leads the dancers and us, too, on. By "us" I especially mean anyone in the audience who knows and loves this iconic ballet: the familiar orchestral music lent Navas' newly minted choreography a whole layer of memories on which I at least could not help but draw. Similarly, when a music box tinkled a familiar tune in Friedenberg's *Highgate*, the evocative past was brought very close. ▼

Hosts of a bygone era provided creative grist for the mill as Winnipeg-based choreographer Nina Patel unveiled her newest creation *arrivals & departures*. The site-specific work, performed April 19-20 at historic Union Station by the Lime Project Dance Company, was inspired by scores of immigrants in search of better lives who passed through the city once called “Chicago of the North.”

The Blackburn, England-born Patel founded the socially conscious troupe two years ago as a way to bring contemporary dance to marginalized communities. Her project-based works have included dance/theatre installations, digital film projects, and education and outreach initiatives, as well as her first stage production *jurn.e* in 2011. A former company member with Winnipeg’s Contemporary Dancers, Patel pursued a master’s degree in dance therapy at the University of London before returning to Winnipeg five years ago to explore her creative roots.

The 50-minute show began with Rachelle Bourget, Carol-Ann Bohrn, Branwyn Bundon and Alexandra Scarola bolting through the station’s front doors, luggage in hand, accompanied by composer Joel Klaverkamp’s screaming train whistles and clanging railway crossing bells.

Patel immediately establishes a tumultuous world of inner conflict as individual dancers slam their suitcases and bodies against the rotunda’s marble floor, or break out into anguished, kinetic solos watched passively by the others. Costume designers Stefanie Hiebert and Erin Thiessen’s vintage floral dresses and sturdy black shoes helped create the sense that the four women had just time-travelled from another era. A loosely based narrative thread ran throughout the mostly abstract show, with Patel’s movement vocabulary ranging from vigorously intense high kicks and leaps, to quieter, more contemplative moments of repose.

A few sections particularly stood out: Bundon being buried alive by the suitcases, evoking both the physical hardships and alienation faced by many immigrants after arriving in a strange new land. Another began with pre-recorded telephones jangling loudly until the women hurtled forward to pick up actual handsets at the station’s payphones. Their escalating panic was palpable as they pushed and shoved each other to



Winnipeg by Holly Harris

the floor in frustration, speaking to the overwhelming culture shock often experienced by foreigners.

The show’s most harrowing moments are inspired by local lore. Scarola’s short solo depicting a British orphan sent to Canada was infused with the young girl’s growing desperation after being forced into child labour, culminating in her suicide. The lithe dancer’s distorted leg extensions and twisted torso captured the youth’s angst, climaxing when she stretched her arms outward as though crucified while recorded children’s voices gaily counted in rhythm.

The production mostly flowed seamlessly, despite a few overly extended sections that slowed the momentum. Abruptly breaking into J.S. Bach’s *Concerto for 2 Violins* felt cryptically jarring — especially right after Scarola’s dramatic solo — in the predominantly electronic score.

One of the show’s greatest strengths is having viewers freely circulating throughout the performance space, and even amongst the dancers themselves. This close proximity made for a kind of creative “glasnost,” dispelling the

ubiquitous fourth wall as the crowd ostensibly became actual pedestrian traffic that may have greeted the travellers. Audience interaction that promotes active engagement with the art form itself is what Patel seeks with her company — and successfully accomplished with her second, intriguing production.

This past spring also marked the launch of the city’s newest modern dance troupe, the Momentum Collective, which presented its inaugural production at the Gas Station Arts Centre March 21-23. *Desire to Collide* featured four premieres choreographed and performed by the troupe’s founding co-directors: Natasha Torres-Garner, Johanna Riley and Ali Robson, all graduates of the Professional Program of the School of Contemporary Dancers, as well as performers with Young Lungs Dance Exchange and others.

Of the four eclectic pieces, I felt Riley’s solo *Soon* to be the most compelling. As Torres-Garner was increasingly tossed about the stage as if blown by windstorms, her fluidly executed pivots and spins seemed an eloquent response to the vagaries of change.

Torres-Garner’s *A Side Road* featured a seven-month pregnant Robson circling the stage on a giant tricycle, perilously navigating both the downstage edge as well as her lowered centre of gravity. Tim Church’s evocative soundscape laced with chirping crickets and howling wolves lent a pastoral feel, recorded last year during Torres-Garner’s Deep Bay Artists’ Residency at Manitoba’s Riding Mountain National Park — the first dance artist in the program’s seven-year history.

The Designer, also choreographed by Torres-Garner, spoke to the art of relinquishing control as Riley built, balanced and toppled an entire bag of wooden toy blocks. The evening’s sole duet, Robson’s *Posed*, featured the stately, physically well-matched Torres-Garner and Riley closely interconnected by gesture and movement as though simpatico twins. A score of voiceover interview questions posed by Robson to the duo about their longstanding friendship added context, while Nunavut’s Tanya Tagaq’s visceral throat singing added effective sonic counterpoint.

Winnipeg has long been known for the venerable Royal Winnipeg Ballet and Winnipeg’s Contemporary Dancers. But younger independent troupes also flourish, as proven last spring by these two unique productions. ▼

The National Ballet School pulled off one of its most logistically complex achievements during the spring with an international gathering of students from professional training institutions around the world. Some 180 talented pre-professionals convened in Toronto for an intensive week of shared classes, rehearsals, discussions and performances. The school's Assemblée Internationale 2013 built on the success of a similar event organized to mark the school's 50th anniversary in 2009, although this time it was even bigger.

As before, performances included programs that allowed each school to present its own students in choreography that, ostensibly at least, reflected each institution's distinctiveness. The bigger challenge was the program of student-choreographed works performed by casts that blended students from several different schools. These had been made, performed and filmed in their originating locales before selected students from other schools began learning their parts via DVD, only rehearsing with fellow cast members on arrival in Toronto.

The only professionally choreographed work on this program was a trans-Atlantic undertaking in which students in Amsterdam and Toronto, linked live via Skype, performed a work called *Stream* choreographed in Holland and Canada respectively by Michael Schumacher and Shaun Amyot. On paper, for all the talk of the importance of using new technologies in dance, it sounds a bit of a gimmick, but was done with such skill and inventiveness that the end result, while hardly memorable as art, was charming.

Just as it did in the fall of 2011 with its extraordinarily powerful production of Gluck's *Iphigénie en Tauride*, so once again the Canadian Opera Company proved this spring

just how effectively movement can be deployed to support the dramatic and emotional substance of a great operatic work. In this instance, it was their May presentation of Poulenc's *Dialogues des Carmélites* in a much acclaimed production by the Canadian team of director Robert Carsen and designer Michael Levine with choreography by Philippe Giraudeau, the same Frenchman who helped make *Iphigénie* such a triumph.

Theirs is a spare, almost minimalist approach to the tale of Blanche de la Force and the Carmelite convent in which she seeks escape, only to find it caught in the godless maw of the French Revolution.

Doubtless working in close collaboration, Carsen and Giraudeau use simple but effective movement images to intensify the drama, whether in the sweeping progress of a small army of revolutionaries or the careful rituals of the nuns. Their greatest coup is the final scene in which the nuns' chorus, giving voice to their faith, is chillingly and progressively diminished with each swooshing fall of the guillotine blade. In this production, the nuns in simple white gowns stand facing the audience. When Poulenc's score signals a death, one of them slowly crumples to the ground to lie prostrate, arms outspread in the form of a cross, until all are silenced. It was great opera and great dance-theatre.

If only the latter could be said of Italian choreographer Davide Bombana's *Carmen*, presented by the National Ballet of Canada as the spring's main attraction.

The familiarity of Bizet's music for his 1875 opera together with an overwrought story, courtesy of Prosper Mérimée, have made *Carmen* a natural target for dance companies in search of works with marketable titles. Thus it has been often adapted for dance, with predictably varied success.

Bombana first tackled *Carmen* in a 2006 one-act version the National Ballet danced three years later. Since then he's expanded it to the evening-length, two-act version the Canadians danced in June.

Apart from making considerable use of Rodion Shchedrin's astringent orchestration of the original Bizet, Bombana mixes up the familiar musical flow with drumming by Tambours du Bronx, whisperings by Meredith Monk and other aural interference. This might be justified if Bombana had a clear point of view about the drama, but instead he turns Carmen and Don José into two-dimensional emblems of lust and obsession. The introduction of an "Old Carmen" character suggests the title heroine is horrified by the notion of growing old and haggard and seeks out death as an ultimate gesture of defiance — after being gorged/raped by a bull-horned, half man/half beast Escamillo. The less said about the quartet of toreadors in frilly flamenco drag the better.

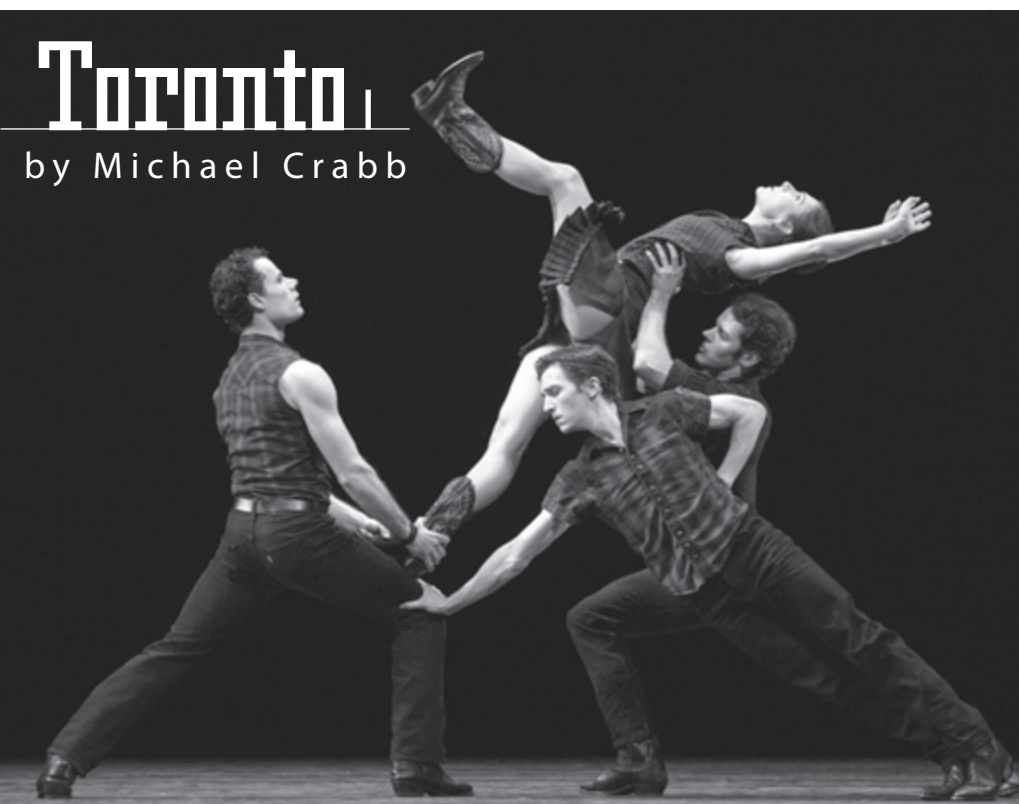
The National Ballet wound up its season with a mixed bill that fully lived up to its adjective and featured — at last — the Toronto premiere of James Kudelka's gem of a work set to Johnny Cash, *The Man in Black*.

In between *Carmen* and the mixed bill, the company mounted its annual fundraising gala on June 12. These are curious affairs because they try to combine a performance, to which ordinary mortals can buy tickets, with a glamorous post-show dinner/dance onstage for the rich and fabulous. To be fair, even the non-diners get to booze and schmooze for a bit, but when the performance component is so slim, as it was this year, you wonder why it can't be dispensed with altogether.

This time, at least, there was a guest artist to add a little spice to the meagre, 45-minute, four-item lineup. Svetlana Lunkina, the Bolshoi principal ballerina who announced in January she'd taken refuge in Canada, danced the night's only pure classical bonbon, the *Don Quixote* grand pas de deux, partnered dependably by the National Ballet's Piotr Stanczyk. Lunkina, who has essentially been sidelined since fleeing Russia last fall, was not at her dazzling best, but still had more than enough of that natural Bolshoi grandeur and authority to remind one what being a true classical ballerina is all about.

Naturally, there's been much speculation among fans about whether Lunkina, who together with her Russian, naturalized Canadian husband has a home with two small children outside Toronto, will ever return to the Bolshoi. If she does not, will Karen Kain try to hire her into the National Ballet? It would certainly be a coup, but Kain has stated she has no budget to take on an additional principal. Of course, in ballet things can change quickly — injuries, retirements — so the June gala may not be the last time Lunkina appears with the company. ▼

Robert Stephen, Rebekah Rimsay, Piotr Stanczyk and James Leja in James Kudelka's *The Man in Black*
Photo: Aleksandar Antonijevic



Toronto
by Michael Crabb

Montreal



by Linde Howe-Beck

Émilie Durville and Yadil Suarez Llerena
in Les Grands Ballets Canadiens de
Montréal's *Danz* and *TooT* Evening
Photo: Damian Siqueiros

dreamer, the excellent Eva Kolarova), scirms used to define realms or dimensions of time and place, mustaches, bowler hats, ringing phones, melting rag doll gestures, wallpapered rooms, upside-down candelabras and even an inverted body hanging in space — the visuals, and the furious pace and lighting, simply astounded.

All was nightmarish: wave after wave of dancers, a sense of perpetual mystery that demanded spectators look beyond reason, a grotesque and generally disconnected feeling between the many scenes and characters. *Dream Away* turned out to be more than its gentle title suggests and rife with confusion for its dreamer.

Les Grands' feel-good March 14-23 double bill could be construed as another kind of dream — or an answer to a young dancer's prayers. *Danz*, a compilation of some of choreographer Ohad Naharin's longer works, and Didy Veldman's 2005 creation, *TooT*, made more ideal showcases for the daring and determined company.

Danz could have been a rehearsal director's nightmare with its quick-shifting masses of wild bursts of energy, crazed attitudes, bobbing heads and Pilates exercises. Aerobic beyond a doubt, the constantly transforming sequences in *Danz* blazed with freedom, a potent package of casual-looking action that resisted categorization.

A little less edgy and a tad more predictable, *TooT* granted viewers a bit more time to digest. Clown-faced dancers emerged as individuals combating conformity, repression, loneliness and manipulation to the multi-dimensional *Jazz Suite No. 2* by Dmitri Shostakovich.

Champions of both programs were Les Grands' dancers, whose spirit, dedication and physical daring has earned them the right to stand right up there on the podium of international dance.

7th Sense, from Vancouver's Wen Wei Wang, was more obtuse than works this innovative choreographer has shown here before. The latest in an important oeuvre inspired mainly from Wang's

personal experiences, *7th Sense* was shown at the Agora de la danse, March 20-23.

Seven dancers, including the choreographer, interacted with detachment in their black-and-white universe, appearing and disappearing into black rectangles, moving with quick, almost spastic twisting and off-balances. Although in the program notes Wang defined the seventh sense as animalistic instinct, the meaning of the title was obscure despite one memorable sequence in which a man, clearly identifying as a dog, sat, played and ran about in comic canine fashion.

Mixed heritage has been an abiding theme of Armenian-Indian Roger Sinha's choreographic life for two decades. At the Agora, April 17-27, his company, Sinha Danse, collaborated with Montreal's Constantinople, a three-member musical group with Iranian roots, in the beautifully staged *Sunya*. Led by Kiya Tabassian, Constantinople was the star of the evening. Singing and playing a setar, a small stringed instrument reminiscent of the Indian sitar, Tabassian, his brother Ziya on a variety of percussive instruments and Pierre-Yves Martel on viola da gamba, floated among the dancers, Tabassian's comfortable and focused presence dominating the dancers' busyness.

Sinha appeared with Tabassian in a prologue charged with his signature cross-cultural mudras drawn from contemporary and South Indian classical dance. Then came the physically witty Thomas Casey, Tanya Crowder, François Richard and Ghislaine Doté, all long-time members of the company and well-acquainted with Sinha's form of fusion. However, it was the lovely Doté — whose expressive arms and fingers etched subtle, unhurried interpretations of what were sometimes frenzied moments — who left indelible memories.

Visuals were stunning, especially when Arabic script was projected over the stage, washing over the dancers who rose and fell softly as if buffeted by a sea of script around the simple, dark form of Tabassian, an island of calm.

On the minus side, the choreography became over-reaching, as if the ever-creative Sinha couldn't resist adding more — and more. Although the physical tricks were fun at first, sequences were often marred by inexplicable dynamic shifts, which, combined with the more-is-better movements, suggested the choreographer had lost his sense of direction. I also did not understand the relationship between the title, a Sanskrit word for "nothing," and the production. ▼

Les Grands Ballets Canadiens de Montréal dominated the city's spring 2013 menu. Between perfectly performed contemporary programs, Quebec's oldest dance company announced it was getting into the health business. With several partners from hospitals, Quebec government and universities, Les Grands will open what may be the world's first dance therapy centre when it makes a long-anticipated move into new quarters in central Montreal.

While facilities for that have yet to be built, Les Grands plunged ahead with two memorable, fleet-footed programs last spring.

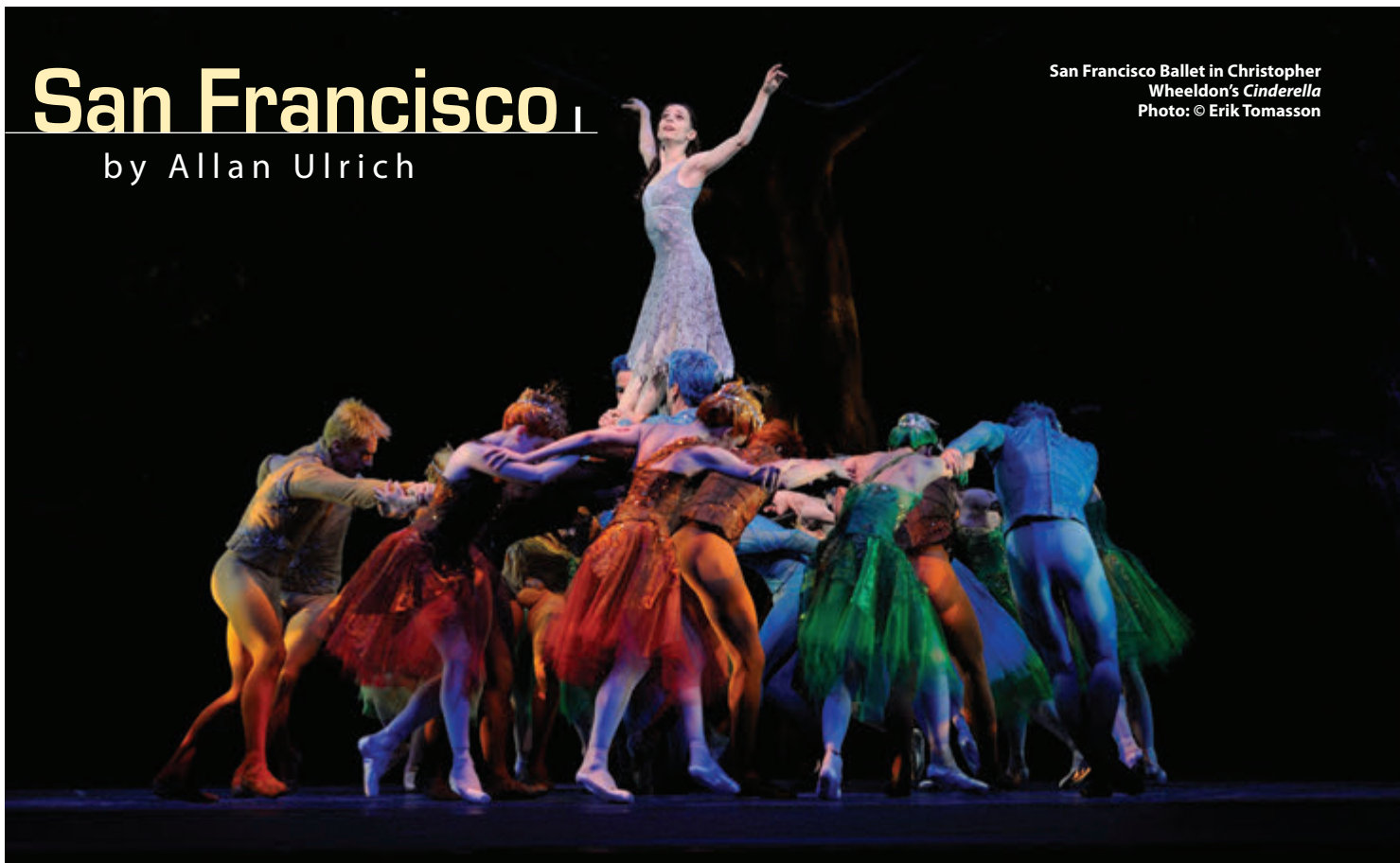
Rêve, known as *Dream Away* in English, is a full-length piece by German choreographer Stephan Thoss, his first commission from the company. It played at Théâtre Maisonneuve, Place des Arts, May 16-25. Oh, what a good fit it was! Thoss obviously had his fingers properly on Les Grands' pulse when he made it. Fast, precise, sculptural in an angular Nordic way, it swooped, flexed, stretched and overflowed with creative energy.

While I defy anyone to be able to transpose the synopsis to what happened onstage, what I saw was obviously the stuff of a liberated mind, which, having chosen dreams as his theme, staged them according to the master of surrealism, René Magritte. Videos (which sometimes overshadowed the

San Francisco

by Allan Ulrich

San Francisco Ballet in Christopher Wheeldon's *Cinderella*
Photo: © Erik Tomasson



The San Francisco Ballet knew it had a hit on its hands with Christopher Wheeldon's *Cinderella* weeks before the sold-out, 10-day run opened May 3 at the War Memorial Opera House. That was understandable; it had been more than three decades since the company had mounted any version of the tale.

In addition, the public's thirst for romantic fantasy was substantial this winter and spring, but the reprise of John Cranko's haunted *Onegin* was not the sort of ballet to set little girls' hearts aflutter. And the word from the Dutch National Ballet premiere of this co-produced *Cinderella* in December was that we could expect some sort of theatrical miracle.

The rumours were correct. The verve, wit and sheer stagecraft on display here represent some sort of milestone in Wheeldon's career. The level of invention signals an evolutionary step after his *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland*. All *Cinderella* stagings should look and move as wonderfully as this one. But they would require a choreographer like Wheeldon who sees the comic possibilities in even the direst situation and wields a penchant for self-mockery.

Inspired by the Brothers Grimm version of the tale (with its shafts of cru-

elty and violence), rather than the excessively sweet Perrault recounting, this *Cinderella* adds several ingredients to the mix, leaving the original 1945 Bolshoi setting to Prokofiev's score by Rostislav Zakharov and the much loved Frederick Ashton version to their own fates.

Craig Lucas' libretto for Wheeldon gives us an effete father, a snobbish stepmother and nasty stepsisters. It gives us a Cinderella who is a young woman in need of incorporating and transcending her past before claiming her prince, here named Guillaume. He emerges a rounded, larky lad, imbued with an antic spirit and a sense of fun, which leads him to exchange identities with his commoner buddy, Benjamin (the device has been borrowed from Rossini's opera, *La Cenerentola*), and visit our heroine's hearth in disguise. Their quest for the owner of the lost slipper at the opening of Act 3 prompts a hilarious tableau that seems right out of English music hall.

What's missing in the Wheeldon scheme is a fairy godparent of either gender. At the climax of Act 1, the creatures of nature and a magic tree, planted by the young Cinderella, prepare her for the ball and thanks to the great puppeteer Basil Twist's rustling foliage and coach assembled out of scraps, she goes

to meet her fate, trailing silky fabric in one of the great theatrical coups of anybody's balletgoing career.

Encouraging Broadway's Julian Crouch to design his first ballet was a felicitous decision. His décor includes a ballroom festooned with enough candlepower to illuminate the Grand Canyon, a kitchen dominated by a wall of cooking utensils and a witty portrait gallery of royal forbears, lit brilliantly by Natasha Katz. The look of the opulent costumes seems vaguely Edwardian and why not?

Wheeldon's Act 2 yields the most pleasure. An exploratory duet for the couple leads to a playful duo for Guillaume and Benjamin; there's a cornucopia of swirling couples (the Prokofiev score, with its weary, even bitter tone is heard substantially complete, though somewhat rearranged). The stepsisters cavort and chase the prince. He is also bedeviled by three very pushy foreign princesses competing for his hand, an episode that seems to satirize every dreary Act 3 *Swan Lake* divertissement you've ever sat through.

Choreographically, this is an imperfect *Cinderella*. The problems first lie with the narrative. Perhaps because Lucas toils in the theatre world, the libretto abounds in attempts at psychological profundity, which do not transfer to the dance stage. The opening moments present us with back story. We do not really

need to know anything about the early demise of the protagonist mother and there's too much information about the prince's court. When you search a program, asking yourself, "Who is that?" the narrative has clearly led you down the garden path.

More seriously, Wheeldon has invented four Fates, gold-masked male dancers who derive from some strain of Asian theatre. They are the surrogates for fairy godparents, and while their presence leading, guiding and buffeting Cinderella in the first act makes some sense, their omnipresence (especially in Act 2) is obtrusive. Their contribution suggests that the heroine is not the master of her fate. Which lessens our interest. There's still time before the New York run in October for Wheeldon to make adjustments.

He has no need to tamper with the casting, which called for five different sets of principals during the initial run. Opening night honours went to Maria Kochetkova and Joan Boada. The Russian ballerina basked in her classical pedigree, her feeling for the shape of a phrase and a gorgeous, eloquent instep. Interpretively, Kochetkova savours the pleasure of being an eternal waif. Boada can't

muster the sheer technique of yore, but he's still one of nature's princes who happily enters into the spirit of the jest.

Luxury casting yielded Taras Domitro (Boada's Cuban compatriot) as a whirlwind, perfectly placed Benjamin, and Sarah Van Patten (just this side of outrageous) and Frances Chung (near-sighted and oddly lovable) as the stepsisters. The next afternoon, Van Patten moved over to Cinderella and invested the part with considerable poignancy. In fact, *Cinderella* brought out the best in the company. It returns in 2014.

Meanwhile, 45 miles to the south, Ballet San Jose is going through some substantial changes, almost all for the better. Founding artistic director Dennis Nahat was rather callously bounced in 2012, but his replacement, artistic advisor Wes Chapman (a former American Ballet Theatre principal) seems to know what he is doing, both in terms of repertoire and dancer training.

Last spring, he introduced dances by 20th-century giants of the calibre of Ashton (*Les Rendezvous*) and Merce Cunningham (*Duets*) and American Ballet Theatre standards like Clark Tippet's *Bruch Violin Concerto No. 1*. San

Jose now uses American Ballet Theatre's training syllabus and the improvement in performance is notable.

But Chapman is also planning a series of commissions. If Jessica Lang's new *Eighty One* (seen April 20) is representative of what is to come, the South Bay company will be a magnet for sophisticated dance fans. This abstraction is a dazzling theatrical spectacle, smoky and mysterious to watch. High atop a platform looms composer Jakub Ciupinski, creating an electronic score, altering metre, harmonies and dynamics as the piece proceeds.

Lang gives her 11 dancers a workout built from unisons, frozen tableaux, sweeping bourrées and transitory relationships, in which limbs are stretched and backs bear the weight of partners. Fluidity trumps profundity, but there's enough in Lang's work to compel interest. She joins the never huge rank of women ballet choreographers in this country and is close to the top of the heap. One hopes that Chapman will continue operating in this enlightened vein and that audiences find their way to the San Jose Center for the Performing Arts. A new era is dawning here. ▼

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During its two-month annual season at the Metropolitan Opera House, American Ballet Theatre offered two exceptional mixed bills, again breaking with its tradition for presenting multi-act, narrative and more-or-less name-recognition ballets.

The first mixed bill was a happily balanced and varied combination of older works. It opened with Mark Morris' bold and moving *Drink to Me Only With Thine Eyes*, created for American Ballet Theatre in 1988, using 13 piano études by Virgil Thomson in its run up to the concluding and moving, traditional title song (without its poetic lyrics by Ben Jonson). Almost all the roles in the 12-dancer work, ostensibly an ensemble creation, were impressively danced, but particular mention needs to be made of the fine dancing of the role created for Mikhail Baryshnikov by the gifted corps de ballet dancer, Joseph Gorak.

The bill effectively concluded with *Symphony in C*, a now classic 20th-century showcase from 1948, in George Balanchine's expansive and exuberant four-movement display of crystalline classicism, which notably departs in mood for its now legendary, and elegiac, adagio-dominated second movement. Throughout, the company's casts were variable, with the demands of Balanchine's musically keyed choreography sometimes beyond the reach of individual dancers, though never so much as to leave the ballet lost in the shuffle. Rewardingly, some moments soared as finely as they ever have in New York, where the 1947, Paris-born ballet has become a fixture. Primarily, this means at New York City Ballet where the choreographer long oversaw its performances and where the dancers now under Peter Martins' direction have kept it, for the most part, alive.

Here, with American Ballet Theatre in 2013, Cory Stearns breathtakingly performed the poetic, heroic cavalier role of the second movement with depth and finesse. His ballerina, the often erratic Veronika Part, remained her erratic self, looking unsure of herself and her own strength at one moment and less so at others. In the bounding, showy third movement, unofficial guest artists Natalia Osipova and Ivan Vasiliev brought their own brio, however potentially un-Balanchinean, into the mix, to the audible delight of audiences.

The second bill began with a work new to American Ballet Theatre, but not to New York, a most welcome staging

of Frederick Ashton's richly human and deftly classical adaptation of Turgenev's dramatic play, *A Month in the Country*. Framed by Julia Trevelyan Oman's summer-scented setting and costumes in an effective array of creamy whites and azure blues, the one-act ballet from 1976, caringly staged for the company by Anthony Dowell and Grant Coyle, is like little else on U.S. ballet stages nowadays. However high the standards set by the original cast from Britain's Royal Ballet, notably in the leading-role portrayals of Lynn Seymour and Dowell, American Ballet Theatre mostly rose to the mark impressively.

The first cast (of two) was the better. Julie Kent had all the requisite depth of changeable character and classical clarity as the central figure of Natalia Petrovna. As Beliaev, the tutor whose arrival at the summer residence gives the action its dramatic twists as he becomes irresistible to almost everyone in the household, Roberto Bolle was wonderfully dashing and if not quite as deft as Dowell, still artful and riveting.

Next up in programming that departed from American Ballet Theatre's run of multi-act, narrative works came *Shostakovich Trilogy*, a triple bill of new ballets by ABT artist-in-residence Alex-

ei Ratmansky. Two of these, *Chamber Symphony* and *Piano Concerto #1*, were world premieres that joined *Symphony #9*, which the company first showed here last fall at City Center. Brought together, with the composer's ninth symphony to lead off, the trilogy is presented as essentially individual ballets "about" their music, which indeed they are. The choreographer has chosen to offer no specific annotations to elaborate the program's credits and casting.

For all three parts, George Tsypin has credit for scenery and Keso Dekker for costuming. These visual elements, along with Jennifer Tipton's sensitive lighting, flavour the choreography's music-inspired scheme with hints of the music's time and place of creation. This means the composer's years in Soviet Russia from 1933 for *Piano Concerto #1*, 1960 for *Chamber Symphony* and 1945 for *Symphony #9*.

With Ratmansky's statement that he worked to make his individual ballets decidedly different, the bill is essentially a triptych, that is, a trio of works inter-related and yet distinct. Tsypin's "scenery" is limited to background decoration, each of which harkens to Soviet Russian aesthetics.

Chamber Symphony gets its décor late,



after all the dancers involved have been introduced. These, in addition to eight couples of hardworking ensemble dancers surrounding the ballet's semi-prominent secondary couple, are dominated by a heroic, "golden" couple in the persons of a handsome Marcelo Gomes and statuesque Polina Semionova, with a mercurial Herman Cornejo acting for all the world like an actual fleet messenger recalling Mercury himself. Eventually, "colouring" this world of athletic action shaded here and there by emotive and furtive glances, comes Tsypin's sky-blue wall of heroic men and women, who float in a firmament dotted by red elements such as unfurled flags. As we know, the post-Second World War era of Shostakovich's music included both Soviet hero worship and victimized citizens.

Chamber Symphony (music arranged by Rudolf Barshai) features a central male dancer, perhaps suggesting the composer himself, whose seemingly sickly behaviour echoes that of an ailing Shostakovich. Looming in the background is Tsypin's reworking of large portrait heads in the style of Russian avant-garde and "anti-cubist" painter Pavel Filonov, who himself was a tragic Soviet artist who died of starvation. David Hallberg, as the ballet's protagonist in the first cast, effectively telescoped the choreographer's dramatic and emotional points. As his character made his way with dancing and gesture, he found himself within a "world" where he encountered three prominent women, likely inspired by Shostakovich's own three wives.

Climactically and most stirringly, *Piano Concerto #1* features a stellar first cast of Osipova, Vasiliev, Stearns and Diana Vishneva. All have solo and duet choreography that emphasizes virtuosity and super-human strength. Behind the activity for the potent leads and another ensemble of eight couples, is an expanse of Tsypin's hung with individual, often three-dimensional objects in the form of nuts, bolts, geometric shapes and even an airplane. All these enlarged, toy-like pieces are coloured red-hot vermilion. Glowing reds find reflection in the body suits of the ensemble, which are red in the back of gunmetal fronts, giving the men and women wearing them the appearance of catching heat from offstage furnaces. Some of Ratmansky's daring formations suggest the gymnastic, dance-as-sport interests of experimental Soviet dance in the 1920s.

Shostakovich Trilogy will likely suggest more and more "meanings" as time goes by. Ratmansky is wise to refrain from spelling out in program notes any of the dramatic or biographical aspects indicated within his ballet. For now, American Ballet Theatre audiences can take in just how rewardingly Ratmansky's dance-making looks, Janus-like, into his music, heeding its motor and atmospheric elements while finding distinct challenges that spur the individual dancers chosen to lead the charge of his vision. ▼

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Britain

by Kathrine Sorley Walker



César Morales and artists of Birmingham Royal Ballet in *Aladdin*
Photo: Bill Cooper

Talking points recently for two of Britain's ballet companies — Birmingham Royal Ballet and English National Ballet — have been about directors rather than dancers and productions. David Bintley, artistic director of Birmingham Royal Ballet since 1995, has also acted as artistic director of the National Ballet of Japan in Tokyo since 2010. This ambitious workload means he has been in charge of two sets of repertoire and dancers. Fortunately, he has excellent backup in both countries from assistant directors, ballet masters and répétiteurs.

Bintley is also a leading choreographer and last March the Birmingham company brought to the London Coliseum a production of *Aladdin* he created in Tokyo in 2008. Music by Carl Davis, and designs by Dick Bird (sets) and Sue Blane (costumes) provided a handsome spectacle based on the familiar *Arabian Nights* tale. According to program notes, Bintley decided that to suit the Japanese dancers his choreography "should tell the story with just the steps, and not ... ask for big acting performances." So, in London, we were

given a long evening that disappointingly depended much more on dance than on dramatic development. It included a six-part divertissement for jewels, episodes of Chinese-style lion and martial arts, and some pleasingly lyrical, and excellently performed, duets for Aladdin (César Morales) and his Princess (Nao Sakuma).

English National Ballet has adapted to many artistic directors since it was founded in 1950 as London Festival Ballet. In taking it over, Tamara Rojo has inherited a notable part of British ballet history as well as a group of outstanding dancers. Like most first-time directors, she plans to give the company a "brand-new image" and (following a recognizable 21st-century tendency) has recruited "an iconic British fashion house" (linked with Dame Vivienne Westwood) to set up advertising and marketing publicity to make them "the U.K.'s most creative and most loved ballet company."

Her first triple bill opened April 18 at the London Coliseum with Jiří Kylián's *Petite Mort* (a synonym for orgasm), danced by an admirable group of six couples. Created by Nederlands Dans

Theater for the 1991 Mozart Bicentennial Festival in Salzburg, it was given its British premiere by Rambert Dance Company in 1994. An aggressive work beginning with six men exercising with fencing foils, it develops into a series of sexy grappling and wrestling duets, featuring striking images of intertwined limbs and bodies.

Roland Petit's great early work *Le Jeune Homme et la Mort* was acquired for English National Ballet by its previous director, Wayne Eagling, in 2011. It remains a finely poised and succinct dramatic ballet, even though it no longer captures the distinctive mood of French artistic decadence that it possessed when created by Jean Babilée and Nathalie Philippart. This time it was forcefully danced by guest artist Nicolas Le Riche and Rojo herself. The evening ended with Harald Lander's *Études*, which has been in the company repertoire since 1955. A strenuous and demanding display of classical ballet class technique, it was worthily, if not quite brilliantly enough, tackled.

On May 14, Northern Ballet brought to Sadler's Wells David Nixon's latest production, *The Great Gatsby*. Over his

years as the company's artistic director, Nixon has established himself as a creator of long story ballets who understands how to vary moods and tempi, to create character and action through dance. He also often benefits from collaborating over scenarios with Patricia Doyle.

Gatsby has an appropriate score edited and orchestrated by John Longstaff from music by Richard Rodney Bennett, as well as clever and elegant designs by Jérôme Kaplan. Choreographically it is fluent, fascinating and witty for two-thirds of its length, capturing the period style and atmosphere of the *Gatsby* milieu rather than developing a storyline or reflecting the deeper nuances of F. Scott Fitzgerald's classic novel; but, sadly, it loses impetus in the last few scenes. It is, however, a proficient and rewarding production, and the deeply engaged cast was led by Tobias Batley (*Gatsby*), Martha Leebolt (*Daisy*), Giuliano Contadini (*Nick*) and Hannah Bateman (*Jordan*).

Northern Ballet also brought a pleasing short ballet for small children, *The Ugly Duckling*. The choreographers, Dreda Blow and Sebastian Loe, sensibly told the tale in short episodes that were bright, clearly defined and easy for the young audience to follow. Flat-footed ducklings were contrasted with an appealing cygnet on pointe (delightfully danced by Isabella Gasparini), who met a jolly pair of acrobatic frogs and a menacing fox before becoming a tutu-clad swan.

At Covent Garden, the Royal Ballet concentrated on familiar works like Makarova's version of Petipa's *La Bayadère*, which ends with the spectacular collapse of the temple. This time, although the long entry of the corps de ballet in the Kingdom of Shades remained hypnotic, the ensuing scene failed to achieve the exquisite poetry of Nureyev's long-ago staging.

MacMillan's grim tragedy *Mayerling* continues to be one of the company's finest offerings, and its outstanding and testing leading role of Crown Prince Rudolf is currently superbly danced and interpreted by Edward Watson.

As for new works, at the Linbury Studio Theatre in May, Liam Scarlett staged his first full-evening ballet, *Hansel and Gretel*. In spite of a commissioned score by Dan Jones and an ingenious two-level setting with a cellar below the witch's house designed by Jon Bausor, the production suffered from insufficient variety in dance invention and far too much straining after novelty and contemporary allusions. Influenced

by current news about dysfunctional families, kidnapping, pornography and child abuse, Scarlett contrived a new scenario for the Grimm fairy tale with a hard-hearted stepmother (Laura Morera) instead of a cruel birth mother, a paedophilic middle-aged male (Brian Maloney) instead of a female witch, and a Sandman (Steven McRae) altered into a sinister robot who delivered the straying children (Leanne Cope and James Hay) into the witch's clutches. As with Humperdinck's opera, it was unconvincing to have adults pretending to be children.

Back in 2001, William Trevitt and Michael Nunn deserted the Royal Ballet (and classical ballet) for modern dance to establish BalletBoyz. They were steadily successful, but, in 2010, they took a new direction as hands-on directors of BalletBoyz: The Talent, finding and coaching a team of emerging male dancers from various countries in new dance works. Their pleasurable season at Sadler's Wells last March comprised two contrasted works. Liam Scarlett's *Serpent*, to music by Max Richter, produced partnerships, lifts and groupings with fluency and purpose. In *Fallen*, the admirable Russell Maliphant displayed masterly controlled imagery and impe-

tus in choreography set to an electronic score by Armand Amar.

The National Ballet of Canada, in its first British visit after 28 years, brought Ratmansky's *Romeo and Juliet* to Sadler's Wells in April. This was indeed a welcome return, showing us an entirely new and very attractive company of dancers — but personally I wished they had brought a mixed repertoire. So many differing versions of Prokofiev's *Romeo and Juliet* from a great number of international companies have reached London! Ratmansky's version has its own character as rather more a perpetuum mobile of dancing than a deeply moving drama, but Heather Ogden as Juliet and Guillaume Côté as Romeo danced and acted with memorable charm and sensitivity.

Another visiting company, at the Coliseum, was the Mikhailovsky Ballet from St. Petersburg, which presented *Giselle*, *Don Quixote* and Chabukiani's *Laurencia* revised by Mikhail Messerer (little more than a collector's piece). The particular delight in each case came from the leading partnership of the delightful Natalia Osipova (who is shortly joining the Royal Ballet at Covent Garden) and the notably aerial Ivan Vasiliev. ▼

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Never was a dancer as revered as Nureyev, who died 20 years ago in Paris. Over this past year, he has been remembered in France through a number of special evenings celebrating his work and extraordinary persona. He remains one of the last super-icons of dance, one so indestructible that longstanding friend Charles Jude, who organized the Nureyev and Friends Gala at the Palais des Congrès in Paris at the end of May, thought nothing of kicking off the evening by praising both his talent and his tyranny. Nureyev, Jude said, was as fun-loving and giving as he was obnoxious, recalling his famous mantra: "Pas parler, faite!" (No talking, just do it!).

In fact, the rare footage projected

on a screen throughout the evening spoke for itself. Even on film, the man radiated enough aura and grandeur to make members of the younger generation watching fall eternally in love with him. The footage was excellent and so, in fact, was the whole evening, focusing on Nureyev's fruitful tenure as Paris Opera director and on his constant efforts to revive Petipa.

Besides it was a rare opportunity in Paris to catch up with the world's stars, starting with Tamara Rojo, now directing English National Ballet, hardly ever seen in Paris, who gave two refined and compelling performances opposite the Royal Ballet's Federico Bonelli in extracts from *Manon* and *Marguerite and Armand*.

Other ballerinas admired at the gala

included Iana Salenko of Berlin Ballet in *La Sylphide*, Daria Vasnetsova in *Swan Lake* and Evgenia Obraztsova in both *La Bayadère* and *Sleeping Beauty*.

Aurélie Dupond, supreme étoile of the Paris Opera, showed off her full majesty in an extract from *Raymonda* opposite long-injured étoile Mathias Heymann, one of the most acute technicians in the company. Heymann also soulfully performed an extract from *Manfred* later in the evening.

Other contemporary extracts included *Petite Mort* by Jiří Kylián, who Nureyev had invited to the Paris Opera. It was stylishly performed by dancers from the Ballet de l'Opéra de Bordeaux directed by Jude. Also on the program was 1997's *Two Pieces for Het* by Dutch choreographer Hans van Manen, who first led Nureyev into more contemporary spheres. The only thing missing was something by Forsythe, whose career was propelled by Nureyev following *In the Middle*, *Somewhat Elevated* created for the super-dancers of the Nureyev era.

The evening ended ideally with the pas de deux from *Le Corsaire* in which the young Tatar baffled the drooling Parisian crowd back in the sixties. It was compellingly performed by budding star Vadim Muntagirov, 23, who trained in Perm before joining the Royal Ballet School. Now a principal at English National Ballet, he has just received a Benois award in Moscow and seems to be on a mighty roll.

Rarely shown as a full-length production, Joseph Mazilier's *Corsaire*, created in 1856 in Paris to a poem by Byron and music by Adolphe Adam, was revived in May by former Paris Opera étoile Kader Belarbi, now directing Le Ballet du Capitole in Toulouse.

A story of love and revenge, first set in a lush harem and ending in disaster at sea, *Le Corsaire* is a long Oriental epic tale whose flamboyant imagery was savoured in the second half of the 19th century. Belarbi's obvious main ambition was to cut it in length and visual luxury.

He was aided in that by Sylvie Olivé, who thought up a stark and clever white set to enhance the shimmering fabrics of Olivier Bériot's refined costumes. The *Corsaire*, in fact, seems to like his purple doublet so much that he keeps it even in the final pyrotechnical action — a chaste change maybe not for the better.

But, overall, the ballet, augmented with twirling Dervishes and personal

France

by François Fargue



touches, works wonderfully well thanks to a clear dramatic staging, and to the young and vigorous dancers of the company, but most of all to the main protagonists — Maria Gutierrez as the bewitching slave girl and David Galstyan as Corsaire, both principals in the company, as well as Kateryna Shalkina from Béjart Ballet and Yoel Carreño now in the Norwegian National Ballet, alternating as guests in the lead roles.

The most-hyped event at the Paris Opera was by far a new *Bolero*, a commission to very talented Flemish enfant terrible Sidi Larbi Cherkaoui in collaboration with longstanding sidekick Damien Jalet and queen mother of performance art Marina Abramović, who came up with the huge tilted mirror. Albeit not a novel idea, it is a nifty device to reflect both the myriad moving circles of light onstage as well as the twirling dancers, blending together to form a magical kaleidoscope.

The effect is nothing short of stunning, but expectation soon grows as the random twirling keeps its steady pace heedless of Ravel's famously mounting score. Yet they never alter their somewhat slow, hypnotic, dizzying trance until the end.

Not a feat of technical prowess for the Paris Opera dancers — unless you count their resilience to dizziness — the piece is if anything the most spectacular anticlimax ever. Which obviously it aimed to be. Cherkaoui's idea was clearly to resist his predecessors' urge to follow the mounting rhythm. Instead he seems to have taken Ravel at his own words when he disparagingly summed up his *Bolero* as a piece that just went round in circles.

In typical Abramović style — the woman would look well at home in the Addams Family and is known to deal in the macabre — the piece is steeped in esotericism and death (the gorgeous see-through leotards embroidered in lacy skeletons are courtesy of Italian designer Ricardo Tisci) but also light serenity. Those twirling skeletons feel like souls floating in peaceful eternity. It's possibly one of the best creations commissioned by director Brigitte Lefèvre for the company in 20 years. ▼

Spain

by Justine Bayod Espoz

When confronted with the devastating effects of the economic crisis in Spain, the more optimistic members of the cultural sector are likely to remind us that “necessity is the mother of invention” and that hard times contribute to richer, more creative and better honed works of art. Those with a more cynical point of view argue that the less money there is, the less possibility there will be to cover up a lack of artistic quality with costly flash and glitz, revealing an arts scene of questionable merit.

When it comes to Spain's flamenco scene, need does not appear to have had a positive influence on the creative process. Unfortunately, the pessimists and the cynics seem to be winning this ideological debate, as the quality and originality of flamenco productions have dropped steadily over the past four years. With the exception of a handful of works, the average flamenco show — at least the ones that make it to the major festivals and theatres — is not nearly as engrossing, moving or even relevant as its pre-crisis counterparts.

Most notably, a lack of originality, both on artistic and institutional levels, has left a negative impression on the current flamenco scene. For proof of this look no further than the programming of Spain's two most important flamenco festivals: the Seville Biennial Flamenco Festival and the Jerez Festival. Some programming overlap is always expected, so it's not particularly surprising to know that five of the more than 35 dance performances at the 2012 Seville Biennial had been staged at previous editions of the Jerez Festival. However, the fact that the 2013 Jerez Festival programmed seven dance performances (one fourth of the total dance productions) that appeared at the Biennial no more than four months prior is harder to swallow. And if we add the number of repeated musical performances, the total overlap just about doubles.

This similarity in programming may not matter much to locals, but it is a deciding factor for those of us who travel either nationally or internationally for these festivals. By the festivals' own admission, their success relies heavily on outside patronage, but why would people pay the cost of travel, lodging and meals to see a stale artistic lineup?

Repetition is not only a problem across flamenco festivals, but also across editions of the same festival. There is no better example than with Jerez, which may blame steadily declining attendance on the economic crisis, but at some point must also accept that these dwindling numbers could be because they program the same artists year in, year out. Once known for presenting the freshest performances and most promising newcomers, the Jerez Festival is losing its importance and edge due to a poorly designed programming strategy.

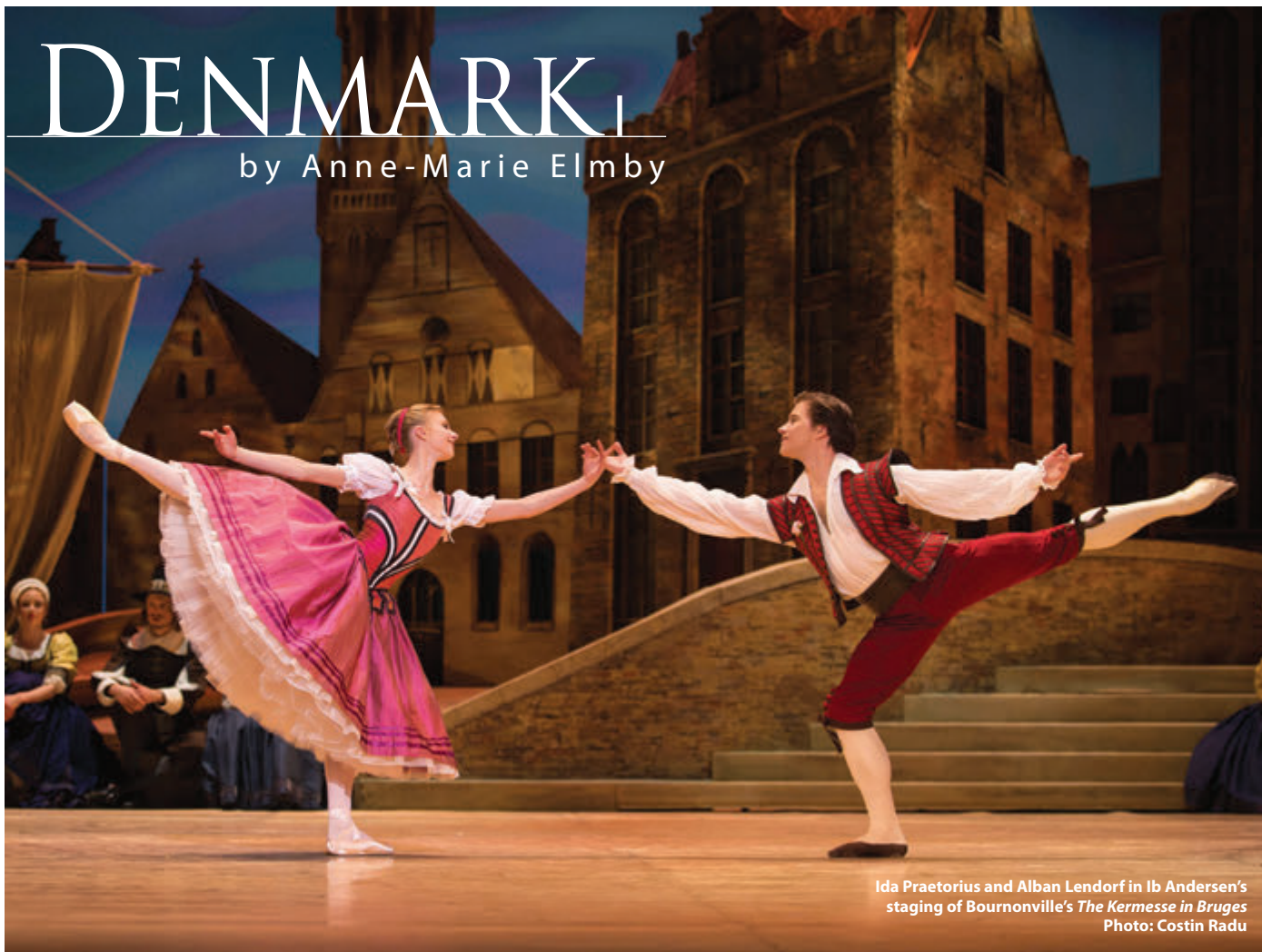
Prior to the 2012 edition, a member of the Jerez Festival programming department openly admitted during a phone conversation that the festival was not as open to programming performances by young or lesser-known flamenco artists because budget cuts were “forcing” them to select more “commercial” artists to attract larger audiences. From the poor attendance this year, it would seem the plan backfired. The festival is attended by flamenco students, professionals and serious enthusiasts — this is not the type of community that seeks hype over substance.

This pervasive idea that what audiences want now is pure commercial entertainment is in my opinion a mistake of epic proportions. The Suma Flamenca Festival in Madrid may do a good job of steering clear of productions staged at the Jerez and Seville festivals, but its programming is substantially more off-putting, mainly because it repeatedly programs the same handful of expensive big-name artists that are guaranteed to fill the theatre (although this year, even they're not living up to expectations) and then populate the rest of the program with sub-par, presumably “cheap” shows. Suma is also known for working with a rather loose definition of flamenco, as relatively well-known pop musicians with the most minimal of flamenco influences are known to headline.

What's most troublesome about this commercial tunnel vision is that it leaves no room for young and up-and-coming performers and choreographers. The easy sell is all that matters. If the headlining artist's name or reputation isn't enough to draw media attention and quick ticket sales, the production is often overlooked by the large organizations tasked with promoting flamenco nationally and internationally. Spain has a long track record of not assisting the younger generation establish themselves professionally — explaining in part why national youth unemployment is more than 50 percent. The flamenco community should take this as a sign of what it can expect if it doesn't take a long, hard look at the facts and begin applying more creative programming strategies. ▼

DENMARK

by Anne-Marie Elmbj



Ida Praetorius and Alban Lendorf in Ib Andersen's staging of Bournonville's *The Kermesse in Bruges*
Photo: Costin Radu

The Royal Danish Ballet's spring season in Copenhagen offered an evening of two of August Bournonville's ballets in new stagings. With *La Ventana* (*The Window*), principal Gudrun Bojesen had her debut as director. To set the scene, Bojesen included a prologue for a guitar player and a flamenco singer, who express the low spirits of a character called the Señor. The female singer encourages him with a red rose that he throws through the window to his beloved, the Señorita, who dances with her own image in front of a mirror and happily reacts to the rose. A Spanish flavoured pas de deux is followed by variations for the couple and their friends all danced with the natural ease that honours Bournonville's maxim: dance is an expression of joy. As the Señor, the slender Alexander Stæger embodied a believable change from melancholy to joyful love, and Diana Cuni's Señorita radiated both charm and joie de vivre to the sound of the castanets.

Bournonville created *The Kermesse in Bruges, or The Three Gifts*, in 1851, a year when the Danes were in a generally

optimistic time period; also, an old theatre attendant had advised him that the audience wanted something cheerful. Inspired by Flemish old master paintings, Bournonville wanted to make their characters come alive.

The present staging was by Danish-born Ib Andersen, artistic director of Ballet Arizona. In his youth, he had learned the role of Carelis from a teacher of the Bournonville tradition, the late Hans Brenå, whom he calls "the funniest man ever." The scenography was by Jérôme Kaplan, who in 2010 made the set and costumes for Christopher Wheeldon's new *Sleeping Beauty* for the Royal Danish Ballet. Now he returned with a meticulously researched scenography inspired by actual architecture in Bruges and costumes from 17th-century paintings.

On opening night, the young couple was danced by a sweet Ida Praetorius (Eleanora) and principal Alban Lendorf (Carelis), who, in spite of his many dramatic roles of late, has not forgotten the spontaneous naturalness that keeps Bournonville's ballets alive. The second night, Andreas Kaas, who won this

year's Erik Bruhn competition together with Praetorius, was finely matched with a new, young talent, Stephanie Chen Gundorph, who bestowed the part with poetic grace.

Under Andersen's direction, Adrian's musketeer's attitude gave occasion for spectacular sword fights. The scene with the down-to-earth Gert and the blindly infatuated Madame van Everdingen, enhanced with a foppish servant, became pure comedy. Machen displayed a firecracker temper, while Johanne weepily hid her face in a handkerchief at the slightest provocation. Mother Trutje's no-nonsense manner even resulted in her spanking Gert for his escapades. There were snobbish, womanizing noblemen, and noblewomen comically swooning over Gert with the ring, with one little page boy holding his mistress' long train and running as fast as he could to keep up with her turns in the dances.

Both casts were excellently chosen, proving the company's comic acting talent, where everybody could contribute with witty details. It was evident the dancers enjoyed themselves as well as

amused the audience. Some previous stagings have accentuated the darker side of the magic and given Mirewelt and his alchemist world a more prominent place, as Bournonville's libretto opens up the possibility for multiple interpretations. Andersen favoured the entertaining aspect and breathed new life into the story.

In 2003, on a tour to Cuba with his company, Granhøj Dance, choreographer Palle Granhøj met local dancer Aline Sanchez Rodriguez. She eventually came to Denmark and in 2006 he created what he calls a "performance portrait," *Aline Alone*, based on her autobiographical material.

In the moving, updated sequel, *Aline Not Alone*, the dancer has become a mother. In close interplay with two responsive musicians, percussionist Niels Kilele and singer Thierry Boisdon, a human destiny unfolds in front of us. In a medley of ballet and modern, Cuban

and African dance, interspersed with her beautiful singing, Aline takes us through a range of sentiments from the quietly meditative to sensual explosions, where her dancing goes into dialogue with the heated rhythms of a drum.

To celebrate the centenary of the first performance of *Le Sacre du Printemps* in 1913, Tim Rushton, artistic director of Danish Dance Theatre, initiated a collaboration with the orchestra Copenhagen Phil. During several months, dance intermediaries from Dansehallerne (the Dance Halls) as well as musicians from the orchestra visited eight schools spread over the island of Zealand. In workshops, they introduced the children to dance movement and Stravinsky's complicated score, inspiring them to make sequences that could be included in the final choreography.

Rushton's *Sacre du Printemps* had a mother fleeing with her son from unknown forces embodied by groups of

children in earth-coloured costumes who rushed onto the stage in menacing formation. The son was danced by a boy with karate training, who performed with unaffected straightforwardness.

The performance took place in a round building, a former gasworks, now used as a theatre, which allowed groups of dancers to enter from four directions. It was amazing to witness how the 200 children, sometimes in groups, sometimes all together, became part of the work. At times they interacted with the 12 professional dancers, at other times they had their own interesting movement patterns.

In the climax, the whole stage became a seething vortex that whirled the chosen one high into the air. The result was highly successful and by far surpassed any pedagogical intention. According to comments from the enthusiastic children, *Sacre* was an experience of a lifetime. ▼

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Oslo Dance Ensemble is the only group in Norway with jazz dance as its specialty. The company toured the country in March and April, visiting more than 26 stages with a three-ballet program called *Move*. When you leave the big cities in Norway, dance is a strange bird on the cultural sky, and it is often a hard task to fill seats. So it was a great pleasure to see that the theatre in the small city of Larvik, where I caught up with the tour, was full with enthusiastic youth.

To reduce the barriers between stage and auditorium, the dancers did their warm-up with an open curtain while the audience entered the theatre, and the stage manager introduced each dancer. First on the program was the choreographic duo Subjazz — comprised of Karl-Erik Nedregaard and Knut Arild Flatner — with their work *Morph*.

The dancers look like they are trying to break out of a cellar. Why and where they want to go is not easy to say, and when they suddenly do break free, one wonders why they didn't do it earlier. Before the two men leave, there is a lot of strong dancing, but that's all: there's no human interaction between them.

Jo Strømgren is one of our greatest exports within the arts. Ten years back, he created *Kvart (Square)* for Oslo Dance Ensemble and the company brought it back for this tour. The question that pops up is has the piece survived the years? It is good to be able to say, yes, definitely.

Strømgren is very clever in the way he uses the stage, which gives the choreography a strong flow. The music, composed by Maria Tanase and Kimmo Pohjonen, goes faster and faster, and the dancers end up in a fantastic whirlwind. The all-white costumes by Johanna Sutinen help create the positive result, as do the dancers' great performances.

The last piece, *Just2dance* by Antonio Ferraz, is just for pleasure. It is a combination ballroom and jazz dance with beautiful gowns for the ladies, and white ties, tails, top hats and canes for the men.

In Oslo, Snelle Hall and Siri Jøntvedt, who have

many years of collaboration behind them, performed their latest production *Skapet (The Closet)* at Dansens Hus in March. Their theme was openness ... can everything survive the sharp daylight or are there some things that should be kept a secret? Out of the closet came aggression, jealousy and waves of secret feelings. The two women move between sad storytelling and wild humorous moments. It is absolutely hysterical when, at the end, they put everything they brought out of the closet back into it. How they managed, I still don't understand.

Another special evening took place on the Norwegian Opera's small stage. Cina Espejord has done some very successful work for the Norwegian National Ballet, for whom she still dances. Espejord's *Over hodet, under huden (Over the Head, Under the Skin)* is special in the way she has asked the company dancers to talk about themselves as they are dancing. The audience gets to know them quite well before the evening is over.

Dancers who are not Norwegian talked about how they found their way to this company so far away and how, for some, it was difficult to settle in. Some

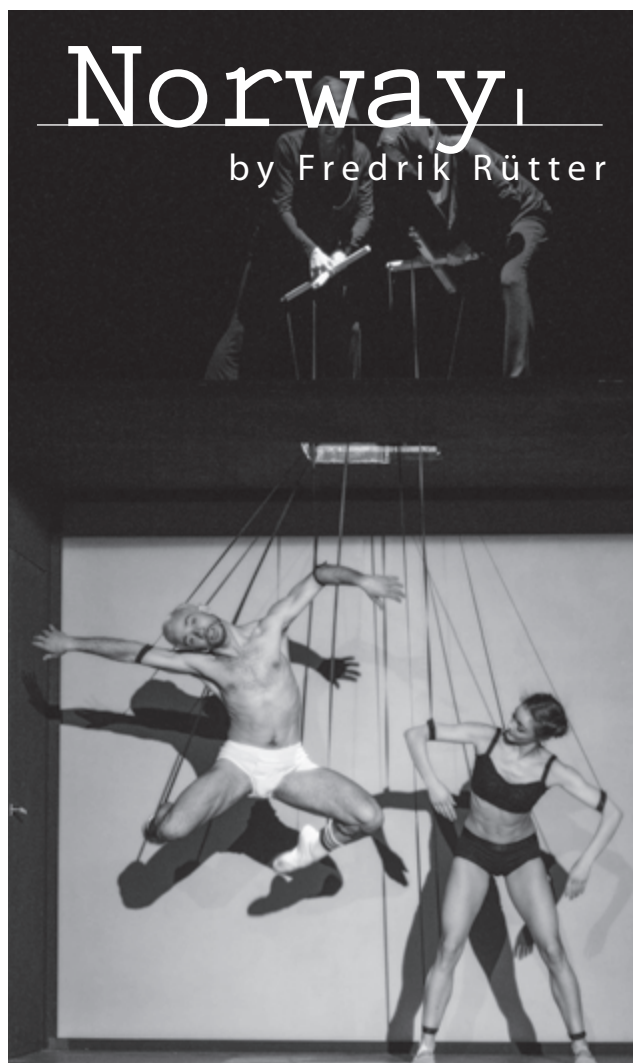
talked about why they had started dancing and about retirement. We learned that it could be tough for dancers with children, especially if both parents work in the same company. Espejord managed to create the dancing in harmony with what the dancers shared about themselves. It worked out beautifully, but I would assume that it will not be an easy piece to repeat with a different cast.

On the big stage at the Opera, the Norwegian National Ballet offered a great mixed bill with three ballets by Jiří Kylián under the title *Different Shores*. The pieces spanned nearly 30 years, showing the development Kylián has made as a choreographer, while, at the same time, reminding us how strong even his first ballets are. An evening with Kylián is a combination of many things, and can be mystical, magical, intense, humorous and dark, and, of course, there is a lot of good dancing. *Stepping Stones, Gods and Dogs* and *Soldiers' Mass* are very different in style, but all three carry Kylián's beautiful and exciting signature style.

A few guests visited Oslo this spring, too. Belgian choreographer Wim Vandekeybus and his company Ultima Vez came to Dansens Hus with two different evenings. *What the Body Does Not Remember* was his breakthrough piece 25 years back and has now been reconstructed. Once again, it works and is still worth seeing. The second evening featured a much newer production, *Nieuwzwart (The New Black)*, as physical as his first piece.

The GöteborgsOperans Danskompani, which is connected with the opera house in Gothenburg, Sweden's second largest city, came in the beginning of June to Dansens Hus with two quite new works. The company used to be classically oriented, but has changed focus under new director Adolphe Binder, a German who has taken the group in a modern direction.

Your Passion is Pure Joy to Me, by Stijn Celis, was forgettable, but *Untitled Black* by Sharon Eyal and Gai Behar from Israel will stay in the memory for a long time. The dancers came out as from another universe and the choreography can be compared with filigree. ▼



Marco Pagetti and Natasha Jones in Cina Espejord's *Over hodet, under huden*
Photo: Erik Berg

Australia

by Jordan Beth Vincent
in Melbourne

When Daniel Riley McKinley premiered his work *Riley* as part of Bangarra Dance Theatre's evening-length program *Of Earth and Sky* three years ago, it was clear

the company had a promising new choreographic voice emerging from within its ranks. A dancer with the company since 2007, McKinley moved seamlessly into choreography with a piece that illustrated his cultural heritage as a member of the Riley clan of the Wiradjuri people.

McKinley's newest work, *Scar*, also forms one chapter in a larger work, *Blak*, a three-part collaboration that toured to Melbourne from the company's home in Sydney in May. In *Scar*, which opens *Blak*, McKinley further develops his earlier investigation into contemporary indigenous identity, and again utilizes the episodic structure in which a single work features multiple scenes with different sets and costumes, a format preferred by Bangarra's artistic director Stephen Page.

Scar offers a dark vision of indigenous masculinity in an urban landscape, offering a commentary on some of the difficulties for young men of indigenous heritage with drugs, alcohol and violence. The men of *Scar* are angry and lost; they find modern parallels to traditional coming-of-age rituals in acts of violence. Suicide, fighting, drug-induced stomping celebrations — *Scar* paints a bleak picture of the world for young men torn between different cultures.

Scar begins with the male dancers hooded in metallic, black jumpers. The dark gleam of the costumes, designed by Luke Ede, is mirrored in Jacob Nash's set design, which looks as though it features lava rocks worming their way across the sky. This is a decidedly grungy Bangarra — the dancers crouch, tumble and roll under the glow of amber lights and behind screens of smoke. In one scene, a dancer traces a line of red paint from his navel to his chin. It looks like a strip of blood — as though he has been sliced through the gut — but this moment also references the use of ochre in traditional rituals.

McKinley's movement vocabulary draws on rhythms associated with hip-hop, including the isolated jerks of hips, shoulders and elbows. There is an interesting juxtaposition between traditional movement and urban rhythms throughout, and between sharp movements and wide, sweeping ones that skim the floor.

The second movement of *Blak* is Page's *Yearning*, a dance for the company's women. Like *Scar*, *Yearning* has a strong political commentary, investigating challenges faced by contemporary in-

igenous women, such as domestic and sexual violence. In one striking scene, the women sit in a line on cheap plastic chairs — they could be in a waiting room or a train station — then one by one walk downstage to perform solos. Some are more lighthearted than others, but as the women return to their seats and stare blankly ahead, it is almost as though any such expression is ultimately futile. For both the men and women in *Scar* and *Yearning*, there is an underlying dissatisfaction about connecting to culture within the modern world.

The final section, *Keeping*, is directed by Page and co-choreographed by Page and McKinley, and offers a kind of resolution as the men and women come together. The black, lava-like substance that Nash uses across the backdrops for *Scar* and *Yearning* now seems to have transformed into fabric for the dancers. Wearing gleaming black briefs and bras, this is more skin than we are used to seeing from Bangarra. The impression is one of a slick modernity.

The work's final tableau has the entire company gathered upstage, staring past a curtain of falling sand at the audience. Through the dimness, we see faces watching and waiting; this gathering of bodies is a quintessential Bangarra pose. The streaming sands can be interpreted as passing time, or even as a kind of metaphor for the dim curtain that still divides indigenous from non-indigenous Australia.



Blak walks the line between the urban and traditional, reflecting, in a deep sense, the very essence of Bangarra. This is a company that speaks to a diverse and wide-ranging audience, and takes its position as the country's leading indigenous dance company very seriously through community partnerships and extensive touring. From an artistic perspective, the company has cultivated a specific cultural aesthetic, developed through ongoing collaborations between Stephen Page, composer David Page (his brother), costume designer Jennifer Irwin and set designer Nash. These collaborations have been generally successful, yet also a little predictable.

Blak marks a significant change of direction. Costumes by Ede are sleek and metallic, and David Page has collaborated with composer Paul Mac to create a score that balances voice and recordings of traditional language with techno beats and sirens. These are interesting collaborations; neither Ede nor Mac has experience working with dance.

In a very real sense, it is as though Bangarra is throwing open the doors, testing, perhaps, how their stories can be enhanced or diluted with different influences. At the very least, Stephen Page is signaling an interest in expanding the team, and for a company settling into its 22nd year with the same artistic director, this is potentially more than just a succession plan. It is a vision for the future. ▼

RUSSIA

by Marc Haegeman



The 12th edition of the Dance Open International Ballet Festival in St. Petersburg took place from April 18 to 22. Initially conceived in 2001 as a series of master classes, Dance Open developed not only into a major annual cultural event in St. Petersburg, but also into one of the more prominent dance festivals featuring talent from around the globe.

Each year, Dance Open welcomes dozens of leading dancers, choreographers, ballet masters and company directors in a nearly weeklong celebration. In 2010, the festival established the International Ballet Award Dance Open, with an international jury presided over by Natalia Makarova, to distinguish remarkable dancers regardless of style or genre.

This year, the festival program was augmented by an evening of recent one-act creations performed by guest companies at the Alexandrinsky Theatre, allowing St. Petersburg audiences to get acquainted with work by Edward Clug, Jacopo Godani and Yuri Possokhov. Another evening in the larger Oktyabrsky Hall was devoted to the history of Russian ballet.

The new works were a mixed bag. The Slovene National Theatre of Maribor brought Clug's version of Igor Stravinsky's *Le Sacre du printemps*. Romanian-born Clug has been heading the Maribor troupe for the last 10 years and as a dancemaker is probably best remembered for his *Radio and Juliet*, a revamp of Shakespeare's popular tale set to music from Radiohead.

For *Le Sacre du printemps*, he stayed on more traditional ground. Sticking rather predictably to the original thematic material (including the braids and painted cheeks of the girls), Clug treated us to yet another pagan tribal sacrifice, although the argument remained way too blurred dramatically to really make its point. He was at his best when staying close to the score, achieving with the simplest of movement

language a real sense of menace (most of the time his dancers move like zombies). Employing a mixed group of 12 in the barest of attire, Clug's main addition to the list of *Sacres* is the use of water, which suddenly comes pouring down during the musical climax of what is normally the Spring Round Dance.

Originality wasn't what made *Spazio-Tempo* from the Italian Godani stand out

either. Enthusiastically performed by the Dresden Semperoper Ballet, it was another of Godani's attempts to be at the cutting edge. The dancers ventured out in Godani's trademark genderless attire, shaped by the ever-present overhead and side spotlights, and engulfed by a rattling soundscape from 48nord. The clip-joint cliché action, the frequent blackouts, the rejection of any human emotion other than violence and aggression — it all smacked so obviously of déjà-vu that even an oldies revival might easily have been more surprising and memorable.

The Bolshoi Ballet brought Possokhov's *Classical Symphony* set to Prokofiev, created for San Francisco Ballet in 2010. While not flawless, it's an edifying and often exciting effort to refresh the classical vocabulary with contrasting steps and combinations, while the overall spirit is one of fun and wit. Moreover, *Classical Symphony* was irresistibly performed by the Bolshoi group, relishing the challenges to the hilt.

The mixed bill titled History of Russian Ballet — with solos, pas de deux and small ensembles — offered an extraordinary trajectory from the era of Arthur Saint-Léon, Jules Perrot and Marius Petipa, to the present day with Alexei Ratmansky, Possokhov and Vasily Medvedev.

The evening included the usual suspects like Mikhail Fokine's *The Dying Swan*, authoritatively danced by the Mariinsky's Uliana Lopatkina, and the Grand Pas from *Don Quixote*, attributed to Alexander Gorsky, joyfully performed by the Bolshoi's Kristina Kretova and the Mikhailovsky's Leonid Sarafanov. Yet it also featured lesser-known gems. The delightful Animated Frescoes pas de quatre by Saint-Léon from Cesare Pugni's *Little Humpbacked Horse* is hardly ever seen outside of Russia. It was on this occasion ravishingly danced by a quartet of Mariinsky and Bolshoi soloists — Anastasia Kolegova, Ekaterina Osmolkina, Elena Evseeva and Anna Tik-

homirova. No less attractive was the Petipa pas de six from Pugni's *La Esmeralda* with Iana Salenko and Dinu Tamazlacaru from Berlin State Ballet in the leads. Another gem was the Viennese Waltz taken from the *Choreographic Miniatures* from Leonid Iakobson.

Soviet-era choreography was also present in Asaf Messerer's show-stopping *Spring Waters*, performed with calculated panache by Evseeva from the Mariinsky and Marat Shemiunov from the Mikhailovsky, and in Rostislav Zakharov's Gopak from *Taras Bulba*, spectacularly danced by the high-flying Denis Medvedev from the Bolshoi. Vasili Vainonen's Basque Dance from *The Flames of Paris* got a blistering account as well by Bolshoi soloists Anastasia Meskova, Denis Savin and Mikhail Lobukhin. The Bolshoi's Evgenia Obraztsova, teaming up again with her former Mariinsky partner Igor Kolb, brought a beating heart to Leonid Lavrovsky's Balcony pas de deux from Prokofiev's *Romeo and Juliet*.

The famous expats of the Russian School weren't overlooked either. George Balanchine was represented by Sterling Hyltin and Amar Ramasar from New York City Ballet in the irresistible The Man I Love from *Who Cares?* Alexei Ratmansky's work was sampled by a fragment from his *Seven Sonatas* set to music by Domenico Scarlatti and danced with gusto by American Ballet Theatre's Luciana Paris and Herman Cornejo. Both choreographers have contributed as none else in expanding and reinvigorating the classical range, always looking forward, yet also reconnecting with the often forgotten or discredited past and keeping a human face in their dance. In this respect, it was rewarding to see a fragment from Vasily Medvedev's *Onegin*, created in 1999 for the Prague National Ballet, sensitively revived by the Paris Opera's Isabelle Ciaravola and the Mariinsky's Yuri Smekalov.

The evening was capped by the feisty Grand pas d'action from *La Bayadère* in Makarova's staging, danced with Petersburg cool and polish by the Mariinsky's Anastasia Kolegova, joined by Denis Matvienko and artists from the Ukrainian National Ballet.

The feast continued the next day with the Gala of International Ballet Stars and the Dance Open awards. This year's Dance Open Grand Prix went to Lucia Lacarra of the Bavarian State Ballet. Elisa Carrillo Cabrera and Mikhail Kanishkin, both with the Berlin State Ballet, as well as Jurgita Dronina from Dutch National Ballet and Fabien Voranger from Dresden Semperoper Ballet, were awarded for best duets. The People's Choice Award went to New York City Ballet's Daniel Ulbricht. ▼

Benois de la Danse days in Moscow are not only one of the more outstanding occasions to test the state of the art, but it's also an interesting opportunity to check how different the artistic approaches of the Russian and Western worlds of dance are 20 years after the fall of the Iron Curtain. Indeed, the Prix Benois de la Danse jury included personalities from around the world, all with varying points of view, brought together by Prix president Yuri Grigorovich. This year's jury was comprised of Het Nationale Ballet director Ted Brandsen, Bayerische Staatsballet director Ivan Liška, Royal Danish Ballet director Nikolaj Hübbe, San Francisco Ballet director Helgi Tomasson, former Bolshoi ballerina Marina Kundraieva, English choreographer David Dawson and English National Ballet director and ballerina Tamara Rojo. They were called upon to make the nominations and then choose the winners in the categories of best male dancer, female dancer and choreographer.

In a press conference, Grigorovich said that although any new jury will bring to the Prix new ideals and aesthetics, he wants to preserve "the Russian soul of dance." Indeed, Russians dancing at home and abroad made up most of the nominees in the first two categories. A Russian journalist dared to ask the jurors if this "Russian invasion" in international companies means that Russian dancers do it better. A question Liška answered with his usual frankness: "Surely in Russia there still exists the highest standard in ballet technique and dancers are exquisite in classical ballet. But, in this country in the field of contemporary choreography, a lot of years and possibilities have been wasted." The need to find artistic challenges with contemporary choreographers, he suggested, may be why so many wonderful Russian dancers are with international companies.

In other words, a conservative attitude that paralyzes true development in the art of dance still prevails — an impression confirmed during the gala of winners at the Bolshoi's oldest stage by the acclaim the audience reserved for the excerpts from *La Fille du Pharaon*, celebrating the lifetime achievement award given to French choreographer Pierre

Lacotte, internationally known for reconstructing lost Romantic-era ballets. (Another lifetime achievement award went to John Neumeier.)

Liška told me after the award ceremony: "The jury's work was very laborious. President Grigorovich asked us to express opinions sincerely and freely and, you know, when 'truth' is involved everything becomes very complicated."

In fact, the results were carefully balanced, which probably made the jurors — in their role of artistic directors — satisfied. That's because every category had winners tied in some way to the jurors (this is the greatest shortcoming of the Prix, as usually they choose dancers and choreographers from their own companies). Nonetheless, this year's chosen ones were truly of the highest level, although with some differences for

candidates were Matthew Golding, Taras Domitro, Edward Watson and Tigran Mikayelyan.

In the female category, the Bolshoi's new wonder Olga Smirnova prevailed over Gudrun Bojesen, Maria Kochetkova, Ksenia Ovsyanick, Ekaterina Petina and Anna Tsigankova.

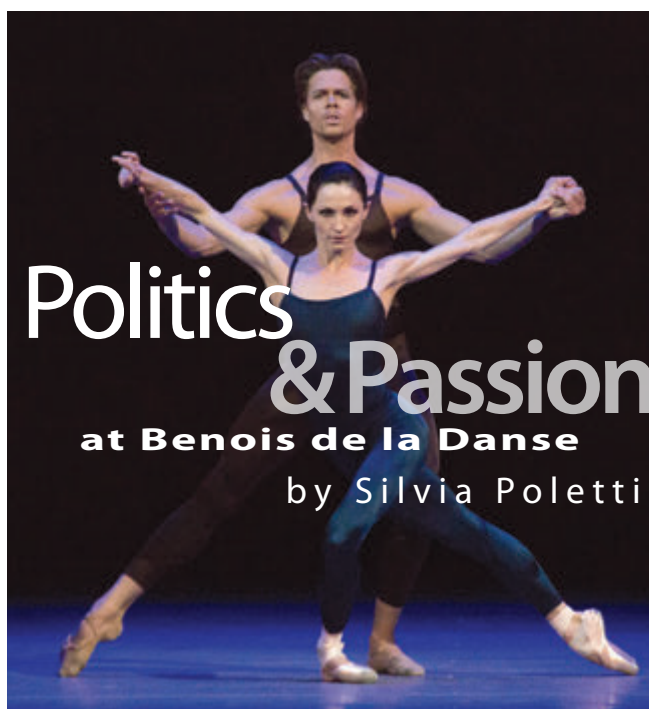
The Charity Gala of the Nominees and the Stars of Benois de la Danse Gala, including winners of previous editions, showed how it is fundamental for a dancer today to be open-minded and able to understand and express any style and technique, in order to carefully transmit the past and also the new challenges of the art.

An example of this range came from San Francisco Ballet's Taras Domitro and an ethereal Maria Kochetkova performing *Giselle pas de deux* with a wonderfully delicate Romantic en-vol style, who then showed dazzling stamina in an excerpt from Wayne McGregor's 2013 *Borderland*.

Although not too accustomed to more radical expressions, Russian audiences understand high-quality contemporary-styled choreography as attested to by the great success of Bayerisches Staatsballet's Ekaterina Petina, Matej Urban and Erik Murzagaliyev dancing the never-ending smooth moves of Russell Maliphant's *Broken Fall*, the extraordinarily deconstructed movement of Kidd Pivot's Jermaine Spivey in a solo from Crystal Pite's *Dark Matters*, and the clever translation of Gertrude Stein's whirling words to movement in Sol León and Paul Lightfoot's *Shutter Shut*, perfectly

danced by Fernando Magadan and Parvaneh Scharafali from Nederlands Dans Theater.

In this wonderful celebration of dance only the renowned French grandeur seemed tarnished in Lacotte's new classic showcase, the very mannered *Celebration*, performed by Ludmila Pagliero with Pierre-Arthur Raveau. What will instead be remembered for a long time is the alchemic mixture of beauty, honesty, bravura, sensibility and passion of an intense Tamara Rojo and the rebel rising star Sergei Polunin, who in an excerpt from Ashton's *Marguerite and Armand* brushed off the dust of time from this piece and made the lovers' passion and sorrow pulse onstage, literally taking my breath away. ▼



age, experience and style.

In the choreographer category, it seemed a little funny to place side-by-side an absolute master of European steely, erotic neoclassicism, Hans Van Manen, who was awarded for his *Variations for Two Couples*, and Christopher Wheeldon, who presented the neoclassic mannerism of his *Cinderella*. (The other nominees were the young Justin Peck and George Williamson.)

Two male dancers took home prizes, the bold and impetuous Alban Lendorf of the Royal Danish Ballet and Vadim Muntagirov, the Russian-born soloist of English National Ballet. It was a pity that the supremely elegant and refined Bolshoi soloist Vladislav Lantratov did not win along with Lendorf. The other

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Demis Volpi / *Krabat*

Demis Volpi is the real thing. If you're searching for a young choreographer to follow, this Stuttgart Ballet innovator is one to watch. After tantalizing hors d'oeuvres like *Little Monsters*, which won the Erik Bruhn Prize for new choreography in Toronto in 2011, and *Private Light*, an illuminating piece for American Ballet Theatre that divided critics in New York that same year, Volpi has tackled his first full-length work. And what a work it is.

Krabat, with libretto by Vivien Arnold and music from Peteris Vasks, Philip Glass, Krzysztof Penderecki and Mulenmusik, is a stunning re-telling of a favourite German story. Based on Otfried Preussler's 1971 novel, *Krabat*, the tale of magic, mystery and the redemptive power of love makes major demands on a choreographer's imagination. For one thing, telling the story in a strict linear fashion just wouldn't work. The book is too dense. There are too many moments you couldn't translate into stage drama. Volpi has chosen to suggest the essence of *Krabat's* story instead.

His ballet — which I saw at the Stuttgart Opera House in July — is about evil incarnate and the way it can ensnare and harness the innocent. Dealing with the entrapment of the spirit and the body, it takes us to a place where love's power to transform destroys wickedness. When *Krabat's* young men, trapped by an evil Master, shuck off their bonds and leap into a world of golden light, it's a metaphor for conquering the greyness of the world. Standing almost naked, they suggest a kind of liberation that can only come from the spirit.

In distilling the narrative's complications, Volpi has heightened the dark mood and atmosphere that permeates the book, retaining its frightening sense of displacement and powerlessness. A strong thread of fantasy tugs the story to its resolution.

In terms of dance, there is stunning contrast between the world inhabited by *Krabat* (the central character) and the world he wants to live in. There are unanswered questions, just as there are in any great fairy tale, and though this isn't technically a fairy story, it has many elements of that seductive format.

We believe in the evil force here as surely as we believe in the Wicked Witch of the West in *The Wizard of Oz*. We believe the Master can inflict pain. We believe that the devil-like Herr Gevatter, a frightening presence who comes once a year, can demand the

death of a callow youth. We also know intuitively it is only through love that *Krabat* can escape his destiny.

Volpi uses sweeping, sculptured movement to propel the story. Fearful birds flap their black and terrifying wings. In contrast, there is ritualistic lurching from the trapped boys that suggests a world of the lost and damned, yearning to be free.

The ballet has a lean look that is carried over into the grey-green designs of Katharina Schlipf's sets and costumes. Lighting from Bonnie Beecher is cold and sinister, offering a chilly look.

What is amazing about Volpi's work is the way he has managed to layer the ballet so it explores a vast emotional landscape even as it retains its simple narrative. Movement is never allowed to tell the whole story. At times stillness fills the terrain with such desperate longing you feel suspended in its trap. Music runs from lushly romantic madrigals to frightening atonal sounds that fuel a sense of surrealism.

The choreography is specific for each character. David Moore's heartbreaking young *Krabat* is open and expansive. His long final solo is a desperate dance of torment, a passionate struggle for release. Sue Jin Kang's Herr Gevatter demonstrates brilliantly sustained, slow, glacier-like motion released through steady steps and quivering fingers. Roman Novitzky's power as the Master is suggested through steps that express cruel repetition and domination.

For pure rapturous abandon, and perhaps a reminder that love is never far away from hate, there is Alexander Jones and Alicia Amatriain's yearning in the first act pas de deux, which captures passion held at the still point. Add Elizabeth Wisenberg's beautiful Die Kantorka and you have a rich cast of characters that make this story live.

Krabat is a keeper.

— GARY SMITH

John Neumeier / Hamburg Ballet Days

They certainly know how to celebrate in Hamburg. During the 39th Hamburg Ballet Days, the company, its school and its National Youth Ballet presented 16 different performances in 21 days. From June 20 through 30 alone, 10 different John Neumeier ballets were staged at the Hamburg Staatsoper, proving this elegant city remains a chrysalis for the making of great storytelling ballets.



Stuttgart Ballet

Hamburg Ballet

Several important things emerged from watching these exquisite works. First, Neumeier, celebrating 40 years as artistic director and chief choreographer at Hamburg Ballet, is one of the most imaginative and intelligent artists working in dance today. Second, his full-length pieces, from *Lady of the Camellias* to *Liliom*, reveal his ability to burrow beneath choreographic inspiration to the place where movement meets music, and create metaphor. There is no greater force in the use of feral imagery, beautifully sustained stage pictures and brilliantly delineated portraits of people in crisis than that unleashed by this Wisconsin-born choreographer.

These Ballet Days prove Neumeier's genius. He takes powerful, romantic images, frequently erotic and troubling, and imprints them on the imagination. He breaks psychological ground, rooting his choreography in the psyche as well as in the physical frame. He's not interested in making museum pieces. His passion is for the future of dance. He describes his work as, "Art that lives in the present and aims for a place in the future."

It's no secret many of his ballets are not appreciated by American critics. They whine that what they see is excessively dramatic. In California, *The Little Mermaid* was thrashed earlier this year. In New York, *The Lady of the Camellias* was pronounced far too romantic. Such criticisms show the divide between European and American work and thinking. This grows even greater as cash-strapped North American companies opt for jukebox style ballets that have few dramatic underpinnings. It is underpinnings, of course, that give Neumeier's dance dramas their serious hold on the imagination.

Hamburg Ballet Days offered a comprehensive look at Neumeier's astounding output. It also offered a thrilling look at his company, a pristine band of dancers who make perfection seem amazingly ordinary.

Watching Neumeier's *Illusions* — like *Swan Lake*, you are impressed by the way he has taken the essence of the Petipa-Ivanov classic, retained the purity of the white lakeside act two scene, yet made the entire ballet happen in the head of mad King Ludwig. Like Erik Bruhn's psychological version for the National Ballet of Canada, Neumeier take us to the heart of the story, but redefines it in a way that makes sense for the 21st century. It is revolutionary, without ever attempting to be different, something many present-day choreographers fail to understand.

Neumeier's libretto remains a search for idealized, perfect love. In this production, Siegfried, Ludwig and Tchaikovsky become one. Perfect. Thiago Bordin, one of the most passionate young dancers in the Hamburg hierarchy, is a fascinating Ludwig, Florian Pohl a beautiful Siegfried and Anna Polikarpova a dramatic Queen Mother.

With *Liliom*, Neumeier's master work based on Ferenc Molnár's poetic play, the imagery is luminous. Light bulbs dangle, like contemporary star images we just might turn on and off. A balloon suddenly flies free, soaring into space, a metaphor for reaching beyond the world we know. A carousel horse turns round and round like a dream that worries sleep.

In this desperately romantic, frequently sad work, Neumeier creates a gorgeous synthesis of music, dance and storytelling that is fuelled by the emotional heartbeat of great dancers Alina Cojocaru and Carsten Jung, who make Julie and Liliom so real you cannot breathe for fear of breaking their spell.

The Michel Legrand music is brilliant in every way, fiercely unifying the worlds of carnival, young love, desperate pain and redemptive resolution.

Now here is the third thing that became evident during the celebrations. The great stars of this formidable company offer phenomenal turns. Lloyd Riggins is a mature dancer of incredible gifts. His Aschenbach in *Death in Venice*, transmogrified in Neumeier's ballet as a repressed, sexually hungry choreographer-ballet master, is so needy you long to hold him in your arms and soothe his pain. Silvia Azzoni breaks your heart as the Little Mermaid, moving with rapturous abandon. Hélène Bouchet, as Titania in *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, is an inspired vision of beauty, arrogance and passion.

The closing night Nijinsky Gala, a six-hour affair, brought together pieces from Neumeier's career, not in a chronological way but by creating a kaleidoscope of his many inventions. It was splendid to see, for instance, a pas de deux from *Now and Then*, created for Karen Kain and the National Ballet of Canada long ago. Where has it been? It's so luscious and filled with invention.

The final thing to note is Neumeier's understanding of the thirst we have for ballet that takes us away from the ordinary, and how he transports us into sometimes impossible worlds. Genius can do that.

— GARY SMITH



Two Mixed Bills

“Sarasota Ballet?” an audience member wondered out loud after seeing the company perform Ashton’s *Les Patineurs* as part of Ballet Across America this spring. “What do they know about ice-skating?” The Florida group probably doesn’t have many skaters, but the real surprise was that Ballet Across America’s greatest treat was a British classic.

The third showcase at Washington, D.C.’s Kennedy Center highlighting ballet in the United States ran the gamut of aesthetics and geography — from coast to coast and from commissions to proven masterworks. The two programs I attended played over a June weekend; the opening program featuring Richmond Ballet and Boston Ballet, as well as Oregon Ballet Theatre in James Kudelka’s *Almost Mozart*, ran earlier in the week.

Since the 2007 arrival in Sarasota of former Sadler’s Wells and Royal Ballet dancer Iain Webb, the small city has become an enclave of English ballet on the Gulf Coast. Opening Program B, the company made sure to put its best foot forward in *Les Patineurs*, tucking a principal dancer into the ensemble. The ballet was scrupulously staged by Webb’s wife Margaret Barbieri; the cast showed off strong, clean arabesques and neat arms.

Danielle Steele and Ricardo Graziano were glamorous as the snow-white leads, but the trio in blue, Nicole Padilla, Kate Honea and Logan Learned,

stole the show. Both women had precise pointe work; Padilla topped that with secure double fouettés and Honea nailed piqué turns with switching arms. With a goofy grin and his head bouncing like a bobble-headed doll, Learned took his Blue Boy right up to the line between performing and mugging. His loose body dropped into deep slides and bends, but he could also snap right into rivoltades and no-handed cartwheels.

Ashton’s ballet-in-a-snowglobe is now more than 75 years old. No matter how well made, it could still easily look dated, yet it didn’t. The dancers seemed to love what they were doing; their comprehension and the brisk setting made the piece work both as a classical suite of dances and as a fond look at skaters on a winter’s eve.

Balanchine and Ashton bookending a program makes for a high-class edition, and Philadelphia’s Pennsylvania Ballet danced a creditable if unfocused version of *The Four Temperaments*. Bright spots included Jermel Johnson’s understated, noble Phlegmatic, as well as Ian Hussey’s silent-movie reading of Melancholic, staring into the audience with black-lined eyes.

The two weekend programs shared only one composer in common — Philip Glass. Taken on their own, Edward Liang’s *Wunderland* from Washington Ballet and Stephen Mills’ *Hush* from Ballet Austin are both agreeable works that contrasted well with the rest of their programs, but looked at on

consecutive performances, they showed just how similar ballets to Glass can be.

Liang used five couples in red and tan; Mills used four in purple. Both contained several languid duets; the woman wrapping and draping around the man as he hauled and dragged her around. *Wunderland* seemed more extroverted than the earnest *Hush*, but that could have simply been bright versus dim lighting. *Wunderland*, which was filled with more movement and effects than ideas, also had a snowfall at the end (with noisy plastic snow that fell with a clunk), but it might as well have been glitter, flowers or dirt.

Instead of old masters, Program C featured homegrown works, but they still filled the bill. Charlotte’s North Carolina Dance Theatre, run by former New York City Ballet star Jean-Pierre Bonnefoux, is better known for its contemporary repertory, yet brought the festival’s most stereotypically classical work. Associate artistic director Sasha Janes took five couples in jewel colours — the women in tiaras and short classical tutus — and fashioned *Rhapsodic Dances* to Rachmaninoff’s *Rhapsody on a Theme of Paganini*. A series of solos and duets designed to flatter the company, a sparkling variation for Emily Ramirez was typical; it took sharp, angular shifts and made them look classical. Not everything made sense — when the big tune finally arrived, Christina LaForgia took off her tutu skirt and waved it about like a fan dancer, a striking but ambivalent effect.

Ballet Across America



Christina LaForgia, Anna Gerberich, David Morse, Jamie Dee and Emily Ramirez in Sasha Janes’ *Rhapsodic Dances*
Photo: Christopher Record

After several years battling through financial difficulties, Dance Theatre of Harlem has come back to the stage, appropriately enough with Robert Garland's 1999 *Return*, the only work to recorded music — Aretha Franklin and James Brown hits that had the audience grooving. *Return* is cagily made; like *Rhapsodic Dances*, it feels tailored to the company, and is designed to show off and strengthen the dancers. It's also built to please the audience with funky moves amidst the arabesques and a bang-up finale. Garland also takes classical language and adapts it to his dancers. The women, particularly Chyrstyn Fentroy and Ashley Murphy, flipped between the styles most easily — Murphy was so precise that even her funk felt sharp as a knife.

Even with highs and lows, the series avoided any real duds. American ballet tends to happen in clumps: one season it seems everyone is presenting *Dracula*; the next, *Jewels*. Ballet Across America's careful curating made a big nation's ballet seem more varied than it often is.

— LEIGH WITCHEL

Louise Lecavalier / *So Blue* Marie Chouinard / *In Museum*

Two minutes into Louise Lecavalier's *So Blue*, at Montreal's Festival TransAmériques, I was blown away by her unrelenting, over-the-top energy and über-quick, emotionally penetrating gestures. Yes, *that* Lecavalier, queen of speed, endurance and innovation, the much-decorated powerhouse who for 19 years was the star and muse of La La La Human Steps.

Although I have followed her career since its inception, after an hour of watching her incessant twitching, running and slicing, I was more convinced than ever that she is super-human. Now 54, this inimitable woman who with characteristic humility calls herself a "dance worker," still personifies movement at its most extreme.

And she does this simply, honestly, without artifice.

Dressed in a jogging suit, her feet bare and her famous blonde mane sheered — she could pass as David Bowie's twin — Lecavalier's small-boned body looked deceptively fragile alone on the stage of

Théâtre Misonneuve, June 6-7. When she started those twisting runs back and forth across the stage, legs crossing, arms and hands chopping, head bobbing so hard and fast it was a miracle it didn't fly off her neck, she looked spontaneous. Virtuoso stuff.

Increasingly, the lone figure upped the ante with a series of sequences that read like challenges: shadow boxing and balancing, wild rolling, shaking, scratching and throbbing, until she slipped into a breathtaking headstand. By this time, I was in a trance and scarcely able to differentiate the pounding of my own heart from Mercan Dede's folk-rock-electronic soundscape fused to Lecavalier's heady emotional imprints.

The headstand spoke volumes. Gravity pulled the dancer's loose top down,

blink of an eye, she was simultaneously everywhere. Always he waited to enfold her, promising safety. Gradually, her convulsions slowed. Trusting at last, she was cocooned by his bulk.

Read this way, *So Blue* was like a voyage of self-discovery. Lecavalier has said that every piece she dances is autobiographical in a way. "Dance helps me become myself, and I notice that I never fully manage to define that self since it is full of contrasts ... Pushing beyond physical limitations is the basis of my research."

So Blue, which was billed as her first choreography — a claim not quite exact since she has co-created occasionally since forming her company Fou Glorieux in 2006 — exposed a soulful need of expression that reaches beyond

Frédéric Tavernini and Louise Lecavalier in Lecavalier's *So Blue*
Photo: André Cornellier



exposing six-pack abs. For many minutes, attention riveted on her muscular torso, which proclaimed her peak condition, her vulnerability, her determination and humanity. Her abdomen pumped and rippled, her gasps for breath sounded like groans as she recovered from the cardio feats. Above, like sea creatures, her feet waved. The moment typified the contrasts inherent in all of Lecavalier's movements.

A little more than halfway through *So Blue*, she was joined by a goliath: Frédéric Tavernini. Towering above her like King Kong, his long arms wide and calm to her hummingbird frenzies, they shook and quivered their lower limbs.

Tavernini played a patient foil to her trembling and speed. Flea-like, in a

the normal pretensions of the stage. Lecavalier's honesty is immensely seductive; spectators' wild enthusiasm when her energy finally faded showed that the formidable dancer had achieved an unusual heart-to-heart communication with everyone. Of course, her enormous cardiac capacity, and decades of discipline, training and maturity count, too. But it was her ability to allow her body to speak its truth that overwhelmed.

As far as her choreography is concerned, *So Blue* seemed as natural — if much, much more difficult — as breathing, and just as personal. It shows she knows herself well, knows what she wants and has plenty to say. It is not about aspiration; Lecavalier has nothing to prove. She's won it all, starting with a

New York Bessie for best performance in 1985 when her now famous barrel rolls — sort of horizontal pirouettes executed at Formula 1 speeds — triggered a chain of international awards. Plus, she has collaborated with a list of famous artists like David Bowie and Frank Zappa. Lecavalier's dedication to pushing the boundaries of extreme dance has continued into her second career in solos and duets, focused on the intelligence and profound humanity of the body.

Another Montreal dance icon of major international repute, Marie Chouinard, also appeared at the Festival Trans-Amériques, in a work titled *In Museum*. Rarely seen onstage these days, Chouinard pursued a formidable solo career

spirit. She's an ageless performer of huge merit and a great pleasure to watch.

— LINDE HOWE-BECK

Ohad Naharin / *The Hole*

Ohad Naharin's new work for his Batsheva Dance Company, *The Hole*, premiered in May in a space designed specially for it. In the big Varda Hall studio in Tel Aviv's Suzanne Dellal Centre, an octagon-shaped stage has been built, with seating arranged parallel to the sides of the stage and with a wall surrounding the seats. At the start, dancers cling to this wall behind the audience, forming statue-like figures who

Hole there are no characteristic male or female parts that make the change in casting obvious to anyone who saw only one version.

Sadeh 21 (Field 21), Naharin's previous masterpiece from 2011, ends when the dancers jump from a wall at the back of the stage into what seems to be a black void. While *Sadeh 21* has a very different feeling of open spaces, it seems that *The Hole* is a continuation of this last action of jumping into a dark place, where falling and recovery, balance lost and regained, where up and down lose their meaning, when dancers move like divers in deep waters, then form a heap of bodies, only wilder, verging on the sinister.

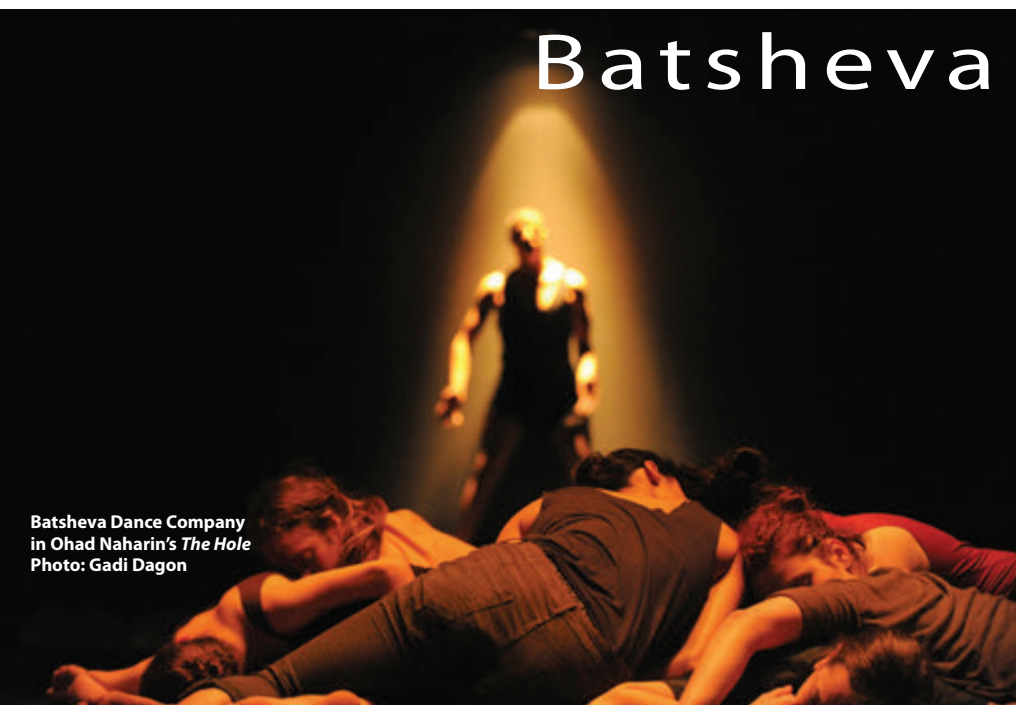
At a certain point in *The Hole*, the men, now perched on a high grid overlooking the stage, let themselves hang down, and softly jump to the stage like falling angels, to dance with the women. Duets are formed, limbs entangled; one pair left alone on the stage tries to escape, pushing one against the other as if to pass through their partner's body into the space beyond.

There are other magnificent moments in this stunning work. The solos are an exuberant explosion of limbs emanating from a twisting, flexible torso, drawing new directions in space, and they are swift and abrupt, the dancer disappearing under the stage as if falling off the edge of the world.

The underlying motif of swift, powerful appearances and swift, unnoticed disappearances achieves its high point when a single dancer at the edge of the stage hurls himself off, only to be caught by a group of women, who seem to be lying in wait to catch the falling figure. They rush from one place to the next, wherever a dancer is tossing himself into the void, always landing safely in the women's outstretched arms. It makes you think: who would catch me if I were falling off the edge of the world?

There is no narrative to this dance, only layers of amazing occurrences, a sense of growing excitement, a feeling of awe. Is this an apocalyptic view of what we are facing? Is it a warning? Toward the end of the dance, several seesaws are lowered from the grid above the stage, moving gently in the dying golden light. The dancers climb on them, rocking gently. It is a sweet image, a promise of conciliation, maybe, or are they like an open question, moving endlessly in the falling darkness?

The music assembled by soundtrack editor and composer Maxim Waratt (reportedly Naharin's pseudonym) is a



Batsheva Dance Company
in Ohad Naharin's *The Hole*
Photo: Gadi Dagon

a couple of decades ago before choreographing group works for her company.

On May 25-26, she performed an intimate series of improvisations in a vast gallery at the Montreal Museum of Fine Arts, gravely welcoming visitors to whisper secrets in her ear. Then, bowing reverently to each in turn, she translated their words into gestures over a three-hour period.

Often solemn, sometimes goofy and raucous, Chouinard drifted about examining the nuances of waving arms and hands, sliding furtive glances from beneath almost closed lids, howling at unseen monsters and collapsing as if empty of inspiration to end each little dance. Spectators lined up to sit on the floor and be mesmerized.

While much tamer than in her dramatic solos of yesteryear, Chouinard still projects an unparalleled wisdom and

eventually break into wild contractions.

While the men are plastered to the back wall in sensuous, slightly ridiculous poses like those found in *Sports Illustrated* magazine, the women burst upon the stage. They run in a line along the edge, falling off it one by one; climbing back, they run and fall and disappear underneath the stage. Finally, they're back up and moving along the edge on all fours like magnificent tigers, hips rolling, thumping their clenched fists on the floor with accelerating rhythm, while the men call out numbers in Hebrew and Arabic, cupping their hands around their mouths as if calling from afar.

There are two versions of *The Hole*, and on some nights the male and female dancers exchanged parts. Alternate gender casts have been employed in previous works by Naharin, such as *Black Milk* and *Five*. As in those works, in *The*

masterful collage of tracks by several artists (including Waratt), with an underlying menacing and dark motif, on top of which the most delicate tunes are heard. The lighting by Avi Yona Bueno (Bambi), a life-long collaborator with Naharin, graces the work with another layer of meaning and beauty.

Each work of Naharin's opens up slowly, to be seen over and over. After the initial shock of — again — unexpected beauty, the intricacies, elegance and humour are there to be discovered. Like returning to the museum for a painting you like, *The Hole* is a jewel in Batsheva's repertoire, ready to be rediscovered.

— GABY ALDOR

Nacho Duato / *Sleeping Beauty*

During Munich's annual Ballet Week in April, the Mikhailovsky Ballet presented Nacho Duato's *Sleeping Beauty*, which he created for the company in 2011. It might not have looked anything like Petipa's original 1890 version, but the atmosphere, which catapults viewers into a wondrous magical world, could have been the same as the one the St. Petersburg audience experienced.

Using a classical movement vocabulary, Duato resuscitates the Romantic era of dancing. In the enchanted wood, nymphs traverse a moonlit landscape creating the illusion they are gliding across a lake, making small ripples with their pointed feet. Women, defying gravity, soar across the stage carried by men making themselves (almost) invisible in order to highlight the presence of these otherworldly female creatures.

Duato has maintained traditional sets, in the rococo style, and costumes (both by Angelina Atlagić). The fairies have small propeller-like wings, and the costumes are opulent in a mix of rococo and modern style: long, bejewelled ball gowns for the ladies of the court and short, layered dresses for the townspeople.

By making his characters contemporary and replacing many mime sequences with dancing, Duato manages to dust off the cobwebs that shroud many other productions. The royal couple has been turned into a

modern family caring for their child and participating in the festivities. The Queen (Olga Semyonova) carries in baby Aurora, and when the fairies bestow their gifts upon her, she and the King (Marat Shemiunov) sit upstage with the crib between them. When Aurora meets her suitors or takes the spindle from the disguised Carabosse, she behaves like a modern teenager having fun. The King and Queen dance at the opening of the christening and wedding scenes, and the hunting party at the beginning of act two has been turned into a pure dance scene. These changes give the ballet more flow because dance, unlike mime, does not stall the action.

The choreography for the five fairies hardly distinguishes them from each other, but each is presented like a star with her partner. The Lilac Fairy (Ekaterina Borchenko) was wonderful. With soft authority she revokes Carabosse's spell and takes Prince Désiré through the enchanted forest that gives way to a moonlit lake, where a swan-shaped boat brings them to Aurora's open grave.

Unfortunately, Aurora (Oksana Bondareva) and Prince Désiré (Leonid Sarafanov) did not hit it off the evening I saw the performance. There seemed as much compassion and love between the two as between a fridge and a freezer. Sarafanov's dancing, however, was superb. His high jumps and cabrioles, immaculate technique and elegant bearing

made a true prince. Bondareva must have had some problems in the second act because she did not even manage one full balance out of the four in the Rose Adagio, which, of course, was very disappointing. But it was not for want of prowess, as she later proved in the wedding scene.

Carabosse — she is, as in traditional productions, danced by a man (Rishat Yulbarisov) — was far from the usual witch-like creature. She enters without a carriage, an impressive woman in a wonderful black ball gown, a tattoo showing between her breasts and a jewel-studded coiffure. The only premonitions of her evil-doings are the six black-clad creatures who accompany her. Yulbarisov is impassioned, sweeping across the stage with dignity and dwarfing the good fairies, less like an evil creature and more like a furious but controlled woman.

Atlagić's sets and costumes create some beautiful pictures. When the wedding entertainment begins, the court sit at the sides, the ladies in gorgeous dresses, like puffy balls in front of their partners, with the royal couple in the middle upstage. Andrey Yakhnyuk is the high-jumping part of the gold couple. Nikolay Korypayev soars as the Bluebird and presents Princess Florine in some breathtaking off-balance pirouettes.

The company is in very good shape and makes every technical feat look easy.

Aurora and Désiré's wedding pas de deux is regal and official, but also beautiful. The wedding scene ends as she is clad in a long train. It was like watching a royal wedding on TV. The Bavarian State Orchestra played Tchaikovsky's music with great compassion and conviviality, adding to the drama.

Duato's aim was, as he said in an interview, to have the characters express themselves only through dance, but he does not believe in changing classical into modern choreography. The wonderful fairy tale world he has created is a far cry from the grounded contemporary work he made for the Compañía Nacional de Danza in Spain, when he was artistic director there, and for other companies he has choreographed for. It is his first restaging of a Romantic ballet and it's going to be interesting to see if this excursion into classical ballet will have any influence on what he will do for the Berlin State Ballet, when he takes over the directorship in 2014.

— JEANNETTE ANDERSEN

Mikhailovsky Ballet



Le Sacre du printemps

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Serge Bennathan's witty and colourful evocation of *Le Sacre du printemps* (*The Rite of Spring*) celebrates this legendary Ballets Russes production. Nijinsky, Stravinsky and Roerich — three great artists brought together by the equally great impresario Diaghilev — premiered *Le Sacre* at the Théâtre des Champs Élysées, Paris, in May 1913. This fiercely modern statement of dance and music, with its weighted, contorted bodies and pounding, polyrhythmic score, resulted in a now-famous opening night riot.

Bennathan, the French-born visual artist and choreographer, had his first gallery exhibit in Vancouver, British Columbia in 2010. He has been making dance for more than 30 years. Bennathan's most recent choreography — the barefoot *Elles* for eight women — received the Rio Tinto Alcan Award 2012, and is inspired largely by the Romantic ballet *Giselle*.

Visit www.maisonfiglio.com or contact the artist at sfiglio@yahoo.ca for more information.

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