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Photo: Steven Lemay

As usual after reading our writers' reports from around the globe, the list of dancers I'd love to see has grown.

Alessandra Ferri is on there now: the dramatic ballerina's return to the stage in *Chéri* is so vividly described by Silvia Poletti in her report from Italy. Spain's Vanesa Aibar is another addition: the flamenco artist, in a golden dress from which a series of fans magically appear, is enticingly evoked by Justine Bayod Espoz.

My list of places to visit, or revisit, already pretty much covers the world. Two became more compelling this quarter. First, San Francisco: the city's dance scene is always full of thrilling hits with, also, the occasional miss, as seen through Allan Ulrich's discerning eyes. Do they ever have an uneventful season? Second, St. Petersburg: Laura Cappelle's guest report makes the city — from Nevsky Prospect to Theatre Square — come alive.

There's also must-see dance closer to home — my home, that is, on Canada's west coast — with Yukichi Hattori from Alberta Ballet, featured by Kate Stashko.

From right here in Vancouver, where *Dance International* lives, we bring you our city's masterful Crystal Pite. Besides my own feature on Pite — who was the magazine's cover story in 1996, too, when she was leaving town for Germany — the choreographer herself has a few things to say in an accompanying piece. It turns out the woman has a way with words, as well as with dance.

Kaija

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Dance International

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Nederlands Dans Theater's Sarah Reynolds in Crystal Pite's *Plot Point*
Photo: © Joris-Jan Bos

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Serving Paris Opera Ballet

by Victor Swoboda

Photo: Anne Deniau

Brigitte Lefèvre's 20-year reign

In October, Brigitte Lefèvre will retire after 20 years as the artistic director of the Paris Opera Ballet, a company she first came to know as a member of the corps in 1963. Lefèvre's immediate predecessor was the company's star dancer, Patrick Dupond, and before him, Russian legend Rudolf Nureyev. Her successor in October will be dancer/choreographer Benjamin Millepied [see story page 9].

During her tenure, Lefèvre brought in new choreographers and repertory that looked forward to the 21st century, while at the same time maintaining a deep respect for the classical works that set off the refined Paris style.

Lefèvre spoke with Victor Swoboda about her long career after a news conference at the company's headquarters in the Palais Garnier to announce the troupe's first visit to Montreal in 47 years, where this fall they will perform *Paquita*, a 19th-century classical ballet restored at Lefèvre's request by Pierre Lacotte [see sidebar].

Victor Swoboda: Can you recall your first season as director of Paris Opera Ballet?

Brigitte Lefèvre: I came to the Opera after 20 years' absence. I had left the company after 27 years as a dancer, and then was asked to come back as general director. At the outset, I wanted to understand what was going on. The season had already been planned, so I had the opportunity to understand how the various sections worked. It was a year of "silence," and also attentiveness. I wasn't intimidated, but at the same time, I knew I had a responsibility, which meant I had to be humble and ambitious at the same time. Humble as far as I myself was concerned, and ambitious in terms of my position. Yet it's vital that you don't allow yourself to be carried away by the importance of the job. What I wanted to introduce were things that didn't exist when I left the company as a dancer. At that time, dancers didn't dance much, there was little creation, some dance genres were taboo on our stage. That's what I built up season after season. I think these things are now well established, and will allow for further evolution.

VS: It's curious that your predecessors remained in the job for only a few years before leaving. You've remained for 20 years.

BL: I really devoted myself to the job. Sometimes I think there's confusion around the role of an artistic director. The director is not necessarily a ballet master or a choreographer or a great dancer. But the person must have all the force and knowledge — and I hope that I did — to put those people at the service of the troupe. Often, dancers or choreographers who took on this job were absolutely wonderful personalities, but, for them, I think the job was only a passing phase. I had a mission, and I think I handled the job like a mission. I was a member of a somewhat militant generation. I left the Opera in 1968 [a year of major student protests in Paris]. I wanted to reach out to a different audience. So I had this ideal, which I think was strongly artistic, but aimed as well to give something and show something relevant. I think for those reasons I agreed to stay on so long.

VS: Rudolf Nureyev was artistic director of the Paris Opera Ballet from 1983 to 1989. Were you influenced by him?

BL: I was not influenced by Nureyev. But I must be clear here. I had a great admiration for Rudolf. I think he was an extraordinarily brave man and a historical figure in some sense, and not only as an artist. He left his country and all his personal attachments at a young age for an unknown future — I think that was courageous. Then he had the fervour to be able to restage great classical ballets [including *La Bayadère* and *Sleeping Beauty*], which I kept in our repertory.

I recall his somewhat sentimental phrase: "I will live so long as my ballets are being danced." I wanted him always to remain alive. As artistic director here, he was extremely at odds with some people, but he also brought something really unique. He was loved and he was hated, but his ballets are the proof that he was right. We hold on to what was best in him, and the best was fantastic.

VS: What were the most noteworthy stages in your career?

BL: Everything that was linked to creation and to those challenges that the dancers faced, which compelled them to

Marie-Agnès Gillot and Stéphane Bullion in Èdouard Lock's *AndréAuria*
Photo: Icare

"To see them dance new works for the first time was a great emotional experience. Pina Bausch told me more than once that she wanted to do *Sacre du Printemps* for me. When it entered our repertoire in 1997, that was a very important moment."

undertake works they were unaccustomed to do — artistically, mentally and physically. To see them dance new works for the first time was a great emotional experience. Pina Bausch told me more than once that she wanted to do *Sacre du Printemps* for me. When it entered our repertoire in 1997, that was a very important moment.

VS: And you brought in Canadian choreographer Édouard Lock.

BL: I knew him when Louise Lecavalier was still dancing with him. Édouard Lock means a lot to me. I think he's a great choreographer. He has a deep humanity inside him and he doesn't allow for compromising. He's inside his own world. What really counts for me is that he's someone who doubts a lot, then suddenly he puts his work onstage and everything is in place. I've programmed something of his for the Opera's next season [*AndréAuria* in February 2015]. When I leave, I'll be managing the Cannes Dance Festival [which is directed by Frédéric Flamand, and takes place biennially in November]. I hope to invite Édouard there.

VS: What were the highs and lows of your time as director of Paris Opera Ballet?

BL: I see the lows as those times when the dance community allowed itself to be taken over by the lows. This does happen. And the highs are those times when the dance community aspires to the highs. And then it's extraordinary. It's our life — my life. Sometimes it was difficult, but when I leave this company, I will recall only happy times.

VS: How are the dancers doing financially today?

BL: Their salaries have gotten better. I think the dancers at the Paris Opera do not lack for any kind of consideration, whether it concerns their working conditions or other working matters. The Ballet of the Paris Opera is proud of its company and its dancers, even if they always ask for more — that's part and parcel of any individual. So things are going well for them. Of course, things could always be better.

VS: If you had to re-do anything at all from your time as director, what would it be?

BL: If I had to do it all over again, I would say no. Because I would be aware of what being the director involves. When I started out, I wasn't aware. ▼

Paris Opera Ballet in Pina Bausch's *Le Sacre du Printemps*
Photo: Sébastien Mathé


Photo: Julien Benhamou

Enter Benjamin Millepied

BY HILARY MAXWELL

In October, Benjamin Millepied, a choreographer and a former principal dancer of New York City Ballet, steps into his most prestigious role yet as director of dance at the Paris Opera. His appointment to head one of the oldest and most illustrious ballet companies in the world, succeeding long-standing director Brigitte Lefèvre, was a surprise to many. Millepied, 36, was born in France, but is considered an outsider, having spent the last 20 years in the United States.

Millepied began his dance training in France, initially with his mother, a modern dancer, and then studied classical ballet at the Conservatoire National de Lyon. In 1993, he travelled to New York to train at the School of American Ballet, and, in 1995, joined New York City Ballet. He was promoted to principal dancer by 2001, performing in works by masters George Balanchine and Jerome Robbins, as well as in premieres by the newer generation, such as Alexei Ratmansky and Christopher Wheeldon. Millepied left the company in 2011.

A prolific choreographer, Millepied has created works for many notable companies, including New York City Ballet, Les Ballet Jazz de Montréal, Ballet de Genève, the Royal New Zealand Ballet and the Paris Opera Ballet. He is most popularly known as the choreographer for the Academy Award-winning ballet thriller *Black Swan*, and for his partnering of — and later marriage to — the film's star, Natalie Portman.

Millepied moved to Los Angeles in 2012 and co-founded L.A. Dance Project — a small experimental artist collective. *Invisible Cities*, conceived by L.A. Dance Project and the Los Angeles opera company the Industry, and choreographed by Danielle Agami, was presented at L.A.'s Union Station last fall, a model of the company's innovative vision in its mix of dance, an opera that the audience listened to on headphones and the informal venue. L.A. Dance Project has also been the vehicle for Millepied's own choreography, such as the premiere bill featuring his *Moving Parts*, which received generally friendly reviews.

The incoming director has already ruffled a few feathers with his criticism about there being no dancers of colour in a company of 154 members. Millepied will undoubtedly continue to make waves as he leads the Paris Opera Ballet into what he has stated will be an "era of openness and change."

Paquita

The premiere performance of *Paquita* with choreography by Joseph Mazilier took place at the Paris Opera in 1846. Carlotta Grisi danced the role of Paquita, a gypsy girl who falls in love with an aristocrat, first interpreted by Lucien Petipa. He was the brother of the great choreographer Marius Petipa, who later added a grand pas de deux with music by Ludwig Minkus. This pas de deux has remained active as a gala piece, though the ballet itself disappeared from view.

In 2001, Pierre Lacotte recreated *Paquita* for the Paris Opera Ballet, respecting the subtlety of the period style, and retaining Marius Petipa's pas de deux. "Thanks to a long archival search," says Lacotte, "I was able to reconstruct all of the pantomime sections of Mazilier's ballet. In the 18th and 19th centuries, pantomime played an important part in ballet narration."

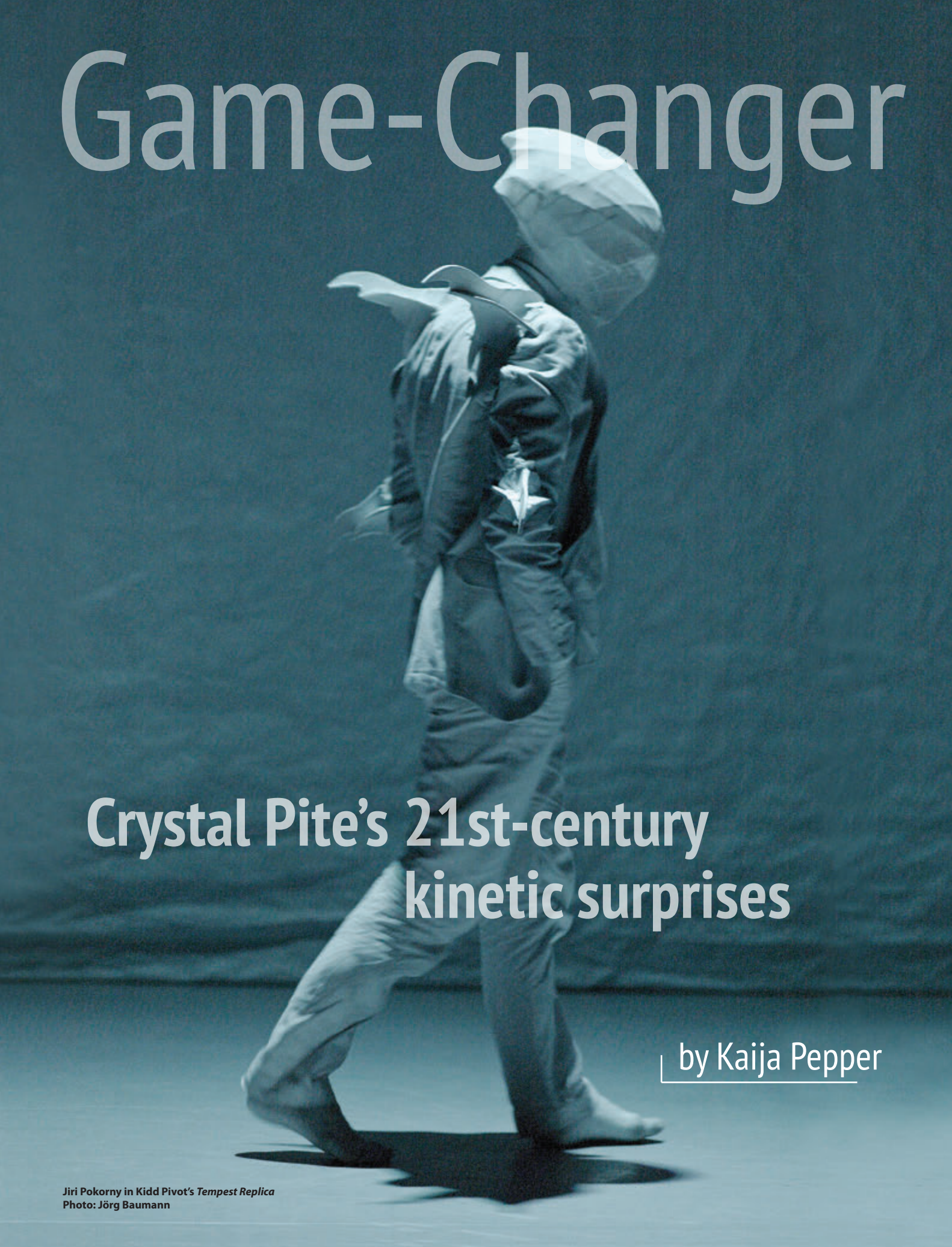
— VICTOR SWOBODA

Paris Opera Ballet in *Paquita*
Photo: Francette Levieux

Game-Changer

Crystal Pite's 21st-century kinetic surprises

by Kaija Pepper



Jiri Pokorny in Kidd Pivot's *Tempest Replica*
Photo: Jörg Baumann

Crystal Pite makes movement that bubbles and pops through her dancers' limbs and torsos. There is never an easy, sustained flow, but one that gushes and stutters, whether the dancers are on pointe or, more often, in socks. The different footwear indicates the breadth of Pite's work: since 2002, she has been the artistic director of her own group, the contemporary-styled, Vancouver-based Kidd Pivot, but she also freelances with commissions from major ballet companies, including the National Ballet of Canada, Cullberg Ballet and soon Paris Opera Ballet.

Pite's work is formal, structured and virtuosic, as the best ballets are, but with a personal vocabulary and interdisciplinary staging that carry ideas, more associated with contemporary dance. In fact, in Pite's hands, the two categories seem outdated. Where, after all, does the Royal Swedish Ballet's spring 2014 performance of Pite's duet, *The Other You*, created a few years earlier for Kidd Pivot's *The You Show*, fall? Categorize it as you will, the movement has its own thrills and chills in this eerie duet for two mysteriously connected men.

Peter Chu (left) in Kidd Pivot's *Dark Matters*
Photo: Dean Buscher

In one of Pite's pointe works, *Emergence*, created for 38 National Ballet of Canada dancers in 2009, both balletic roots and contemporary accents are clear. When *Emergence* entered the repertoire of Seattle's Pacific Northwest Ballet in 2013, Carla Escoda in the *Huffington Post* noted the way Pite "injects menace into the classical vocabulary by taking away the usual transitions between steps, jerking body parts and convulsing the torso, to the sound of gravel crunching, water rushing, combat boots marching and other reverberations from [Owen] Belton's thrilling electronic arsenal." The menace, it should be noted, was entirely appropriate in a work Escoda aptly describes as a "spine-chilling parable of a sci-fi insect kingdom."

The writer's choice of verbs — "jerking," "convulsing" — evokes the physical tension that typically situates Pite's choreography squarely in the present era of global unrest. Underlying the physical tension is the unsettling portrayal of a dark universe and its unknown forces that appear in many of her works, such as the menacing insect kingdom noted above and, more typically, in the form of disturbingly sentient puppets or powerful shadow figures.

"It wasn't until I was working with Lynda [Raino] side by side that I started to really understand the ephemerality of what we do: the fact that none of my work exists right now as you and I are sitting here — none of it exists in this moment — unless [some company] is actually in the middle of performing it!"

From there, Pite began to see the "tragic beauty of constantly being in a state of disappearing" as "the perfect metaphor for life: our present moment of living and our inevitable disappearing …"

In the studio building *Lost Action*, she explored gestures, postures and group configurations relating to grief and anger, including surrender, defeat and rescue, which is when the piece developed its third layer. Developing a quartet with four men that featured violent struggle, Pite said, "I couldn't help but look at them and see imagery of soldiers. It's one of the reasons I came up with the title, which conjures up that tragic phrase of war, lost in action." So the work about the lost actions of all of us, dancers and non-dancers alike, also became a reflection on war. "I'm not a historian, I'm not a philosopher, I'm not a cultural critic," she said with her usual thoughtfulness. Yet she

Relationship is important to Pite's creativity, and she often calls herself and her dancers a "tribe."

Yet Pite herself, a slender, blonde 43-year-old and an adoring mom to her three-year-old son, is one of the friendliest of artists. Longtime Kidd Pivot dancer Eric Beauchesne told me once that it was "very playful in the studio," calling Pite "a character [who] loves to have fun and crack jokes." Tiffany Tregarthen, a new recruit who came on board to perform Ariel on a recent tour of *The Tempest Replica*, said: "The work ethic in Kidd Pivot is unbelievable — it's a challenging and high-standard environment — but everything is done with joy."

How, then, does conflict come to be an energizing force for Pite, both thematically and also inside the individual body? I asked her about this during our recent phone conversation when Pite was in New York with Cedar Lake Contemporary Ballet, doing "a bit of editing and detailing" on 2011's *Grace Engine* for performances at BAM (Brooklyn Academy of Music).

"I didn't have a great facility for ballet, so there was a lot of conflict in my own body," Pite says. "Like torque, a lot of force, a lot of push and pull to try and make myself fit into those ballet shapes. I think that made a certain kind of tension in me."

If you've seen her dance — either with Ballet BC, where she began her career, during her five years with William Forsythe's Ballet Frankfurt, or in her own work — you'll know Pite as an enchanting, even exquisite performer. "I faked it quite well," she laughs. "I certainly wouldn't ever consider myself strong technically. But I wanted to be there so I found ways to make it work — I employed some smoke and mirrors!"

As for the larger theme of conflict, this was something Pite first spoke with me about shortly before the 2006 premiere of *Lost Action,* a gut-wrenching piece for her own company about conflict and loss. One early element informing *Lost Action* were thoughts about the end of a dancer's career, which became urgent in Pite's mind when she co-created the duet, *A Conversation* (2004), with a dancer about to retire from performance. was drawn to the material being uncovered and ultimately felt: "There must be ways to look at [war] through the body that are hopefully as legitimate as any other form of study."

Besides the work in the studio, Pite also spends time at the computer writing, which helps to organize her thoughts about a piece "and to understand it in another way. When I make something, usually around the three-quarter mark I do an essay, often in response to the marketing department's request for a program note or an interview. So I end up writing this essay for myself, as a way to get at the language I need to develop in order to talk about it. Through the process of writing I also learn more about what the piece is and what I haven't actually done. That's also an illuminating part of the process: this is what I wanted to do, but have I done it?"

With Kidd Pivot's next project, Pite hasn't gone through that process yet, "so I don't have the language to talk about it," she explains. The work, a collaboration with Vancouver theatre artist Jonathon Young, will premiere in July 2015 as part of the Arts and Culture program of the Toronto Pan Am and Parapan Am Games.

A company press release announced the working title: *Betroffenheit*, described as meaning "the shock or bewilderment that often follows in the wake of a violent or distressing event." Clearly, we'll be in Pitean territory, though Young will bring his own strengths: as an actor, his physical interpretations of characters are finely etched, and as a founding member of the innovative Electric Company Theatre, he is a master collaborator. The chance to "build content" with Young, who has been developing a script, is "pretty exciting," says Pite.

"I've always been a fan of writers and writing," she continues, "and have always integrated fragments of text into my work." Pite has also chosen to use actual narrative, something that "felt like a natural progression." *Dark Matters* (2009) for Kidd Pivot was built around a melodramatic plot about murder and

mayhem that was both touching and hilarious. *Plot Point* (2010) for Nederlands Dans Theater, inspired by film storyboards, played two stories off each other: one delivered the plot in a series of tableaux, the other danced the scenes' emotional content.

Then, in 2011, came the strong narrative drive of *The Tempest Replica*, her most recent Kidd Pivot production, based on Shakespeare's *The Tempest*. Luke Jennings in England's *Guardian* newspaper praises the "refined lyricism" and "delicate texture" of the piece, which tells its story without resorting to mime or a complicated libretto that needs studying beforehand. Instead, Pite employed a few projections carrying scene description ("Prospero's daughter sees the shipwreck," "Prospero's enemies are delivered to the island," and so on) and characters' lines (such as "You are three men of sin," from Ariel when she is carrying out Prospero's plans for revenge). There are also several gorgeous shadow plays portraying dramatic events, which take the story forward.

Another English critic, Clement Crisp in the *Financial Times,* was bowled over by the "hypnotic power" of the actual dance in *The Tempest Replica*, but also by the more intellectual goals contained in the narrative exploration: the way "Shakespeare's tale is analysed in the light of Pite's brave intelligence."

The Tempest Replica premiered in Frankfurt, where Kidd Pivot had a second home at Künstlerhaus Mousonturm from 2010 to 2012. Then it was known as Kidd Pivot Frankfurt RM and received $1.5 million in German funding. Financial support is harder to come by back home in British Columbia, known for its chilly arts environment. Pite could just keep busy with commissions. She is in demand: there is the Paris Opera Ballet, as well as an upcoming October premiere at Sadler's Wells. The London theatre wanted the piece as part of *Thomas Adès: See the Music, Hear the Dance* (other commissions went to Wayne McGregor, Karole Armitage and Alexander Whitley). But Kidd Pivot is clearly a much-loved child.

"There are things I can only do in the context of my company," she says. "There are things I can explore with dancers I've hand-picked and built a relationship with over years. And once I make the show, I travel with it, I spend years with the material and refine it and make it better over time."

The process with commissions is very different. "What usually happens is I quickly get to know a bunch of dancers I've never worked with before, and a whole production team I've never worked with before. I see the premiere and maybe two other shows, and then it's over, I'm done. I leave those relationships."

Relationship is important to Pite's creativity, and she often calls herself and her dancers a "tribe." Or she refers to her "circus family," meaning son Nico and partner Jay Gower Taylor (an ex-dancer and set designer), who accompany Pite on the road. These are romantic notions of togetherness, and romance is part of her aesthetic, too. Not in the sense of traditional ballet steps and roles, or the emotional self-expression of early modern dance, but in the many ways bodies connect and hold each other, and in the way groups assemble and fragment over and over again, never giving up on the possibilities of connection. And in the way a dancer, or maybe two dancers together, find moments of tenderness, which along with conflict and tension contribute to the human dimension at the heart of Crystal Pite's kinetic surprises. ▼

Crystal Pite in the studio
Photo: © Lindsay Thomas/Pacific Northwest Ballet

Between Rigour and Recklessness

A Choreographic Statement by Crystal Pite

Humans move — our arms reach out, our knees collapse, our heads nod, our chests cave in, our backs arch, we jump, we shrug, we clench our fists, we pick each other up and push each other away. This is language as much as it is action. This is what the body has to say about need, defeat, courage, despair, desire, joy, ambivalence, frustration, love. These kinetic images resonate meaningfully in the mind because we have all felt these things so purely in the body — we have been moved.

I am a choreographer. I work with the body because I am convinced about this. I'm trying to create performances that connect audiences with their own bodies, so that through the dancer they can recognize their own dramas and experiences translated into fierce physical language. I'm trying to create in the theatre a world where we share something through the language of the body that is beyond words — something that is unwritten and very, very present.

Conflict is one of the forces that shapes my choreographic vocabulary. Although in my life I avoid conflict like the plague, in my work it has been vital. I don't mean conflict in the studio as we create; I'm talking about the conflict that arises when contrasting ideas are set against each other in the very subject of a work: like certainty and doubt, for example. Or conflicting physical tasks within the body that create states of torque and exertion. I find it compelling to see someone striving, performing right on the very edge of their ability. There is conflict inherent in the effort of achieving something that is physically tricky, or really fast, or really tiring, or complicated.

This creative state of conflict is reflected in the name of my dance company, Kidd Pivot. Pivot, that precise and technical move that changes your direction, your point of view, evokes a sense of skill and rigour. Kidd is for the outlaw, the pirate, the prizefighter. In counterpoint to the rigorous pivot, Kidd (or "kid") evokes a recklessness and aggressive freedom. It's the tension between these elements that I'm striving for in my work.

I want to make choreography that is detailed and beautiful, but also brave and brutal. It's not a question of balance. Balance feels peaceful and still. I'm looking for the energy created by tension. The tension between rigour and recklessness, or between instinct and intellect. The need to respect traditional ways and the need to subvert them. This moves me. This feels like a dance I want to do.

Not long ago, I created *Solo Echo* for Nederlands Dans Theater in Holland. The impetus for this work was a couple of Brahms sonatas for cello and piano. The Allegro from Opus 38 was written in the prime of Brahms' life; the Adagio from Opus 99, about 20 years later. These sonatas, and these two movements in particular, have been a touchstone for me at various points in my creative life.

The first movement is expressed through solos and duets that are sometimes exuberant and passionate, sometimes urgent, reckless, aggressive. These are the states of a person in the prime of life and the Allegro resonates with that ambition and fortitude. I was exploring physical states of speed and flow, and the energizing conflict inside the body and between bodies.

The second movement is set to the spare, soulful Adagio. Here I was working on the idea of creating a single entity made of seven dancers: a collective body, with unfolding and collapsing structures that required enormous co-ordination and consonance. Its component parts are individuals, but as a whole it is its own expansive and complex being. The same yearning that is present in the single character is manifested exponentially.

Clearly, co-operation is essential to the second movement, in which I was trying to say something about acceptance and loss. For that, I needed to put conflict aside and deliver its opposite.

This text is an excerpt from a talk by Crystal Pite at Creative Mornings Vancouver in September 2012. It has been edited for Dance International. ▼

Crystal Pite and Cori Caulfield in Kidd Pivot's *Further Out*
Photo: Nicole Rivelli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Thoughts on Survival and Innovation:

Alberta Ballet's Yukichi Hattori

by Kate Stashko

Sometimes it's tough to wear many hats at the same time. But Yukichi Hattori seems to thrive on it. Now in his eighth season with Alberta Ballet, he is working as both a dancer and a choreographer, performing the classical ballets of Petipa and the contemporary pop ballets of the company's artistic director, Jean Grand-Maître. He is even presenting his work in the festival scene in Calgary, where the company is based. "I don't get bored, that's for sure," says Hattori with a laugh. It is exactly this variety and contrast that keeps him innovative and grounded.

Hattori's professional ballet career began to take shape when, at the age of 13, he moved away from his native Japan to study at the School of the Hamburg Ballet in Germany. After graduating, he worked with Hamburg Ballet for several seasons, during which time he met his wife, Galien Johnston, who is from Edmonton, Alberta. When they were ready to move on, they decided to do it "as a team," and both landed contracts at Alberta Ballet.

Calgary, Alberta's largest city, has been good to Hattori. Not only is it where he and Johnston have begun their family (they have a five-year-old daughter and a baby son), the city has provided opportunities that he says would not have been possible in Germany. "I get to choreograph so much more here than in Europe. There are already so many choreographers there. When you try to [disseminate] your work, companies will say, 'We already have our own associate choreographers.'"

Hattori has now made 18 works, nine of them in Calgary. His most recent, *Temple*, set to the Gregorian chant *Missa de Angelis*, premiered in January 2014 as part of Alberta Ballet's Up Close series, which is designed to showcase emerging talent in more intimate theatres. His mainstage commission for a new version of *Carmen* premieres in Alberta Ballet's upcoming season.

Working simultaneously as both performer and choreographer is something Hattori enjoys. Many ballet dancers choose to focus on performance earlier in their career, and then transition to creating choreography later. In his view, he is more capable at both roles because of experiencing them at the same time, and being reminded of their unique challenges. "Choreographing while being a dancer makes you appreciate both sides … I think it's an advantage because then you can try to balance the needs of both."

Hattori describes his choreographic approach as "a lot like architecture. A person is here, and a person is over there, and they move in a certain [structural] relationship, and that is an expression of some sort." He is also interested in how gesture can form a strong connection with the audience, and acknowledges the influence of traditional Japanese Noh theatre in his work. "They're very minimalist," he says of Noh mask artists. "They perform in a very small space, but every corner represents a place and taking one step can mean [travelling] miles." His work is less extreme than this, in an effort to reach a broader audience. "I know that Noh theatre is not for everyone." His own take on minimalism involves stripping down technique so movements are simple but performed with integrity. "That's also one of my goals: how simple but effective can I make it?"

When I caught up with Hattori on tour in Edmonton last March, he was focusing on the dancer part of his creative life, as a soloist in Alberta Ballet's first-ever production of *Giselle*. He performed the peasant pas de deux, which I saw in dress rehearsal. A brilliant technician (the man can jump!), Hattori also has a commanding stage presence. He notes, "It's always a challenge to perform any classical ballet. My mind gets distracted by how perfectly I have to execute the steps instead of *what* I am actually dancing for. I try to approach it by dancing ballet like an improvisation." Dancing the precisely choreographed ballet steps in this way helps keep his performance fresh and alive.

Hattori recalls performing as a corps member in Hamburg Ballet's 2004 version of *Giselle*; there he was considered "too short" to be a soloist. Hamburg's *Giselle* was more contemporary, with modern costume and set design, and some added scenes and new choreography by artistic director John Neumeier. The Calgary company follows the classic version of the iconic Romantic ballet more closely.

Alberta Ballet has been performing an increasing number of works from the classical repertoire — besides *Giselle*, this includes *Sleeping Beauty*, *Swan Lake* and, in October, *Don Quixote* — rather than bringing in other companies to fulfill this part of their season as in the past. Hattori says this is because the company can now afford the scale of production involved, and that this is due in part to the success of Grand-Maître's "pop ballets," such as *The Fiddle and the Drum*, with music by Joni Mitchell, and *Love Lies Bleeding*, with music by Elton John.

Ballets to popular music are a bit of a trend: Wayne McGregor's *Carbon Life* was set to nine pop songs, including one by Boy George, danced by London's Royal Ballet in 2012, and James Kudelka's *The Man in Black*, set to Johnny Cash, is in the repertoire of the National Ballet of Canada, to name just two examples. Similarly, entertaining works inspired by literature are in the repertoire of several companies, including the co-production by the National Ballet of Canada and the Royal Ballet of *Alice in Wonderland*, and the Royal Winnipeg Ballet's *Wonderland* and *Dracula*. These ballets have become a hot-button issue with some audiences, critics and academics, who question whether the productions are cash grabs.

"It's always a challenge to perform any classical ballet. My mind gets distracted by how perfectly I have to execute the steps instead of *what* I am actually dancing for. I try to approach it by dancing ballet like an improvisation."

Yukichi Hattori and Alberta Ballet company artists in *Giselle*
Photo: Paul McGrath

Yukichi Hattori in Alexandrous Ballard's *The Precise Nature of the Catastrophe*
Photo: Tim Johnston

"Choreographing while being a dancer makes you appreciate both sides ... I think it's an advantage because then you can try to balance the needs of both."

Hattori has a refreshing perspective to offer: "If you think about it, *Giselle* was done to the popular music of the day, with a very contemporary style of dancing, and [the costumes reflected] current fashion as well." So if Adolphe Adam is to 1841 what Elton John is to 2010, Hattori's point begs the question, "What is the real difference?"

As Hattori said in a *Globe and Mail* interview in 2011, "It's not a bad thing to have a ballet that is a commercial success. It's survival over innovation."

Hattori's ability to see dance in a wider context is perhaps a factor of his exposure to both European and North American audiences. "In Europe, you're recognized as highly skilled artists and as treasures to society. Here, if you say you're a dancer, people ask, 'What's your day job?' or 'What do you teach?'" He also observes that art has not been fully integrated into day-to-day life in North America. "Educating our kids about culture is important," he says. "That's why the arts are strong in Europe — because art and culture are part of their lives."

When I ask about the future of ballet, Hattori replies, "I think the [poor] ticket sales and unemployment rate of dancers tell it all, whether we like it or not." A sobering thought, but Hattori is not one to point out a problem without offering a solution. "We need to start looking for a different way to reach out to audiences." He recognizes that many people can't afford expensive tickets and feels that the next step is to begin choreographing work for alternative spaces. In the ballet world it is still rare to see performances outside of a traditional theatre format, perhaps because of the need for proper flooring and lighting.

In recent years, he observes, dance flash mobs — seemingly spontaneous events where members of a crowd suddenly begin dancing a shared choreography — have become popular as a way to bring dance to the masses. Although flash mobs do situate dance more squarely in public awareness, Hattori recognizes the limits of the form, as typically complexity is sacrificed for the sake of creating choreography that is easily learned by all participants. "The flash mob was definitely born out of necessity. But there should be a more sophisticated way of doing that as well."

Hattori sees these spontaneous, site-specific performances as a way of bringing ballet into its next phase in North America. "I think there is so much potential there, but we have to spend time developing it as a form, not just doing it as a marketing exercise," he urges, referring to how flash mobs are often used as publicity stunts.

"Why not dance in the malls or in the street, but with integrity? If you choreograph specifically for that space, it can be beautiful and profound." ▼

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Lar Lubovitch's *Concerto Six Twenty-Two* was featured in Juilliard Dances Repertory, spring 2014,
photo by Rosalie O'Connor

Dancenotes

Fondation Jean-Pierre Perreault Evolves

Montreal-based Fondation Jean-Pierre Perreault is celebrating 30 years with some big changes, including the move to change the Fondation into the Institut de la danse (working name). The mission of the institute will be to document and promote choreographic works from Quebec's contemporary dance heritage, and to conduct research and increase knowledge of Quebec contemporary dance and its heritage.

***Danser Joe*, an immersive experience into Jean-Pierre Perreault's signature piece *Joe*. From the *Corps rebelles* exhibition, Les Musées de la civilisation (Québec)/ Moment Factory**
Photo: Moment Factory

Royal Ballet Dancers Boycott Russia

Two Royal Ballet dancers boycotted performances at the Bolshoi Theatre in Moscow, in protest of Russia's anti-gay laws. The London company staged six performances at the Bolshoi during a week-long residency in June, as part of the U.K.-Russia Year of Culture, which features an exchange of artists and exhibitions between the two countries. This was its first visit since 2003.

Principal dancers including Carlos Acosta, Natalia Osipova, Sarah Lamb and Steven McRae were among those who did perform in Moscow.

Top Immigrant

Photo: Jean-Laurent Ratel

Gradimir Pankov, artistic director of Les Grands Ballets Canadiens de Montréal, was recognized by *Canadian Immigrant* magazine as one of the Top 25 Canadian Immigrants of 2014.

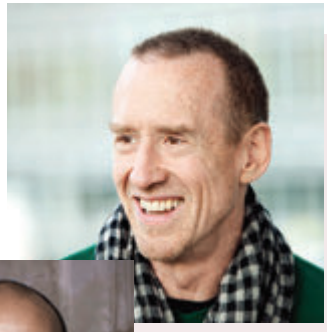
Pankov, who immigrated to Canada in 1999, was recognized for turning Les Grands Ballets into a great ambassador of Canadian culture nationally and internationally. "I seem to have lived most of my professional life as a permanent immigrant, having lived and worked in seven countries, both in Europe and North America, since I left my native Yugoslavia in 1967," Pankov says. "I've become a citizen of the world, but I feel very much at home in Canada and this is my last stop!"

Photo: Amber Star Merkens

Jacob's Pillow Award

This year's Jacob's Pillow Dance Award, carrying a $25,000 cash prize, was presented to Alaskan-born choreographer John Heginbotham. An alumnus of the School at Jacob's Pillow and a member of the Mark Morris Dance Group from 1998 to 2012, he has garnered acclaim for his eclectic contemporary works through his company, Dance Heginbotham.

Ella Baff, executive and artistic director of Jacob's Pillow, calls Heginbotham "an adventurous, intelligent artist, energetically experimenting with dance, music, opera, theatre, and visual design. His originality and wit add new and different ideas to the dance field."



William Forsythe
Photo: Dominik Mentzos

Jacopo Godani
Photo: Peter Greig

Forsythe's Future

Since January 2014, William Forsythe has no longer been artistic director of the Forsythe Company and has taken up the position of artistic advisor. Jacopo Godani, a former dancer with Ballet Frankfurt (which Forsythe directed for 20 years), is the new artistic director, starting in September 2015.

Last summer Forsythe was strongly advised by his doctors to reduce his workload due to health reasons. Forsythe says, "I realized then that without a more permanent change there would be real consequences. At the moment, I'm dealing with injuries myself and trying to get back to the point when I can actually dance."

Forsythe will join the University of Southern California's Glorya Kaufman School of Dance as a professor in fall 2015. He will be on campus for about six weeks per year and will remain in contact with students and fellow faculty while away. Jodie Gates, vice dean and director of the School of Dance, says Forsythe "is one of the most important dance philosophers of our time and his choreographic work has transformed the field. He has crossed boundaries and discovered commonalities within dance, visual art, architecture and media, among many other disciplines. This type of scholarly practice and creative thinking through composition and collaboration is what our students will learn."

Double Duty

Photo: Emily Cooper

Simone Orlando is the new artistic director and chief executive officer of Ballet Kelowna, based in British Columbia's Okanagan Valley. Orlando danced professionally with the National Ballet of Canada and Desrosiers Dance Theatre. As a choreographer, she has been commissioned by Ballet Kelowna, Ballet BC, Toronto Dance Theatre and others. Orlando brings more than artistic talent to the company; she went back to school and graduated with distinction from the BC Institute of Technology's Business Management program. "I realized a few years ago that to successfully run a dance company, I would need to augment my skills and abilities beyond my experience as a dancer and choreographer," she said.

Fashionable Dance

Comme des Garçons, pearlized patent leather and elastic ballet flats, spring 2005. Collection of the Museum at FIT
Photo: © The Museum at FIT

New York's Museum at the Fashion Institute of Technology presents *Dance & Fashion,* September 13, 2014, to January 3, 2015, featuring nearly 100 dance costumes and dance-inspired fashions. Highlights include a rare Spanish-style costume worn by Fanny Elssler, a costume by Christian Bérard for *Symphonie Fantastique*, a costume from *Schéhérazade* designed by Léon Bakst, and a costume by Karinska for *Ballet Imperial.* Anna Pavlova's and Margot Fonteyn's pointe shoes will be on display, plus high-fashion styles by Christian Louboutin and Noritaka Tatehana inspired by ballet shoes.

Lacroix, cat suit inspired by Diaghilev dance costumes, 1990s. Beverley Birks Collection
Photo: © The Museum at FIT

Gailene Stock in the Royal Ballet School's Stock Bussell Studio
Photo: Patrick Baldwin

Gailene Stock 1946-2014

Former ballerina and ballet school director Gailene Stock died on April 29 at the age of 68, after a battle with cancer.

Born in Australia, Stock's career put her onstage with the Australian Ballet, the National Ballet of Canada and the Royal Winnipeg Ballet, performing many leading roles, including in George Balanchine's *Ballet Imperial*, Antony Tudor's *Pillar of Fire* and *The Divine Horsemen*, John Butler's *Sebastian* and Garth Welch's *Firebird.*

After 16 years as a professional dancer, she found a role as director of the National Theatre Ballet School in Victoria, Australia. She then directed the Australian Ballet School for nine years before leading England's Royal Ballet School for 15 years.

She received numerous accolades, including the Order of Australia, for her services to ballet.

Stock is survived by her husband, Gary Norman, a fellow dancer and a senior teacher at the Royal Ballet School, and their daughter, Lisa Norman, also a dancer, who has appeared in the London production of *Chicago.*

Michael Crabb's Notebook

The Shakespeare Edition

Tobias Batley (Hamlet) and Darren Goldsmith (Claudius) of Northern Ballet in David Nixon's *Hamlet*
Photo: Brian Slater

Atlantic Ballet Theatre's Anton Lykhanov as the Fool in Igor Dobrovolskiy's *King Lear*
Photo: Bud Gaulton

Front L-R: Yoshihisa Arai (Mercutio) and Temur Suluashvili (Tybalt) of Joffrey Ballet in Krzysztof Pastor's *Romeo and Juliet*
Photo: Cheryl Mann

The concluding moment of *The Tempest Replica*, Crystal Pite's 2011 deconstructionist riff on Shakespeare's last play, is one likely to rile literary purists, and literary purists bare their teeth with ferocity every time someone messes with the Bard.

In *The Tempest Replica*, Prospero lies helpless on the ground. Sinister characters, garbed and helmeted in white, clap their hands in almost sarcastic slow-motion applause above his lifeless body. Much as it dodges the challenge of adapting Prospero's epilogue into movement, it is arguably the Canadian choreographer's most acute observation. Prospero's closing speech is not simply a specific character's plea to the audience; it is also, surely, the anguished voice of Shakespeare, the artist, questioning the efficacy of his own powers. Pite leaves it an open question … even, perhaps, for herself.

It's provocative, but it makes you think about the source, which is rarely the case with dance adaptations of Shakespeare.

When Pite choreographed her take on *The Tempest*, it marked the 400th anniversary of the play's premiere. This year, dance companies worldwide are hauling out their Shakespeare productions, or making new ones, to join the global celebrations marking the 450th anniversary of the playwright's birth.

American Ballet Theatre jumped the gun by launching its season last October with the premiere of Alexei Ratmansky's *The Tempest,* more conventionally delivered yet even more compact than Pite's. The National Ballet of Canada, co-producer with American Ballet Theatre, will dance its Canadian premiere in Toronto next May.

Britain's Royal Ballet took a risk on a more problematic dramatic property — at least for dance — when it presented an adaptation of *The Winter's Tale* by Christopher Wheeldon. It, too, is a co-production with the National Ballet, with a Canadian landfall slated for the 2015-2016 season.

Given the ballet world's hunger for stories, particularly those with recognizable titles, it's no surprise companies continue to mine Shakespeare. It's not new either. There are records of a *Tempest* ballet at the King's Theatre in London in 1774. About a decade earlier, Jean-Georges Noverre, that great 18th-century ballet reformer, choreographed his *Antoine et Cléopâtre*. The first-known *Hamlet* ballet dates to 1778.

As the art of ballet gathered a full head of steam the next century, Shakespeare ballets abounded. Unlike their operatic companions, which generally came with enduringly attractive music, none of these has survived. Instructively, however, Mendelssohn's mid-century *Incidental Music for A Midsummer Night's Dream, Op. 61*, utilized by Marius Petipa in 1876, was to provide, perhaps as much as Shakespeare himself, the inspiration for any number of 20th-century ballet versions of the play. Most notably, this includes George Balanchine's 1962 full-length work incorporating other Mendelssohn compositions, and the more poetically evocative one-act adaptation Frederick Ashton made to mark Shakespeare's quatercentenary, *The Dream.*

Again, it is the robustness of Prokofiev's 1935 *Romeo and Juliet* music, specifically written for dance, as much as the play itself, that makes ballet

adaptations of the tale of star-crossed lovers so popular. Only a handful of the many productions seem as likely to endure as the Prokofiev score that supports them.

Ashton's 1955 version for the Royal Danish Ballet, the first to Prokofiev by a Western choreographer and almost a chamber version in comparison with its sprawling Russian counterparts, was revived in Britain three decades later by London Festival (now English National) Ballet. Though much admired, it is now rarely performed.

Cranko's 1962 *Romeo and Juliet* for Stuttgart Ballet has gained more global traction and remains widely performed, although the National Ballet of Canada, having danced it since 1964, jettisoned Cranko's in favour of their Ratmansky commission in 2011, with which it ended its current season.

Similarly, Joffrey Ballet, which cleaved to Cranko after a disastrous late 1970s' experience with an Oscar Araiz production featuring three Juliets, now dances Polish choreographer Krzysztof Pastor's stark, updated version from 2008, cast against a backdrop of 20th-century political upheavals.

Kenneth MacMillan's 1965 production for Britain's Royal Ballet is a treasured company heirloom and has acquired a similar position at American Ballet Theatre, the company that in 1943 originated Antony Tudor's *The Tragedy of Romeo and Juliet*. This one-act version, set to selections of Delius, was widely hailed at the time, but now lies dormant.

While *Romeo and Juliet* heads the list of Shakespeare dance adaptations, with *A Midsummer Night's Dream* not far behind, a surprising variety of his 37 plays has become fodder for choreographers. *Othello* and *Hamlet* have been particularly popular targets, and not simply for their name-recognition titles.

Ballet, again like opera, thrives on duets and with love — tortured, conflicted, thwarted or attained — at the centre of so much Shakespeare, his plays offer plentiful opportunities to bring two bodies together. Many of the plays are also reducible, without, as Ashton proved 50 years ago with *The Dream*, necessarily short-changing their emotional cores.

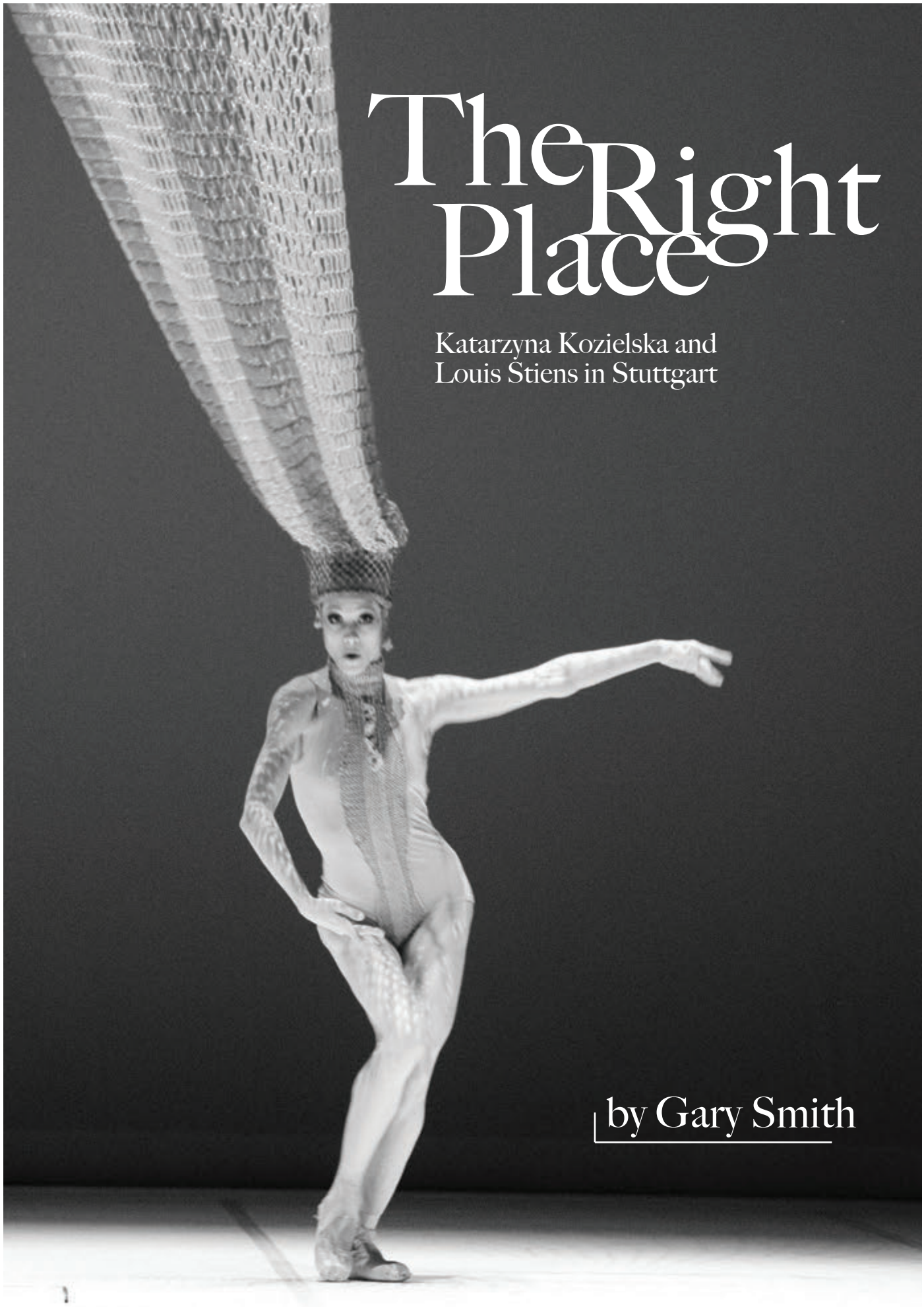
While choreographers such as Lar Lubovitch (in a 1997 American Ballet Theatre/San Francisco Ballet co-production) and Kirk Peterson (in 2007 for Alberta Ballet) have opted for full-length versions of *Othello*, the fact that there is no tailor-made score substantial enough to spawn multiple productions helps explain the variety of choreographic approaches. Notably contrasting versions are José Limón's 1949 *The Moor's Pavane* to music by Henry Purcell, a 20-minute, four-character distillation the National Ballet of Canada danced in the late 1970s, and Doug Elkins' grittily urban *Mo(or)town/Redux* of two years ago — also short and featuring only four protagonists.

In the *Hamlet* corner, the National Ballet in 2012 staged a Kevin O'Day adaptation that elevated the unhappy Danish prince's emotional self-torture to almost unbearable heights. Before that, in 2008, Canadian David Nixon made a *Hamlet* for Northern Ballet, the English troupe he's directed since 2002, updating it to Nazi-occupied Paris. Hamlet's unhappiness is triggered by seeing those he trusted become collaborators. Instead of scattering flowers, a distraught Ophelia hands out miniature swastika flags. In a similar spirit of updating, five years earlier Nixon reconceived *A Midsummer Night's Dream* to feature a late 1940s' ballet troupe touring the British provinces by train.

Potentially difficult subjects seem not to deter choreographers. In 2008, Atlantic Ballet Theatre artistic director Igor Dobrovolskiy, with playwright Sharon Pollock as dramaturge, produced a version of *King Lear* using music by Dmitri Shostakovich.

For understandable reasons, dance has tended to shy away from the history plays, although, in his 1999 *Shakespeare Suite* set to Ellington-Strayhorn music, Britain's David Bintley found seductive material in the famous scene where Richard III woos Lady Anne. And talking of that reputedly murderous king, the late Armenian composer, Avet Terterian, wrote the score for a *Richard III* ballet that still awaits its choreographer. Perhaps James Kudelka should give it a listen. He has a way with dark characters.

Meanwhile, of course, Shakespeare's plays live on triumphantly in the beauty of their language, their reputations undamaged by adaptations of every stripe. ▼



The Right Place

Katarzyna Kozielska and Louis Stiens in Stuttgart

by Gary Smith

Photos: Roman Novitzky

"I don't like to know where the piece leads when I begin work. I like to be surprised by my own ideas. For me, making dance is a kind of experimentation. Sometimes I work out of order. I may start at the end or in the middle."

— Katarzyna Kozielska

Katarzyna Kozielska and Louis Stiens, emerging choreographers at Stuttgart Ballet, couldn't be more different. Their embarkation points are the same: their approach to dance and their ways of unlocking the emotional cortex that is movement comes from both intellectual knowledge and personal passion. But the results are drastically different. Stiens, in his early 20s, has a rough and gritty sense of storytelling. Kozielska, almost a decade older, has a warmth and lyricism that creates its own interior fire.

Both of these dancers have been helped to find a choreographic voice by the Noverre-Society's Young Choreographers' performances presented by Stuttgart Ballet each year. These performances encourage those interested in developing choreographic roots to do work that feature dancers from the Stuttgart company. Rehearsals take place largely on their own time and initiative, so working in this arena demands a very committed choreographer and set of dancers.

Born in Zabrze, Poland, Kozielska came to the John Cranko School, which is attached to the Stuttgart Ballet, in 1999. She joined the company itself in 2001. In 2011, Kozielska created *Der Richtige Ort* (*The Right Place*) for friends in the Stuttgart company, presented at the Noverre performances that year.

Her choreographic journey was underway. "Dancing is one thing," Kozielska says. "Choreographing for others is quite another. It is taking ideas in your head and unleashing them onstage. It is very collaborative."

Kozielska also choreographed *Blender* for four Stuttgart dancers and *Deux* for Stuttgart Ballet stars Alicia Amatriain and Jason Reilly, the latter for a performance in support of the John Cranko School's new building. Within this short time span, it is already possible to see her style, which is lyrical and passionate, mood-drenched and emotional.

Munich-born Stiens, the son of two musicians who play and teach the guitar, went to the Cranko School in 2009. Joining the Stuttgart corps de ballet in 2012, Stiens also has a passion for the way movement can express emotion. Like Kozielska, he created choreography for the Noverre-Society, and his febrile and visceral work soon came to the attention of audiences and critics in Stuttgart.

"I have a strong force inside me," Stiens says. "I call it holy anger. It drives me to push boundaries for myself and the public. I like work that is very intense. I have such inner conflict, and that's what makes me believe in what I do."

When you watch a Stiens piece, such as *Slam*, it is like invading the heart and mind of Kafka. This short work, produced for his company, Choreografisch Räumliches Projekt, is ferocious. At the premiere in 2013, Robert Robinson performed the solo in an abandoned flower shop window, with the audience watching from outside on the street. Pressed against the glass, peering into the window, we discovered what entrapment means. We also discovered what loneliness and desperation mean to the imprisoned man behind the glass. At one point, Robinson stands in the far corner of the space and simulates masturbation in a frenzy of frustration. I was both shocked and touched by the intimacy of the act.

"My work is about atmosphere," Stiens explains. "It's about pop culture. It's political, too. It's about risk. I'm looking to expose what's sensitive and human about life."

Alicia Amatriain in Katarzyna Kozielska's *A.Memory*
Photo: © Ulrich Beuttenmueller

As a child, Stiens says, "I was given classical music, a pen and paper. That kept me busy. Perhaps that's why now I see things as a combination of music and images. Trash music speaks to me. Electronic remixes tell me stories."

Kasia, as Kozielska is known to her friends, comes from another reality. "Once I was too controlled, too tight. Then I saw the mess of Times Square in New York and that gave me freedom. I found my style. All doors are open now."

Although Kozielska paints and sculpts, choreography is her real medium. "Through dance I have discovered I can come close to my vision. Finally, I can see the picture. This is me and my music, me and my steps, me and my dancers."

She begins each piece of choreography with an open mind: "I don't like to know where the piece leads when I begin work. I like to be surprised by my own ideas. For me, making dance is a kind of experimentation. Sometimes I work out of order. I may start at the end or in the middle. That's liberating. Choreography is like standing onstage naked, exposed. It's scary. One minute I love what I see, the next I hate it."

Watching Kozielska's *Symph* is to see how a passionate new eye can bring a different focus to lyric dance. Presented at Noverre and then taken into the Stuttgart Ballet repertoire as part of the Made in Germany program in fall 2013, this piece is mature in the way it takes dancers away from their comfort zone. [Gary Smith reviewed Made in Germany in *Dance International's* Winter 2013 issue.] Kozielska's choreography allows dancers to fly into space, then return to earth with powerful physicality.

She became a choreographer by default, Kozielska admits. "I never sat down and said I have to be a choreographer. The dancers I worked with at first said, 'Experiment. In the beginning you don't have to know what you want.' I began to feel comfortable. If I take the wrong direction, so what? I need to learn who I can trust, who has opinions that matter.

"For years I was a woman in pointe shoes dancing other people's ideas. Now I look for different ways to use those shoes. I am on pointe, for instance, when I choreograph. That helps me to feel the movement as the female dancers do."

Kozielska doesn't know why there aren't more female choreographers.

Maria Eichwald, Robert Robinson and Evan McKie in Louis Stiens' *Rausch*
Photo: © Stuttgart Ballet

"It's just a fact," she says. "I guess I've never really thought about it. I like choreography that is strong and passionate, no matter who creates it."

If she doesn't want to dwell on why the role of choreographer is still largely held by men, perhaps it's because Kozielska is busy with opportunities at Stuttgart. Stiens avoids the issue, too, by declaring gender is irrelevant. "Female or male, what does it matter? What we must do is make work that is interesting and arresting.

"For me it's all about achieving a point," he shrugs. "I don't think my work is dark because there is always something light and humorous there, too. I always want truth in what I do. And, yes, my work is voyeuristic. I want to surprise people. It's not just about being new and different, though. Something very old can be the most radical. I want to confront people with emotion. Technique isn't everything. Too many people think it is."

"Louis and I are very different, yet in some ways we are the same," Kozielska says. "I also want my work to touch people, to give them a feeling of warmth and life."

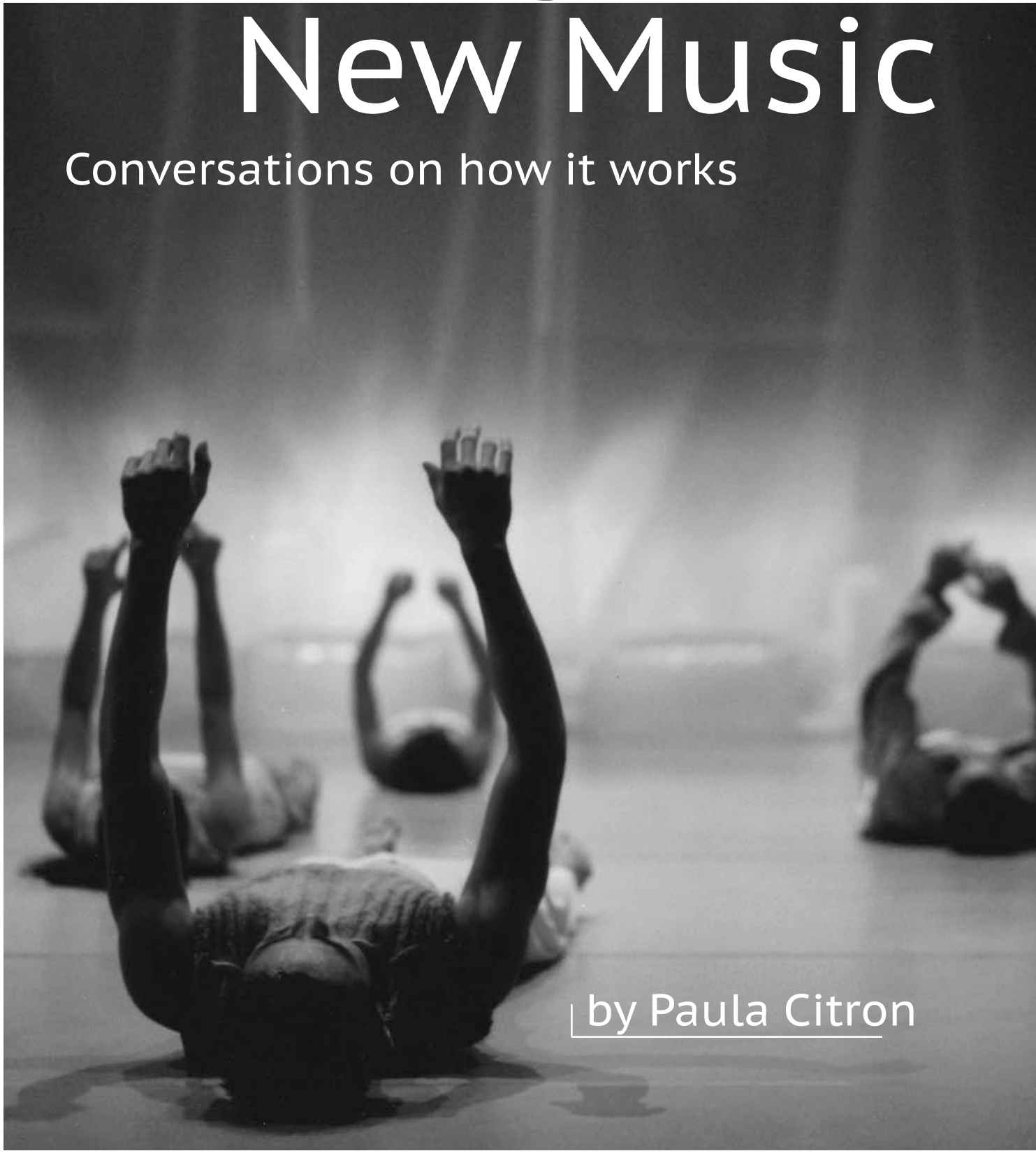
Fast forward to the latest work by Kozielska and Stiens, presented in June at Stuttgart Ballet's Shauspielhaus theatre as part of the company's Dance Lab mixed bill. Stiens' dark and driven *Rausch (The Blood)* is a political and social commentary on the 1990s. Dancers move through broken plastic glass strewn across the stage, picking their way through the detritus of an ecological nightmare. Stiens' work is an angry confrontation by youth with a world spiraling madly out of control. It begs for resolution.

Kozielska's *A.Memory* was inspired by Boston sculptor Janet Echelman's floating upside-down giant basketball net, which fills the stage. The night I saw it, Amatriain led 10 dancers through the musical interchanges and intricate steps of this witty, wry piece.

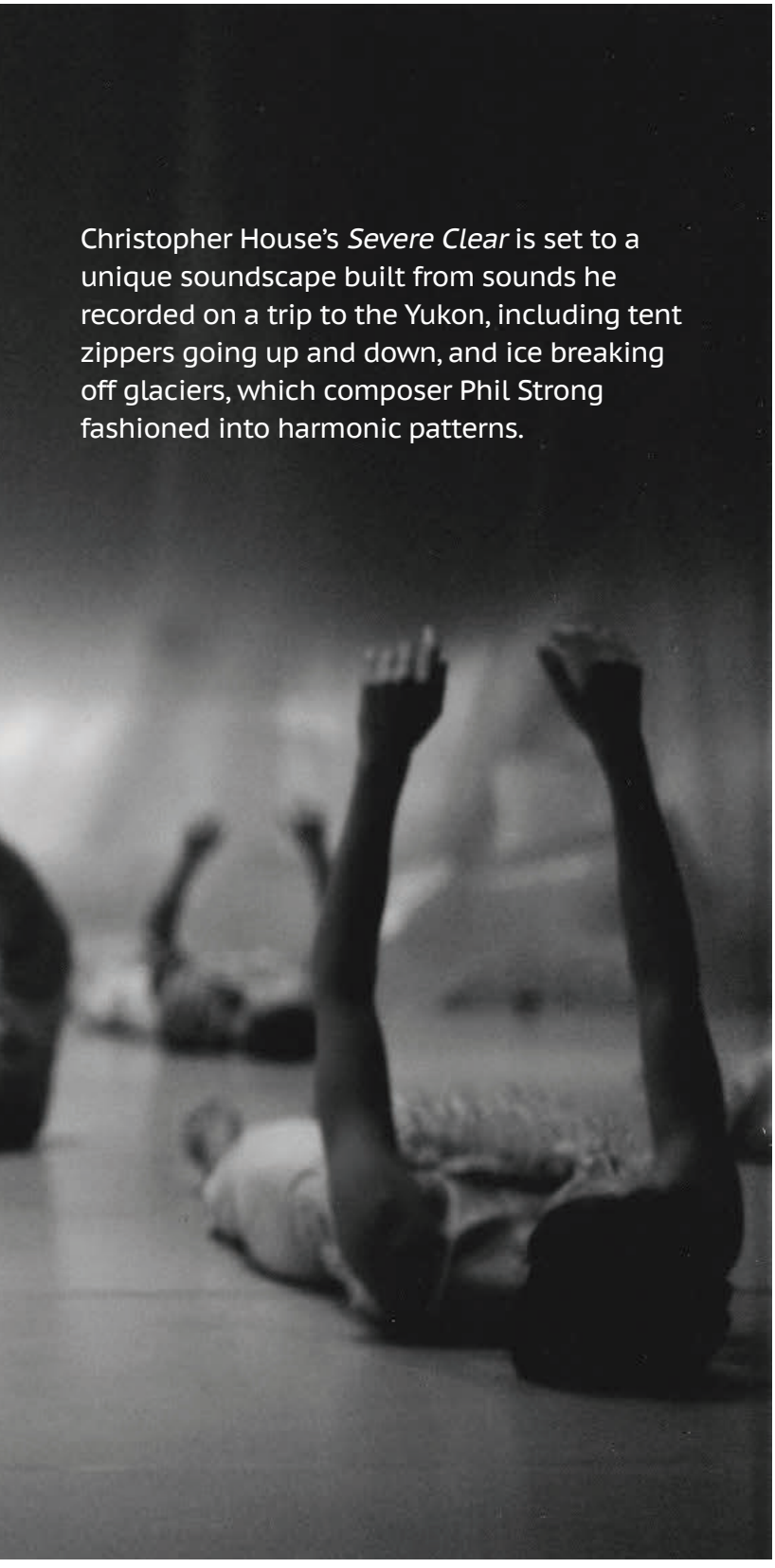
Stiens and Kozielska are fortunate. They continue to dance in interesting roles in important Stuttgart productions, and from this position they analyze and explore new developments in choreography. This inspires them to create their own work, and to take dance forward in meaningful ways. What a thrilling place to be. ▼

Dancing to New Music

Conversations on how it works



by Paula Citron



Christopher House's *Severe Clear* is set to a unique soundscape built from sounds he recorded on a trip to the Yukon, including tent zippers going up and down, and ice breaking off glaciers, which composer Phil Strong fashioned into harmonic patterns.

Toronto Dance Theatre in Christopher House's *Severe Clear*
Photo: David Hou

New music has struggled to find a home in the concert hall, where it is usually relegated to small audiences in small spaces. There is, however, one place where it gets repeat performances, and sometimes even large venues: on the dance stage, in both the ballet and contemporary worlds.

Since its stunning debut by the National Ballet of Canada in 2009, Crystal Pite's *Emergence*, to Owen Belton's atmospheric electronic score, has been revived several times for the Toronto season, has toured to western Canada and has been danced by Seattle's Pacific Northwest Ballet. At the grassroots level, *Kickstart*, presented last April by Toronto-based CanAsian Dance, featured premieres by six emerging choreographers collaborating with the composers of six new music scores.

James Kudelka, resident choreographer at Coleman Lemieux & Compagnie, is an advocate for new music collaborations. "The beneficial thing about collaboration is that it allows for two minds to meet," says Kudelka. "Some of my best experiences have been choreographing dances to new scores. It's a much different experience from working with a dead composer, which is quite a lonely thing to do once you've worked with a living one."

In the golden age of major funding in the arts, the collaboration between new music and dance was actively encouraged. Kudelka participated in the 1980 National Choreographic Seminar in Banff, an initiative launched by dance pedagogy icon, Grant Strate. Six choreographers worked with six composers each day, creating dances and scores that had to be completed in a three-hour period. The experience was a defining moment for Kudelka, because the seminar opened up his ballet horizons to the possibilities not just of using contemporary music, but of creating in a contemporary dance vein as well.

"New music" covers a broad range of approaches. In a large sense, it refers to modernist contemporary compositions that broke away from the rules of classical concert music at the turn of the 20th century, much like modern dance eschewed ballet conventions. Detractors would call new music the advent of dissonance. These adventurous and ever-changing modernisms continue to the present.

On a smaller scale, new music refers to work by a living composer or sound designer, creating scores with both acoustic instruments and electronica.

As long as there has been concert dance, there has been new music, if we think of "new" simply in terms of living composers. The opera-ballets of Lully and Rameau were contemporary in their day. New music for dance has also resulted in legendary partnerships — Petipa and Tchaikovsky, Balanchine and Stravinsky, Robbins and Bernstein, Cunningham and Cage.

Ballet BC's Rachel Meyer and Alexander Burton in Wen Wei Wang's *In Motion*
Photo: Michael Slobodian

Sahara Morimoto in Peggy Baker's *Aleatoric Solo No. 1*
Photo: Makoto Hirata

"You don't want wallpaper music with the dance laid on it. At the same time, you don't want the music to overwhelm the dance."
— Christos Hatzis

The usual method of collaboration between choreographer and composer is a back-and-forth process. With Peggy Baker's *stone leaf shell skin*, a trio for male dancers, she began by telling composer Heather Schmidt her ideas about the new piece. Her major inspiration was the black-and-white photography of Edward Weston, and his highly eroticized natural world.

Calgary-born Schmidt lives in Los Angeles, so it was a long-distance collaboration. Says Schmidt: "From the Weston photographs, I took the concept of light and dark, which I applied to the musical themes. When Peggy sent me videos of the preliminary dance vocabulary, I created musical sketches inspired by the choreography, which I sent back to her. The flow of ideas between us, the back and forth of dance videos and audio files, built the work."

Large ballet companies and original music require very different parameters. As Royal Winnipeg Ballet artistic director André Lewis points out: "A big chunk of music has to be ready in advance. Otherwise you have 25 dancers waiting around in a rehearsal room." To celebrate the company's 75th anniversary, Montreal-based Mark Godden is creating a full-length ballet based on Canada's Truth and Reconciliation Commission, which will premiere in October. His composer, Christos Hatzis, lives just outside Toronto.

Godden had only worked once before with a living composer (in 2006, when he created *Two Jubilees* with John T. Cooper for Ballet Memphis). Nonetheless, he knew he wanted an original score, and had been impressed by a recording of Hatzis' string quartet *The Awakening,* which included train sounds and Inuit throat singing. Godden envisioned the powwow music of the Northern Cree Singers and Inuit throat singer Tanya Tagaq as part of the score for his new ballet.

Godden has always started with music in his creative process. "Working with Christos was the complete opposite experience," he says. "He wanted to know specifics, like an itemized list of scenes, what exactly was happening in each and how long they were. He wanted a literal breakdown of the score. It was arduous having to think in advance, but exciting." And from Hatzis: "You don't want wallpaper music with the dance laid on it. At the same time, you don't want the music to overwhelm the dance. The challenge is to create music that tells a story the dancers can communicate through movement. You want the music to be heard through the dance."

In the new music/dance world, there is a distinction between composer and sound designer. Here is choreographer Heidi Strauss' differentiation: "A composer has had formal musical training and approaches the score from a structured compositional point of view. A sound designer

creates a world of dramatic sound effects, mood environments and evocative atmospheres. A choreographer will choose the right artistic ear to suit the piece."

There is much crossover and blurring of lines between the two. Toronto-based John Gzowski is the quintessential multipurpose soundscape artist. Michael Greyeyes recently engaged Gzowski as the composer for *A Soldier's Tale,* with Andy Moro as sound designer. Based on Greyeyes' scene sketches, Gzowski and Moro decided which sections would better benefit from acoustic music or soundscape. For Laurence Lemieux's *Looking for Elvis*, Gzowski created a sound design, using snippets of Presley songs and interviews, plus atmospheric sounds. "Elvis is the score," he says.

Christopher House, artistic director of Toronto Dance Theatre, is another new music buff for both existing and original compositions. His latest works include *Rivers* set to music by Ann Southam and *11 Accords* to a Steve Reich score. With extant music, House wants to get inside the composer's structure and then use this hidden agenda as inspiration for the dance. "There are dynamic patterns imbedded in the score," he explains. "Each piece has a different set of rules. You have to co-exist with the score and build a relationship with the music. There is magic in discovering the inner colours."

House has also had a long and fruitful collaboration with composer Phil Strong, who has produced several original scores for Toronto Dance Theatre. For example, House's *Severe Clear* (2009) is set to a unique soundscape built from sounds he recorded on a trip to the Yukon, including tent zippers going up and down, and ice breaking off glaciers, which Strong fashioned into harmonic patterns.

Peggy Baker has introduced a unique concept, inspired by John Cage, which has figured in her collaborations with pianist/composer John Kameel Farah. For *Aleatoric Solo No. 1* (2013) and *Aleatoric Duet No. 2* (2014), Farah was placed high above the dancers, where he used his array of electronica that included keyboard, synthesizers and computer samplers, creating the score on the spot in response to the dance. The key word is "aleatoric," which means "randomly," or music associated with chance. Says Farah: "I either followed, or counterpointed, or threw something at them that they had to deal with."

Provocateur composer John Oswald was among the doyens of Canadian new music for dance during the 1980s and 1990s. "I was always looking for ways to break down the traditional roles of choreographer and composer," he says, and he found a willing collaborator in choreographer Holly Small. In *Wounded* (1998), the Toronto new music group Arraymusic pre-recorded Oswald's score. To the astonishment of the audience, the live performance featured the musicians miming their own playing. These air instruments, as it were, were choreographed by Small. The cellist was upside down.

The cross-pollination of new music and dance can result in something greater than the sum of its parts. Being a relentlessly contemporary dance company has made Ballet British Columbia a temple of new music, though given their limited financial resources, tape is the norm. In order to give her dancers the live music experience, artistic director Emily Molnar has built a relationship with Vancouver's famed new music orchestra, the Turning Point Ensemble. Says Molnar: "It's thrilling for the dancers to have a conversation between music and dance. Live music is a gift."

Ballet BC's February 2014 show featured live, original music by Owen Underhill, Turning Point's co-artistic director and conductor: Wen Wei Wang's *In Motion*, a 2011 Ballet BC commission remounted for the occasion, is set to Underhill's *Geometry of Harmony.*

Says Underhill: "Because it was a concert piece, the musicians couldn't imagine it with dance. Now they can't imagine it without dance. Wen Wei's choreography was a revelation. He picked up on qualities, rhythms and humour in the music that I never could have predicted."

Admittedly, many new music scores for dance are electronica soundscapes rather than acoustic melodies. The dance is layered over pings, squeaks, twangs, gurgles, drones and other industrial cacophony. As House quips: "Given the advance in technology these days, any kid with a computer can write a complex score."

Sound designer Jeremy Mimnagh gives a thoughtful response to the predominance of electronica in new music for dance. "The auditory world has evolved beyond traditional Western instrumentation. Electronica, with its infinite possibilities, creates new ways of exploring sound. It's all about art-making, which is a licence to use your imagination. ▼

Mediawatch

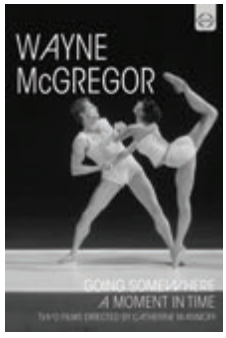
Le Corsaire
by Kader Belarbi, performed by Ballet du Capitole, 120 mins., www.opusarte.com

French-Algerian dancer Kader Belarbi enjoyed a successful career at the Paris Opera Ballet for more than 20 years; he has been director of dance at the Théâtre du Capitole in Toulouse, France, since 2012. For his new company, Belarbi took the unwieldy classic *Le Corsaire* and created what he describes as "a version for our age." He wrote a more streamlined libretto, and worked closely with music director David Coleman, who rearranged much of the Adam score and incorporated sections of music by Arensky, Lalo, Massenet and Sibelius, as well as writing some new sections himself.

This *Corsaire* clocks in at a comparatively modest two hours. The minimalist sets are often quite beautiful, and Belarbi has retained most of the distinctive notes of the original: the small, energetic corps efficiently fills the stage with action as pirates, concubines, peris and guards, and the costumes are suitably exotic. The choreography is modern without sacrificing classical technique, even retaining some of the signature steps of the famous grand pas de deux. A refreshing approach overall, yet perhaps not sufficient to conquer the suspicion that *Corsaire* — with its endlessly passive heroine and hero — lacks appeal to modern expectations.

Maria Gutierrez is a supple and expressive Slave Girl, Davit Galstyan an exuberant Pirate and Takafumi Watanabe a memorably nasty Sultan. The accompanying booklet provides useful interviews with Belarbi and Coleman on the creation of the ballet and the score.

— **HEATHER BRAY**



Going Somewhere and A Moment in Time
by Wayne McGregor, directed by Catherine Maximoff, 80 and 30 mins., www.euroarts.com

Going Somewhere, a documentary on Wayne McGregor's artistic methods and interests, and *A Moment in Time*, a compilation of excerpts from four of his works (*Entity, Dyad 1909, Qualia* and *Limen*), together make for a rich exploration into the mind of the British choreographer. Director Catherine Maximoff features clear, elegant framing and well-paced, unhurried editing in both.

One highlight in the documentary is watching Royal Ballet dancers Mara Galeazzi and Paul Kay in the early days of working on a duet that looks hopelessly tangled and complicated. Then, in the filmed performance with Galeazzi and Edward Watson, the duet becomes dazzling, with cool dramatics that seem to drive the now smooth entanglements.

Some captions indicating who, what, where and when would have enriched the documentary. McGregor and his Random Dance company fill out questionnaires given them by cognitive scientists (ah, the body language as the dancers lounge on the floor, pencils in hand), but who were the scientists? Or, when McGregor is exploring a computer choreographic program, what was the name of the program? Information here was sketchy.

A Moment in Time, the performance, is the keeper: an elegantly presented half-hour of the surprising angles and ceaseless flow of McGregor's arresting contemporary aesthetic.

— **KAIJA PEPPER**

Juliet and Romeo
by Mats Ek, performed by the Royal Swedish Ballet, 108 mins., www.naxos.com

By putting Juliet first in the title, Mats Ek signals the gently feminist treatment he gives Shakespeare's romance. There is his portrayal of the Nurse (Ana Laguna, Ek's wife) who instead of the usual dithery old woman is a strong, lusty character. There is also the opening violence, which comes from both women and men.

More daringly, Ek sets his ballet not to the well-loved Prokofiev score, but to Tchaikovsky. It's a shock at first to hear, for instance, the sweeping *Piano Concerto No. 1* as the Duke (Niklas Ek, brother to Mats) contemplates the feud between the Capulets and Montagues, but also refreshing.

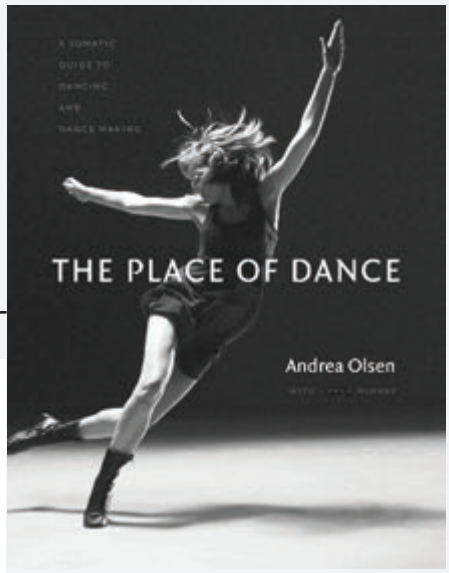
The Royal Swedish Ballet dancers powerfully fulfill Ek's quirky classicism. The final act one pas de deux between Juliet (Mariko Kida) and Romeo (Anthony Lomuljo) is full of fierce, grounded sweetness. Also noteworthy is the dangerous Mercutio (Jérôme Marchand).

Magdalena Åberg's moveable set of metal walls and Renaissance-inspired costumes create a timeless space to great theatrical effect.

Juliet and Romeo, Ek's first full-length work in 17 years, is contemporary ballet at its most thoughtful yet playful, as in the Capulet gang's arrival on Segway motorized scooters.

— **KAIJA PEPPER**

The Place of Dance: A Somatic Guide to Dancing and Dance Making
by Andrea Olsen, with Caryn McHose,
Wesleyan University Press, 2014,
www.wesleyan.edu/wespress



Andrea Olsen was born smack dab in the middle of the 20th century and in *The Place of Dance: A Somatic Guide to Dancing and Dance Making* she muses that she can look back 50 years to when modern dance was first formed and 50 years forward to current trends. From that vantage point, and with four decades dedicated to dance artistry, she has created this generous resource aimed at giving movers, dancers and choreographers an opportunity to push past their comfort zones.

Olsen, professor of dance at Middlebury College in Vermont, began her training in traditional modern dance techniques such as Graham, Limón and Cunningham. Her creative process, however, is a synthesis of experiential anatomy, authentic movement, performance and even her love of history and biology. Co-author Caryn McHose is a somatic movement therapist in New Hampshire.

This book's beautifully organized 288 pages offer heaps of guidance to finding what Olsen, in a video on her website, calls a "fresh edge," with a balance of anecdotes, photos and exercises poetically woven together.

She delivers her extensive knowledge in 31 bite-size chunks or "Days." Each Day has a To Do list involving a somatic practice, which she defines as "trusting the intrinsic intelligence of the body"; a To Dance section, featuring an exercise to try out in the studio; and a To Write portion, which invites us to refine awareness through writing. I appreciated the inclusion of Studio Notes, garnered from verbal cues by renowned American dance teachers, including Nancy Stark Smith and Robert Swinston.

Olsen finds her fresh edge with a holistic vision with which to dance, make dances and move through life. In the Introduction, she details her dancing priorities, which cross into both science and spirituality. As well as looking at the external experience of the body moving in space, she is interested in moving inwards to discover parts of the self hidden in the unconscious. Flip-flopping from the metaphysical to the physical keeps us on our toes. For instance, Olsen's Find your Calcaneus on Day 2 is a simple and practical method to get to know your heel bone and then on Day 4 the less scientific Vessel Breathing promises the reader they will "reconnect to the natural organic place of nurturance and aliveness in the body." Directions include imagining a sea anemone attached to the ocean floor, relaxing the gut tube and seeing yourself as "all gut." While I was not drawn to all the exercises, the author provides a smorgasbord in which the reader can take whatever morsels are most appealing.

I enjoyed Looking Back, Moving Forward, an articulate chapter contextualizing the history of modern dance. It is short and sweet and has a feeling of coming from lived experience. For example, when Olsen describes three of the mothers of modern dance — Loie Fuller, Isadora Duncan and Martha Graham — it is as though she is speaking about old friends. Although the chapter takes a somewhat narrow American point of view, Olsen does bring in personal stories throughout the book of experiencing dance in other parts of the world, including Bali, Greece and Japan.

In order to avoid predictability when making dances, she suggests we search to find "the vulnerable or unfamiliar view." I applaud Olsen for doing just that in this refreshing addition to the growing number of choreography manuals. I will surely reach for it when as a teacher, dancer and choreographer I need that little push to find a fresh edge.

— **DESIRÉE DUNBAR**

Don Quixote
by Carlos Acosta,
performed by the
Royal Ballet,
125 mins.,
www.naxos.com

Cuban-born superstar and longtime Royal Ballet principal Carlos Acosta proves an inspired choice to produce a new *Don Quixote*. This DVD is a treat even for purists who tend to find the ballet a little brash.

In an introductory feature, the creative team explains how Acosta sought to make the ballet fresh and relevant without losing its traditional charm. He retains the classic hallmarks — the vivid characters, broad comedy, hummable score and, above all, bravura technical virtuosity — and infuses the whole with an exuberant Latin élan. Everybody onstage appears to be having tremendous fun, throwing themselves into the acting as well as the dancing with gusto.

Acosta dances Basilio, and if his technical powers are not quite what they were, he is still a charismatic performer. He is ably matched by Marienela Nuñez as Kitri, a role she might have been made for: she is bold, technically astonishing, cheeky and flirtatious.

I also appreciated Christopher Saunders' nuanced portrayal of the Don, so often depicted as little more than a doddering idiot. This Don Quixote is a dreamy, courtly and kind-hearted gentleman who genuinely wishes to do good in the world, providing an emotional heart to the pizzazz blazing around him.

— **HEATHER BRAY**

Ballet Between the Notes

by Mavis Staines

INSIDE ED

"Theatre" derives from the ancient Greek word "teatron," which means "making visible the divine." That's a tall order for artists of any kind. Even in serious religious practice, manifesting the divine is a challenge; too often, behavioural rules, which are easy to discuss and measure, become the primary focus and end goal, rather than being seen as mere conduits to deeper spiritual practice. A focus on rules can also be found within ballet training, where much is written about how to teach technique simply as bodywork, with a list of dos and don'ts. Rarely are there suggestions about how to convey what musicians describe as the magic that happens between the notes — the phenomenon that infuses music and dance, too, with depth and emotional meaning.

Similarly, it is easier within ballet training to focus on refining fixed positions over the complexities of exploring movement's potential for expressive meaning. As well, it is so easy to drift from sustaining the essential balance between form and movement, even when remaining mindful of this vital component. The challenge is finding ways to avoid these pitfalls and, even more exciting, to develop daily teaching strategies to explore ballet (even at beginner levels) as a powerful language capable of conveying profound emotion.

Over the years, I have discovered a few strategies for developing artists, and not just technicians, by helping connect students to their passion for the art of ballet. One is to avoid using the mirror as the focal point of the studio. In fact, I believe the global practice of always facing the mirrored wall is the biggest deterrent to dancers developing a personal artistic voice and a theatrical use of eye line. This is not to say that I do not appreciate the benefit of mirrors as a tool for effectively refining a fixed position. However, in my view, to dance with one's eyes on a "fixed space hold" while aiming to share a sense of one's inner world goes beyond being counter-productive into the ludicrous.

Another strategy is to urge each dancer to create the impression the music is emanating from their inner world through their body, as opposed to just listening to the music. Encouraging students to infuse steps with specific and contrasting emotions often unlocks the door to considering music from an entirely new perspective.

Helping students develop a mindset that recognizes innumerable daily repetitions of the same movement as an opportunity to problem solve, rather than as inevitably mind numbing, is also important. Striving to make every repetition count, students turn into problem-solving "ballet detectives," which empowers them to act as partners within the training process.

I want to guide students to experience dance as a language capable of conveying profound human emotion. Comparing this to how we use verbal language has proven surprisingly effective. Just as we can choose to communicate verbally with genuine meaning, or merely "hollow words," the same is true with movement.

Seeking the artistry in every movement phrase is vital. While the possibilities of doing this in a well-known variation are immediately evident, creating artistry in a simple training phrase is not as obvious. Striving, for example, to make a tendu en croix sing provides a clear connection to the art of ballet.

My ultimate measurement of success within a ballet class is whether light is shining from each student's eyes, especially in what could be perceived as the drearier exercises; this signals that they are fully engaged and sharing the divine — the essence of teatron.

Mavis Staines, C.M., DHumL, has been the artistic director of Canada's National Ballet School since 1989. ▼

Mavis Staines works with students from Canada's National Ballet School
Photo: Courtesy of Canada's National Ballet School

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Global
REPORTS

Vancouver

by Kaija Pepper

Ballet BC closed its season with a triple bill of premieres, all with plenty of sound and motion, all demanding to dance, with high energy and whip-fast moves. Montreal-based Gioconda Barbuto went for fun, from the opening spotlight that searched slowly through the audience looking for … what? Who knows, but it made us laugh and a few people waved, enjoying their moment in the bright light.

Barbuto's piece, *immix* (a word from the Middle Ages that means to mix in or mingle), was set to club and classical mixed tracks by Gabriel Prokofiev, a London-based composer and DJ (and grandson of Sergei Prokofiev, whose beloved *Romeo and Juliet* score is heard so often on the ballet stage). *Immix* ended with a stage full of dancers (17, including four apprentices), who dash forward to take the final shape of the evening, one that connects them all in a splendid display of group solidarity.

Opening the bill was new work by two Spanish-born choreographers. First, Cayetano Soto's *Twenty Eight Thousand Waves* featured a fulsome display of hands, with legs that kick out and lock, extended like steel rods, or that fold like vises around a partner. Then, Gustavo Ramirez Sansano's *Lost and Seek*, a short piece with one long section in which a handful of dancers face the upstage corner, herking and jerking their bodies to fulfill the crabbed and rocky shapes of the choreography. It was my first sighting of work by these artists, and while I didn't get a clear sense of purpose or poetry from either piece, both had an undeniable physical force that the dancers ably mastered.

This quarter also featured shows by three Vancouver contemporary dance stalwarts. The senior of the group, Noam Gagnon, well known as one-half of the now defunct Holy Body Tattoo, has been forging his own path for several years. Here, he worked with Toronto's Nova Bhattacharya, a contemporary bharata natyam-based artist. Their full-length duet, *DVOTE*, at the Vancouver East Cultural Centre, was an odd piece, in which for much of the time one or both have their entire head and face fully swathed in a heavy black mask.

Over the last 15 years, Alvin Erasga Tolentino has established himself as an Asian-Canadian artist (born in the Philippines, living in Canada since 1983) interested in issues of gender and culture. *Colonial*, which premiered in 2012, was remounted at Vancouver's Dance Centre on June 12 in celebration of the Philippine's 116th independence day.

The hour-long solo was evocatively staged by Tolentino and Filipino Dennis Gupa: the dark space was eerily lit, with two large, transparent screens set downstage at an angle to each other, creating an intimate corner for Tolentino to dance in. The screens often contained projections of Catholic religious images that offered a cultural contrast to his bare-chested, barefoot character, gliding and shimmering in a long skirt and clutching two large raffia shakers.

Later, there was video of the creative team discussing their colonial theme and reflecting on the staging itself: film is a Western art form, said Manila filmmaker John Lazam, which gave the creators pause for thought. The piece was also about gender, insofar as Tolentino is a boldly luscious mover, his body comfortable with soft curves and languorous ripples, a style more associated with women than men.

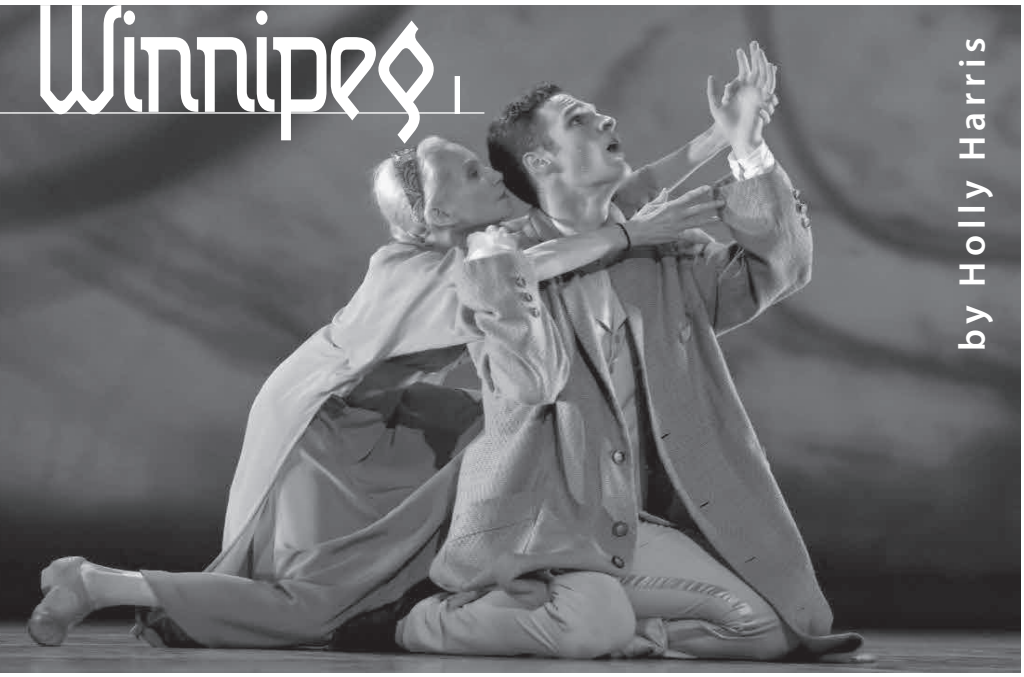
Amber Funk Barton, the youngest of the trio of stalwarts (her company, the response, was founded in 2008), presented her 55-minute *The Art of Stealing*, to a great rocking score by Marc Stewart. Barton and her gang of five performed scenes of urban tension that may not have added up to a final statement, but were beautifully danced and dramatically composed. Costumes were by lululemon lab, known for their stylish yoga and athletic wear; indeed, the layers of black leggings and tops might well be available in their store racks.

Finally, for something a little different: Serge Bennathan's autobiographical tale of coming of age through dance — *The Poetry Dance Project* — was presented in the front room of a private home. Accompanied by Bertrand Chenier on piano and bass, Bennathan sat barefoot behind his computer, which held the text, occasionally standing up to strike a telling pose. The 57-year-old ex-dancer evoked Nureyev at one point, in Balanchine's *Apollo*, the first piece he saw the charismatic Russian dance, which is the beginning of an engaging youthful episode about finding his way to Nureyev's empty dressing room — and an outrageous act of theft! Best known as a choreographer, Bennathan is revealed here as a warm and humorous storyteller, evoking the passion, power, arrogance and beauty of dance and dancers — both himself and the ones he remembers. ▼

(R-L) Manuel Sorge, Heather Laura Gray, Amber Funk Barton, Maiko Miyauchi, Lexi Vajda and Kevin Tookey in Barton's *The Art of Stealing*
Photo: Chris Barton

Winnipeg

by Holly Harris



The Royal Winnipeg Ballet's season-closer, the baldly titled Mixed Programme, provided sweet poetry this spring. The eclectic bill of three contemporary works gave a nod to the company's backbone — the Royal Winnipeg Ballet School — as well as paying tribute to its illustrious past on the eve of its 75th-anniversary season launching this fall.

James Kudelka's masterful *The Four Seasons*, chronicling "the journey of life," gave the company's former principal dancer**,** prima ballerina assoluta Evelyn Hart, her long-awaited, final bow, nine years in the making. Hart retired from the Royal Winnipeg Ballet in 2005 without a formal send-off and has since pursued an independent dance career in Toronto, where she currently resides. The still mesmerizing, 58-year-old dancer was joined by a trio of retired Royal Winnipeg Ballet dancers — Caroline Gruber, John Kaminski and Alexander Gamayunov — during the work's evocative final season, Winter, which felt like witnessing living history. Hart's cradling of corps de ballet dancer Liam Caines increasingly faltering Lead Man like a watchful, tender mother during their final pas de deux sent chills down the spine.

By contrast, William Forsythe's *The Vertiginous Thrill of Exactitude* was a dizzying display of classical technique and contemporary choreography, inspired in turn by Marius Petipa and George Balanchine. Staged by former Royal Winnipeg Ballet principal dancer Laura Graham, its quintet of dancers (Yayoi Ban, Sarah Davey, Elizabeth Lamont, Dmitri Dovgoselets and Yosuke Mino, garbed in Stephen Galloway's spring green tutus and leotards) handled the driving 11-minute piece's propulsive solos and intricate ensemble sections with militaristic precision as they shifted directions like fickle weather vanes.

Jorden Morris' premiere of his classically based *Défilé* showcased all levels of the Royal Winnipeg Ballet School's Professional and Recreational Divisions, set to a composite score by Mozart, J.C. Bach and Johann Strauss II. Despite best intentions, the 20-minute work's predominantly linear structure began to feel predictable. However, the finale in which all 56 students, joined by 15 company members, fill the stage highlighted the company and school's rich legacy of closely interwoven connection.

Gearshifting Performance Works ended its season with the cryptically titled *Eat All You Want/The Top!* choreographed by founding artistic director Jolene Bailie. The 60-minute production at the University of Winnipeg's Asper Centre for Theatre and Film featured strongly committed dancers Claire Marshall, Hélène Le Moullec Mancini, Krista Nicholson, Janelle Hacault and Jillian Groening in Bailie's latest exploration of what it means to be "human." Sound designer Susan Chafe's droning litany of newscasts telling of global war and political strife, subsumed with a rumbling techno-score juxtaposed with choruses of birdsong, underscored this theme.

Bailie's keen visual sensibility, including a copious use of props such as tarps, plastic drinking cups, trampolines and oozing chocolate tortes — beckoning at the side of the white box stage like Eden's forbidden fruit — created resonant stage pictures lit by long-time collaborator Hugh Conacher.

Several short solos and smaller ensemble sections effectively punctuated the unfolding series of episodic vignettes straddling both dance and theatre worlds. A quartet of dancers appears onstage, heads bent and shoulders hunched as they stride through the strewn cups. Another performer gazes upward, one arm held out poker straight before breaking into percussive kicks and leaps. More actual choreography would have added balance and cohesion to Bailie's surrealistic dreamscape of Elizabethan-collared unicorns and galloping horses.

Finally, the Sarah Sommer Chai Folk Ensemble celebrated its 50th anniversary on June 10, with a gala at Centennial Concert Hall. Founded in 1964 by the late Sommer, the renowned 40-member Israeli folk dance ensemble of dancers, singers and musicians is the oldest and largest of its kind in North America. The 180-minute program included retrospective works from the repertoire that fuse traditional and contemporary Jewish folk dance styles, as well as premieres by choreographers from Israel, Argentina, Mexico and the United States.

First up was a Chai signature work, *Hora Nirkoda* (*We Will Dance the Hora*), followed by the mysterious, ritualistic *Kalaht Yemen* (*The Yemenite Bride*), with costume designer Sara Salomon's effective black-hooded capes. The flamenco-inspired *Sh'Charchoret* was another highlight. In *Anachnu N'Hiyeh Harishonim* (*We Will Be the First*), the ensemble's athletic leaps and spins rivalled those of Winnipeg's Rusalka Ukrainian Dance Ensemble (also celebrating its golden anniversary this year). Sentimental favourite *Rabbi's Table* — originally conceived by Chai's former artistic director, the late Nenad Lhotka, in 1976 — included guest alumni invited onstage who belted out Yiddish songs.

The evening's most poignant moment came from Sommer's granddaughter and namesake, a vocalist, in *Eemah* (*Mother*). As a single, female dancer dressed in a pale green dress fluidly spun and twirled in a circle of light, the piece not only evoked the elder Sarah's memory, but also spoke to the continuity of generations.

Audiences also had a sneak peek at the Chai's newest creation inspired by earth and sky. The contemporary work received its official premiere at Israel's Karmiel Dance Festival in July. ▼

Evelyn Hart and Liam Caines in James Kudelka's *The Four Seasons*
Photo: Vince Pahkala

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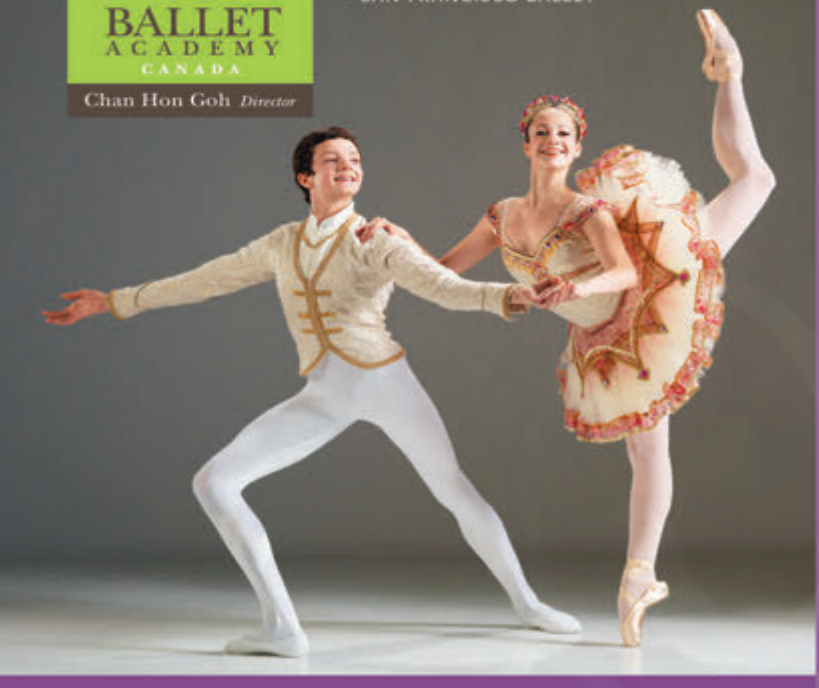

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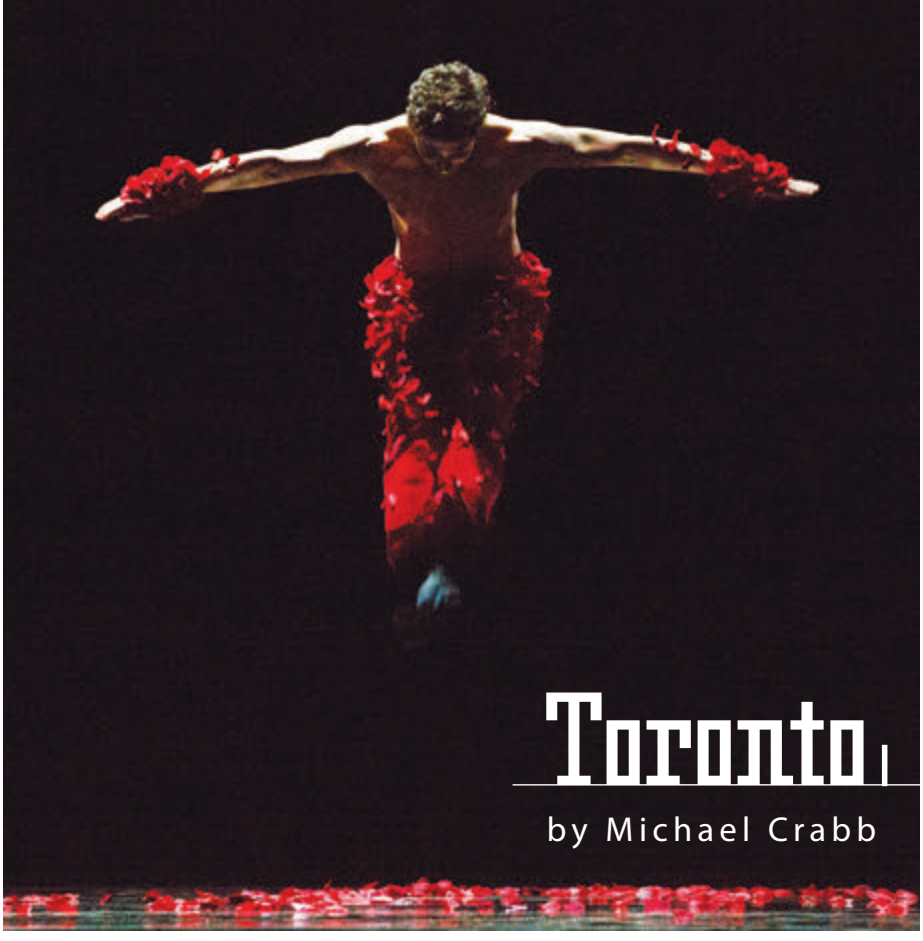


Toronto

by Michael Crabb

Guillaume Côté of the National Ballet of Canada in Marco Goecke's *Le Spectre de la Rose*
Photo: Bruce Zinger

It has been more than five years since *Washington Post* dance critic Sarah Kaufman unleashed her controversial, almost heretical attack on the aesthetic hegemony she claims George Balanchine still exerts over American ballet in particular and the ballet world more generally. Looking at the National Ballet of Canada's most recent triple bill, you get Kaufman's point, even if you're inclined to reject her conclusions.

There was nothing actually by Balanchine on the company's late spring program, but two of the works bore the unmistakable stamp of his influence. It's not just that they were plotless and performed in simple costumes on a more or less bare stage; the movement itself echoed the great Russian-American master.

In the case of *Opus 19/The Dreamer*, this is hardly surprising. The 1979 ballet, set to Prokofiev's D Major piano concerto, is by Jerome Robbins who, apart from being a game-changing Broadway choreographer, enjoyed an equally illustrious if less profitable career in the high-art world of classical dance, a good deal of it working alongside Balanchine at New York City Ballet. Without impugning Robbins' originality, it surely would have been hard for him not to be influenced by Balanchine. Robbins' acute sensitivity to spatial arrangements and dynamics, the way he suggests psychological states, the utter absence of sentimentality and the cool emotional distance he maintains: all bear witness to the potency of the dance aesthetic that then as now permeates New York City Ballet.

The case of William Forsythe is rather different. Although American born and trained, he crossed the Atlantic in his early 20s and essentially forged a path more attuned to European ideas and tastes. Even so, in *the second detail*, a work he created for the National Ballet in 1991, Forsythe apparently couldn't resist quoting Balanchine — if only for the sake of deconstructing several of Mr. B's trademark moves and compositional devices. Fortunately, Forsythe does this affectionately. In fact, watching *the second detail* more than 20 years after its premiere, it's refreshing to discover how much jollity is in it. It's actually quite a romp. Even Thom Willems' score sounds quite tame.

In the early 1990s, *the second detail* was radical, but now that so many aspiring choreographers, especially those who worked with Forsythe, seem incapable of freeing themselves from his influence, *the second detail* looks oddly commonplace. But, of course, Forsythe did it first — and did it best.

The presence of these two relatively old works by American choreographers only threw into starker contrast the North American premiere of German choreographer Marco Goecke's 2009 remake of Fokine's almost iconic *Le Spectre de la Rose*.

While a case can be made for the innovative choreography Fokine gave Nijinsky in the 1911 original — even making a man the prime mover in the pas de deux was novel — most audiences cherish this short bonbon of a ballet as a perfumed romantic reverie.

A young woman, rose in hand, has just returned on a summer evening from her first ball. As she nods off in a comfy winged chair, the rose, obviously symbolic of a man who'd caught her eye at the ball, falls from her hand. Then, in her dream — and at just the right moment in composer Carl Maria von Weber's famous *Invitation to the Dance* — the title character soars in through an open window, dances up a storm, briefly and chastely partners the girl, and exits through another window.

This isn't good enough for Goecke, child of the city of Wuppertal made famous by Pina Bausch. He adds more Weber music, introduces a chorus of six shirtless men in red suits, expands the girl's role to make it equal with the lead man's and turns what in the original was a dream into a dystopian mating ritual.

Goecke, of course, has to make some historic references or else the title would make no sense. Thus designer Michaela Spring puts the lead man in frilly red pants redolent of rose petals, with large matching bracelets, and Goecke

offers the occasional hint of that arching overhead carriage of overlapping arms so famously captured in photographs of Nijinsky.

If, as suggested, this is a mating ritual we're watching, it's not a very happy one. Goecke's concentration on rapid-fire, constantly shifting arm movements speaks of agitation and fear. When the man and woman connect, it's awkward, mechanical and exploratory, as if each is afraid of being consumed by the other. Udo Haberland's lighting design meanwhile often casts the ballet into fashionable gloom.

Kaufman would, in principle, be heartened to know that Goecke's aesthetic owes nothing to Balanchine. Others might wish it did. A little musicality would go a long way. If anything, it's closer to Bausch — all those rose petals strewn across the stage — with a dash of Édouard Lock.

It's all very German, very contemporary and in the end rather tedious. I doubt anyone will be complaining about Goecke exerting an aesthetic hegemony any time soon. ▼

Montreal

by Linde Howe-Beck

When the lights came up after Cloud Gate Dance Theatre's *Songs of the Wanderers,* many spectators' faces were streaked with tears. Created 20 years ago by Lin Hwai-min for his Taiwanese company, the intensely poetic and mysterious meditative pilgrimage had perhaps offered a glimpse toward enlightenment.

At Place des Arts in late March, the moving *Songs of the Wanderers* is the third remarkable work the much-decorated choreographer has shown in Montreal. Each was a unique fusion of Asiatic sensibility, spirituality and extravagant yet simple staging. This time a powerful recording of a Georgian chorus emphasized its universality.

As dancers trekked with butoh-like gravity through landscaped rituals of prayer and fire, tossing three-and-a-half tons of golden rice into arcs as ephemeral as human gesture, one man — a symbol of pilgrimage — stood motionless in Buddha-like prayer for 90 minutes as torrents of the golden grain rained upon his head and shoulders.

Houston Ballet made a return visit of its own a couple of weeks later with *Marie-Antoinette,* choreographed by artistic director Stanton Welch, whose unexpected choice of music by Dmitri Shostakovich turned out to be wise indeed. *Marie-Antoinette*, a well-dressed and decorated three-act production, is a worthy descendant of the 19th-century classics.

Welch takes a decidedly contemporary view of the queen who literally lost her head to the guillotine during the French Revolution. We meet her as a young Austrian princess at her betrothal to the spoiled teenager who will become Louis XVI. Unceremoniously stripped of her Austrian clothes and redressed in opulent French style, she is treated with disdain until she produces an heir to the throne — a difficult task since the marriage was not consummated for seven years.

Marie learns to live in public view, pushed, prodded and peered at 24 hours a day. Louis XVI is a bore, but she dutifully overcomes her aversion to him and learns to enjoy the superficialities of the French court. In the end, although a lover offers an escape from the guillotine, she stays by her family and perishes regally.

The choreography chooses practicality over innovation. It keeps the plot moving swiftly on a stage filled with wonderful sets — the royal bedroom is a gilded cage; there are battalions of courtiers who one-up each other with shows of leg and elaborate bows. Soon, the court is having food fights and playing musical chairs, setting the stage for the epic finale of mob hatred, turncoats, Robespierre and the blade. Throughout, the giddy shades of hypocrisy and decadence escalate, exemplified in strong male dancing with more tours en l'air, rondes de jambe and pirouettes than ever before crammed into a single production.

Dance accounted for 11 of 27 productions staged in late May by the resolutely edgy annual theatre and dance event, the Festival TransAmériques. Artists from the Balkans to Belgium and New York to Berlin to Lisbon gathered to impress and provoke.

Two prizewinners, Benoît Lachambre and Daniel Léveillé, were among the Montrealers showcased. Festival regular Lachambre showed *Snakeskins,* winner of Montreal's 2013 Grand prix de la danse, in which he harnesses his ability to inhabit dissimilar characters.

In *Snakeskins,* he initially appears clipped into strips of leather that look like a second set of ribs. Held by a thick collar, he contorts his body horizontally and vertically at the centre of a vast set made of string. He sheds this skin for superhero spandex before morphing again into a snarly, swearing (bilingual) panhandler. His gestures are real, crude, uncompromising. He throws himself from a high metal platform to collapse on the floor. Musician Hahn Rowe is easily his equal, producing walls of sound from an arsenal of equipment like metal sheets and an electric violin.

No question that Lachambre can create hallucinogenic pieces. But, in *Snakeskins*, his ego controls his art when self-absorbed interludes break his bond with viewers. By the end he was fluttering about the stage for reasons known only to himself.

In contrast, Daniel Léveillé's *Solitudes Solo* for five dancing heroes — four men and a woman — is an Atlas of a piece. No wonder it got last season's best choreography prize from the Conseil des arts et des lettres du Québec.

Performed on a bare stage, *Solitudes Solo*, set to J.S. Bach, emphasizes the miracle of the body. Devoid of lyricism, nuance, tricks of any kind, it is pure physicality as seen by a choreographer at the peak of his powers. Each dancer appears alone dressed only in briefs to perform brusque, unlinked series of anatomical workouts that appear to have more to do with athletic training than dance.

Every movement is raw. Every leap and landing, every shape delivered is perfect, measured, like Bach's musical reminder that discipline can make poetry on its own terms. It's a short hour of matchless virtuosity and originality. ▼

Houston Ballet's Ian Casady and Melody Mennite in Stanton Welch's *Marie-Antoinette*
Photo: Amitava

San Francisco

by Allan Ulrich

Patience pays off. It was the second half of the 2014 San Francisco Ballet season that provided most of the revelations during the past winter-spring season at the War Memorial Opera House. Youthful British choreographer Liam Scarlett, who is the Royal Ballet's first artist in residence, made a compelling company debut April 29 with the abstract *Hummingbird,* a title that defies explanation, like so many of the ballet's finest moments; they nevertheless feel right. Scarlett's glosses on Balanchinesque neoclassicism suggest that this prolific choreographer may yet add something significant to the ballet language.

In *Hummingbird,* Scarlett has delivered a piece in which the whole universe seems to revolve around the duet form. And he seems to believe that the duet form must bespeak a relationship of mortal urgency. Remarkably, for a choreographer working for the first time with San Francisco Ballet, he seems to have peered into the souls of his dancers, especially principal Yuan Yuan Tan, who offered the most poignant performance I have seen from her in a couple of years.

Within John MacFarlane's unusual set (a huge canopy framing a ramp on which many of the dancers make their entrance), three principal couples (in colour-coded dresses and slacks), two soloist couples and four corps pair wander the landscape, sometimes in silhouette. To surprisingly romantic music by Philip Glass, a couple in blue (Frances Chung and Gennadi Nedvigin) mingle in an energetic exchange, involving thrusting limbs, spinning bodies, arched backs, precarious lifts and intense floor work. The subsidiary pairs included James Sofranko, Hansuke Yamamoto, Sasha de Sola (who came into her own this season) and Simone Messmer (who danced with flair, but will not return next season).

The floor is also the locale for the middle duet, in which an anguished Tan stands in a contorted tableau, elbows jutting. Luke Ingham becomes both her enabler and her healer in a duet that brims with emotional overtones. The source of the woman's grief is a mystery, but her vulnerability strikes an intensely human chord. Yet, *Hummingbird* ultimately puzzles. The briefer third duet (performed on short notice by Dores André and Joan Boada) ends without generating much tension, let alone proposing a solution to the material that preceded it.

Artistic director Helgi Tomasson also came up with a premiere, *Caprice*, which on April 4 seemed like an affable example of Hausballett and little more. The music is mostly Saint-Saëns' *Symphony No. 2*, French Romanticism at its most inert. The score inspired in the choreographer a vehicle for star ballerinas Tan and Maria Kochetkova, and cavaliers Ingham and Davit Karapetyan, and it is spiced with daring lifts that drive audiences mad. *Caprice* is well turned-out, but inspiration is not part of the mix.

The event of the ballet season was the local premiere of Alexei Ratmansky's *Shostakovich Trilogy*, a co-commission with American Ballet Theatre, where it opened in 2013 (and was reviewed in these pages by Robert Greskovic). Except for *Russian Seasons*, Ratmansky's previously danced works here gave little indication of his dramatic power and formal brilliance.

The two casts who interpreted the trilogy in March each brought something distinctive to the task. No ballet choreographer I know of working today so blurs the distinction between narrative and abstraction. Tracing the travails of an artist through the Soviet hell was a heroic task and realized here splendidly. *Shostakovich Trilogy* percolates with enough substance to repay a lifetime's study. Rarely have critical responses and audience reaction been so in sync. Tomasson, who had planned to revive only the third panel of the work in 2015, bowed to pressure and will restore the entire ballet.

Away from the War Memorial Opera House, nothing else this quarter made the sensual impact of Mark Morris' staging of Handel's pastoral opera, *Acis and Galatea*, at Berkeley's Zellerbach Hall on March 25. This intoxicating project, for which Morris provided both direction and dances, will be touring intermittently for the next year with the 18 members of the Mark Morris Dance Group.

For his first staging of a Handel opera, Morris chose well. With its small cast, bare narrative and exceptional economy, this 1718 opera evokes an intimate dream of Arcadia populated by a small singing cast and those dancers, whose dizzying entrances and exits, and elaborate and almost spontaneously formed patterns suggest a functioning community that bolsters the lovers of the title and consoles them when tragedy strikes. The dancers' constantly reaching arms, surprising hops and fluid unisons seem an extension of the Handel score (given here in the Mozart arrangement), rather than a response to it.

The tone is alternately boisterous and tender, mirroring the mood of the arias; solo dancers respond brilliantly to the beauties of the sung score. Acis' *Love in her eyes sits playing* summons a courtly romantic duet from dancers Aaron Loux and Chelsea Lynn Acree. Morris also banishes special effects, allowing the villainous Polyphemus to commit his dastardly acts solely through physical means.

This is only the second time in recent years that Morris has directed opera singers onstage (*Orfeo* at the Met was the other). The integration with the dancers was not totally successful: Isaac Mizrahi's vernal costumes, which flatter the dancers, look odd on the less physically sleek vocalists. But the best moments of this *Acis and Galatea* will linger in the memory. ▼

San Francisco Ballet in Liam Scarlett's *Hummingbird*
Photo: Erik Tomasson

by Robert Greskovic

NEW YORK

This year's Workshop performances by the School of American Ballet celebrated a 50th anniversary. Begun in 1965 as the brainchild of faculty member Alexandra Danilova, the legendary Russian ballerina, the tradition eventually hit its stride as a three-performance run that has been in place for a goodly number of years. Eschewing the idea of a "graduation" event, as was traditional in Imperial and Soviet Russia, the workshops get prepared over the school year and largely feature advanced students.

The 2014 landmark event will eventually come under broader scrutiny when Live from Lincoln Center, the U.S. public television series, broadcasts this year's May 31 evening performance (dates to be announced).

The bill performed was more or less all-Balanchine. It was described as "specially chosen to recognize the School's co-founder George Balanchine and former faculty member Alexandra Danilova, who together launched SAB's first year-end student Workshop." Its press release said: "After inviting Alexandra Danilova to join SAB's faculty in 1964 George Balanchine encouraged her to create a year-end performance showcase for SAB's advanced students ... "

Further shading of this view might, however, be in order. Over the years, a colleague close to some of Balanchine's leading ballerinas noted that the ballet master sometimes voiced misgivings about the workshop's effectiveness. Balanchine was said to be leery of the experience it presented regarding being part of his company. To paraphrase what I was told, Balanchine felt that while the workshop tradition had grown too strong to call off, its concepts remained essentially unrealistic. Exposing young dancers to something like yearlong preparation for a role or two made for a situation out of the realm of possibility or even desirability for an eventual company career. Balanchine was well known to steer his New York City Ballet dancers clear of prolonged rehearsal time.

The die, however, was cast, and the latest run included the program that will be televised: *Serenade*, (Balanchine/Tchaikovsky, 1934, much revised in its 90-year history, and staged by Suki Schorer), excerpts from *Coppélia* (Balanchine and Danilova/Delibes, 1974, staged by Dena Abergel, Yvonne Borree, Arch Higgins, Katrina Killian, Lisa deRibere, Jock Soto and Sheryl Ware) and *Western Symphony* (Excerpt), Fourth Movement: Rondo (Balanchine/Kay, 1954, staged by Susan Pilarre). All these offerings were given with youthful expertise and in some cases eye-catching power, most notably in the matinee performance of *Western Symphony* by an especially spirited and high-flying Alec Knight, a willowy 18-year-old from Southbank, Australia, who readily brought to mind New York City Ballet's famous Jacques d'Amboise.

Swan Lake (Excerpt) was also given, with the following credits: "Music by Peter Ilyitch Tchaikovsky, Choreography by George Balanchine, after Lev Ivanov" and "Staged by Darci Kistler." It was this approximately 15-minute portion of the anniversary bill that was the most odd of the mix, to put it mildly.

The backstory here is almost as historic as that of the workshop's own: Kistler, now a member of the School of American Ballet's faculty, came to public attention in 1980 when Danilova chose to feature the 15-year-old advanced student in her own "Tchaikovsky/Ivanov" staging of *Swan Lake, Act II*. To the best of my knowledge, that staging represented Danilova's recollection of what she'd danced in her own Ballet Russe years; there was even a prince's friend in her cast.

The recent Workshop credits would have been more accurate if they had included ballet master in chief Peter Martins' name. The climactic shoulder lift in this staging is a direct quote from Martins' own "After Balanchine, Ivanov and M. Petipa" *Swan Lake*. Likewise, though it was in place during the early years of Balanchine's 1951 staging of *Swan Lake*, the world-famous pas de quatre, called Dance of the Four Cygnets then and Dance of the Little Swans at School of American Ballet, also figured in Kistler's staging. Though she couldn't have seen it in Balanchine's own rendering — it was dropped around 1964, the year she was born — there are a number of places to look for what passes for Ivanov's choreography. Wherever Kistler looked, as the telecast will duly show, the preparation and prompting given the four SAB cygnets left them and their dance looking more haphazardly slipshod than caringly schooled. In what can best be called an ill-advised stress on the dance's energy and "attack," the resulting performance looked overactive to the point of frenzy and messiness.

A related lack of care and a seemingly cavalier disregard for the detailing associated with the "Balanchine after Lev Ivanov" choreography kept the young dancers in the central roles of Odette and Siegfried from looking ready or even suited to these iconic roles. But such young artists cannot really be to blame; those who prepare showcases like this need to be more aware of what they've set out to do. Danilova most certainly helped Kistler make her mark and in a way helped launch her notable career as arguably Balanchine's last iconic ballerina. Kistler didn't show, on this School of American Ballet anniversary, any real rapport with the savvy of her SAB teacher or her NYCB ballet master. My hope is that the telecast, whenever it hits the air, won't make viewers think the fault lies with these young, unsuspecting dancers. ▼

Alston Macgill and Joshua Shutkind and School of American Ballet in *Swan Lake*
Photo: Paul Kolnik

London

by Kathrine Sorley Walker

Choreographers have frequently turned to Shakespeare's plays for source material — it is indeed hard to count the multiple dance-theatre versions of *Romeo and Juliet* — but in *The Winter's Tale*, co-produced by the Royal Ballet and the National Ballet of Canada, Christopher Wheeldon has broken new ground.

The ballet, which premiered at Covent Garden in April, is set to a commissioned score by the British composer Joby Talbot, who, in discussions about the play's adaptation with Wheeldon and Nick Hytner (director of London's National Theatre) has worked out a score that aptly provides different tone-colours and styles for scenes that vary from palaces to folk festivities, and from tragic drama to romantic comedy. Rather surprisingly, to my way of thinking, they have omitted Shakespeare's roguish pedlar, Autolycus.

An interesting point is that the rural dances in Act II are accompanied by a group of on-stage musicians with a disparate set of instruments — a type of Indian flute called a bansuri, a dulcimer, an accordion and some percussion.

Designs, particularly charming in that act, are by Bob Crowley, the Irish designer (who also worked on Wheeldon's *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland*). Eyes and ears, therefore, are well supplied and impeccable performances come from jealous Leontes (Edward Watson), patient Hermione (Lauren Cuthbertson) and the delicious young lovers Perdita (Sarah Lamb) and Florizel (Steven McRae). The dance and mime composed by Wheeldon, however, although always appropriate and fluent, are less inventive and ingenious. Apart from Leontes' tortured and contorted solos, characterizations and emotional responses lack dramatic clarity, and the ending is an oddly brief and muted marital reconciliation.

Also in April, English National Ballet marked the centenary of the First World War by *Lest We Forget*, a mixed bill including three new works at the Barbican; the famous title phrase comes from Rudyard Kipling's great poem, *Recessional,* written in 1897. The choreographers, Liam Scarlett, Russell Maliphant (who was born in Ottawa, but trained at the Royal Ballet School) and Akram Khan, each in their own style, paid tribute to their great-grandparents' "lost generation."

Scarlett's *No Man's Land*, with music from Liszt's *Harmonies poetiques et religieuses*, and an imaginative multi-level setting by Jon Bausor, contrasted glimpses of young women munitions workers with sad partings of soldiers from their wives or sweethearts — poignant duets eloquently led by Tamara Rojo and Esteban Berlanga.

Maliphant's *Second Breath* was musically apt, strong and impressive in its elegiac manipulation of a score of dancers. Typically for this choreographer, it was a closely collaborative work (music by Andy Cowton, costumes by Stevie Stewart and lighting by Michael Hulls) backed by serious period research at the Imperial War Museum.

Finally, Akram Khan's *Dust* was equally effective, an abstract and hypnotic impression of claustrophobic trench warfare with music by Jocelyn Pook, costumes by Kimie Nakano and a set by Sander Loonen.

Scottish Ballet arrived at Sadler's Wells in May with yet another *Romeo and Juliet* set to the over-familiar Prokofiev score and choreographed by Krzysztof Pastor, the present director of the Polish National Ballet and the Lithuanian Opera and Ballet Theatre. This time, with a program note explaining the intention was to show that the "star-crossed lovers'" situation is "timeless," the feuding family tragedy was switched (not very convincingly) to the 1930s (Act I), the 1950s (Act II) and the 1990s (Act III). Able and attractive principals were Sophie Martin and Erik Cavallari, and the rather complicated designs were by Tatyana van Walsum, which included film projections of photographic street scenes of buildings and people relating to the three chosen periods of time.

Also at the Wells, Rambert staged a retrospective program that began with Lucinda Childs' *Four Elements*. Music in four movements for Earth, Air, Fire and Water was by Gavin Bryars, colourful rock-garden backdrops were by Jennifer Bartlett, and Childs' choreography for four couples developed from terre à terre movement to leaps and aerial lifts. Christopher Bruce, a choreographer of infinite and delectable variety, was represented by *Rooster*, his vigorous and clever celebration of Rolling Stones songs, described by him as "something of a battle of the sexes" and danced with great relish. The program ended with Merce Cunningham's rather low-key *Sounddance* (music by David Tudor), and Richard Alston's witty solo *Dutiful Ducks*, admirably danced by Dane Hurst. ▼

English National Ballet's Alina Cojocaru and Junor Souza in Russell Maliphant's *Second Breath*
Photo: Ash

Paris

by François Fargue

There is rarely a new production or creation at the Paris Opera Ballet that does not come with the added buzz of a famous name connected with the world of art and fashion. This season, however, there has been mostly reruns of repertoire pieces. One exception early on was Saburo Teshigawara's *Darkness is Hiding Black Horses* in October, a creation for which Teshigawara single-handedly took care of music, sets, costumes and lights in addition to choreography.

This made the only other premiere of the season in May a desirable commodity, even more so as the choreographer was none other than Benjamin Millepied. He could have hardly imagined when he accepted the offer from Brigitte Lefèvre to create a new ballet to Ravel's *Daphnis and Chloé* some two years ago that he would present it just months prior to replacing Lefèvre. Nor, indeed, could she.

To titillate media attention even further, Lefèvre enlisted Daniel Buren to make sets for the new piece. Best known for the recurring black-and-white stripes in his works, Buren gained national fame in 1986 with his controversial columns in the Palais Royal that remain to this day one of Paris' curiosities.

Lefèvre programmed Balanchine's *Crystal Palace* for the same evening, which somewhat guaranteed a confrontation between the master and his disciple. For the costumes, she called upon Christian Lacroix, who had revamped *Jewels* in 2009 to scintillating effect. Not much can be said of the rigid and cumbersome tutus he came up with for *Crystal Palace*, which torture the girls and hamper their moves. Not to mention the garish colours.

None of the premiere cast quite lived up to the swift and nifty impetus Balanchine's choreography requires, save Pierre-Arthur Raveau, a premier dancer on a roll, who, if this was a competition, decidedly thrashed the étoiles with his classy jumps and Swiss-like precision.

All the dancers, however, impressively poured themselves into Millepied's *Daphnis and Chloé*, glorifying his choreography, which is in perfect synch with Ravel's score, if not a dramatic breakthrough in dance history. Ravel's lyrical music is, in fact, one of the components of the ballet's success: if you ever wondered what the sound of Ulysses' Sirens might be like, those choirs in his *Daphnis and Chloé* might give a hint. Most clever, too, were the mobile and geometrical sets designed by Buren, which, thanks to their Japanese starkness, dramatically broke with the flowing lyricism of the music and dance. In truth, a vastly convincing total art experiment that saw the likes of étoiles Aurélie Dupond and Eleonora Abbagnato at the height of their fantastic femininity.

Millepied also worked in a showstopper of a solo for premier danseur François Alu, who, though bypassed by lovers of the noble prince type, has the technique and charisma to overwhelm the audience and is the potential new star of the company.

Dupond, due to retire next season, will replace Clotilde Vayer as ballet master. An ex-première danseuse with the company, Vayer will in turn be promoted to director's associate/ballet master in replacement of ex-étoile Laurent Hilaire, who chose to resign after being one of the contenders for the position of director before the appointment of Millepied.

Elsewhere, Jean-Christophe Maillot has been director of Les Ballets de Monte Carlo since 1993. He is a clever and artful choreographer at the head of a company of unflagging quality. Never had he packed a harder punch nor shown his dancers' raw energy to such a dazzling degree than with his revisiting of *Swan Lake*, whatever the more fastidious critics might say about his tampering with the plot. But then, that's Maillot's eternal balancing act. "Too contemporary for the classicists, too classical for the contemporaries," he has declared about his own style.

Created in Monte Carlo in 2011, *Lac*, as he has chosen to call it, was shown in Paris in June at Théatre National de Chaillot. It sticks indeed to pointe work with a vengeance, but is also a savage reinterpretation of the tale. Aided in the rewriting by French novelist Jean Rouault, the ballet starts with a short Cocteauesque black-and-white film involving two innocent children at the hands of a frightening queen. It then revs up into hell-for-leather partying at the court and dizzily segues into the Black Swan part. It is not so much controversial as it is totally incomprehensible unless you've read the program, which is honestly scant help. But any attempt at making out what is actually going on is soon washed away by the phenomenal energy of the dancers that sometimes flirts with musical comedy. Absolutely all the dancers show voluptuous speed and precise flexibility.

Star of the company, Bernice Coppieters, is the Night Majesty, a role suited to her astonishing lines and beguiling charisma. Her first entrance in a gigantic black crinoline that turns out to be her three watchdogs is fantastic. Admittedly, the ballet unfolds at a pace akin to the accelerated motion of a silent movie, affording little space for emotion save in a vibrant solo for the prince (Stéphane Bourgond). The wall-to-wall incredible dancing probably fails to move the soul yet cannot help but fill one with breathless admiration. ▼

Les Ballets de Monte Carlo's Stephan Bourgond and Anja Behrend in Jean-Christophe Maillot's *Lac*
Photo: Alice Blangero

Spain,

by Justine Bayod Espoz

The first time I saw Vanesa Aibar perform was at the Spanish Dance and Flamenco Choreography Competition in Madrid in 2012 in *Era Silencio* (*There was Silence*). One or two of the competition's participants always outshine the rest: that year it was Aibar, not just because of her impeccably honed flamenco skills, but also because of the poetic and uniquely authentic nature of her choreography.

Era Silencio was inspired by Juana Valencia Rodriguez, an important flamenco dancer from the turn of the 20th century. As her artistic nickname, La Sordita (the little deaf girl), suggests, Rodriguez was famous for being partially deaf, but she still maintained spot-on rhythm. Through a masterful combination of expressive choreography and creative artistic and musical direction, Aibar succeeds in artfully narrating through movement and music alone the story of a dancer who is losing her hearing. Humour and symbolism are woven together as a succession of fans appear magically from different parts of Aibar's beautiful golden dress, each fan smaller than the previous one, representing the character's continuing auditory loss. Within the span of a mere 15 minutes, the audience lives the joy of dancing and the fear of silence experienced by a dancer unwilling to allow a handicap to prevent her from performing.

Aibar won second prize for solo choreography with an honourable mention for the original musical score by Cristian de Moret. To this day I feel Aibar was robbed of her rightful first place, and when I next saw her at the Chicago Flamenco Festival earlier this year in her first full-length solo production, *EviscerArt*, I was even more certain of her choreographic talent.

Aibar, who danced in the corps de ballet of many of Spain's most important companies, including Nuevo Ballet Español and the groups of Eva Yerbabuena and Blanca Li, credits the musicians with whom she created *Era Silencio*, guitarist Eduardo Pacheco and singer and pianist de Moret, with inspiring her to use her earlier competition piece as a jumping off point for something bigger. *Era Silencio* became the closing piece of *EviscerArt*.

"It's difficult to find musicians who are excited to rehearse and to search for common artistic ground and a shared style of communication. With Eduardo and Cristian, I've been lucky enough to find it," says Aibar. This creative flow and camaraderie are one of *EviscerArt*'s most noticeable strengths. Nothing about the production feels forced, choppy or contrary. This is because the music was composed especially to suit Aibar's choreography, and because all three artists entered into the production with an eagerness to listen to one another and create something unique to their aesthetics and experience. Aibar contributed a desire to delve into a contemporary style of flamenco dance; Pacheco the softer, more classical colours of flamenco guitar; and de Moret the thick, soulful cry of traditional flamenco singing and the rhythmic twang of a piano played as though it was a flamenco guitar. The finished product is explosive and unlike anything I've seen before.

"When flamenco moves you, it grabs ahold of your abdomen, your viscera; it literally pinches you and makes you vibrate. That's the idea we started with when we made *EviscerArt*," explains Aibar. The work uses a rich and deliberate lento and brief gaps of silence in the music as a recurring motif to propose questions such as how do you sing about silence? What does it mean to be a dancer who cannot hear the music? How do we find sincere self-expression in stillness? Embracing this theme does not, however, mean the show is monotone; there is also swelling sound and the stillness is often disturbed by bursts of ebullient movement.

EviscerArt is not what foreign audiences tend to expect from a flamenco show: a lot of fast, heavy footwork, an unceasing blur of spinning ruffles and bold, aggressive facial expressions. Aibar doesn't dabble in fusion — something that has become popular in flamenco — but her style is modern and representative of how flamenco is evolving in the hands of a younger generation of artists. As Aibar aptly describes, in her flamenco "lines, angles, sobriety and organic movement that brushes contemporary dance abound. There is a distancing from the image of traditional flamenco."

Two sold-out Chicago performances and standing ovations both nights left no doubt that Vanesa Aibar and Company had presented something fresh and original, and also managed to use silence and stillness — traditionally uncharacteristic of flamenco — to captivate and engross. From their home base in Seville to Madrid to Chicago, *EviscerArt* has already travelled thousands of kilometres and it continues to tour; the piece will be back in North America in September, at the Madison World Music Festival in Wisconsin and the Lotus World Music and Arts Festival in Bloomington, Indiana.

Aibar is currently working on a revisioning of Alexander Pushkin's *Don Juan* by playwright and dramaturge Irina Trofimov, in which she will dance. It is directed and choreographed by Juan Carlos Lérida, known for his contemporary flamenco creations. The piece is scheduled to premiere in Moscow in February 2015. ▼

Vanesa Aibar in *Era Silencio*
Photo: Antonio Acedo

ITALY,

by Silvia Poletti

The rustle of a silk petticoat. A large bed, unmade, in a dim room. A long string of pearls, which hold the two lovers in more ways than one. These are simple touches that perfectly caught the sensual and decadent atmosphere of *Chéri,* the novel full of melancholy written by French writer Colette in 1920. It breaks the taboo of the possibility of love between a mature woman, Léa, "light-minded and wise," and an immature and spoiled young man, Fred — or Chéri, "little darling," as he is called by his mother and her witty entourage — who with his superficiality will destroy their lives. An intimate story translated in a whirling twist of bodies in a dance imbued by shimmering emotions, and also with the sarcastic words of Chéri's mother, played by American actress Amy Irving: this is *Chéri,* Martha Clarke's dance-drama created for American Ballet Theatre's Herman Cornejo and a resplendent Alessandra Ferri.

After the New York premiere at Signature Theatre last December (where it became the talk of the town, with a run of more than 50 performances), *Chéri* arrived in Europe thanks to Ravenna Festival, the international music, opera and ballet summer event. Three performances were scheduled in the perfect setting of ancient Teatro Alighieri to celebrate the definitive official rentrée of Ferri, Italy's unique dancing actress, after her farewell to the stage in 2007 at age 44.

Back then, Ferri said goodbye to all the heroines she had embodied with passion and devotion — Giselle, Juliet, Manon, Carmen, Marguerite, Tatiana — but soon understood she could continue expressing her own feelings in the body language she masters so wonderfully given the right role. That's why Léa seems a perfect starting point for Ferri's return and new progress in art; in the character she is able to instill not only her uniqueness as a dancer, with those tapering and sensuous lines that seemed to stop time (and they did it again!), but also that special gift of feeling life and translating those feelings into theatrical truth.

In the role of Chéri, Cornejo was a true dramatic discovery for his poignant presence and his understanding that in this choreographic score "less is more." Together, the two created a physical and emotional alchemy that made their characters' relationship quivering and plausible, from the first long, ecstatic opening scene, where passion seems to be moving them through a choreography dominated by twisting lifts and physical abandon, until the last melancholic encounter. That final pas de deux, which happens after Chéri's wedding to a rich debutante and his experiences in the First World War, demonstrates that the possibility of recreating their old magic together is gone, and the breaking of this last illusion will lead Chéri to kill himself.

A good example of chamber dance-drama, Clarke's *Chéri* captures the essence of Colette's novel, its setting in Belle Époque Paris and, above all, the peculiar way of life of a certain social coterie, that demimonde accustomed to live in a flagrant and conspicuous manner, where weddings are considered just a step forward on the social register.

Live piano music was almost a fourth character in the piece, with its Ravel, Debussy, Poulenc, Wagner and Federico Mompou selection played by Sarah Rothenberg, who was curiously so physically similar to Colette herself!

The beautiful set and décor gave us a glance into the lovers' intimate ordinary lives, while the choreography itself repeated the swirling enchaînements of the first duet too often, risking monotony. In any case, the performances of Cornejo and Ferri were so intense and masterful that they made every step lively and nuanced.

While *Chéri* will continue its run with a world tour from Washington to Buenos Aires to Australia, Ferri's schedule is filled with proposals and productions. A new project with Cornejo is on her desk, and she has already accepted two new projects in Europe for the coming season. John Neumeier, whose *Streetcar Named Desire* and *Dame aux Camélias* she has already danced, is going to create a full-evening dance drama based upon an episode of Eleonora Duse's life for Ferri and Hamburg Ballet. In May 2015, she will return to her alma mater, London's Royal Ballet, for a new creation by Wayne McGregor inspired by Virginia Woolf's works.

"Wayne attended *Chéri* in New York and immediately asked if I wanted to work with him on this new project," Ferri told me when we recently spoke. "In this stage of my life I have the wonderful chance to get back into the game, to experience new ways of being an artist. I believe that dance is not simply entertainment but art — it has to start from feelings more than from the body — and I was happy that a choreographer like Wayne, renowned for his bold research in dynamics and movement, had asked a dancer like me to work with him." ▼

Herman Cornejo and Alessandra Ferri in Martha Clarke's *Chéri*
Photo: Joan Marcus

DENMARK

by Anne-Marie Elmby

Is it possible for Royal Danish Ballet audiences to relate to the experiences of Afghanistan war veterans? Yes, when the presentation is by the talented Corpus group, founded last season as a platform within the Royal Danish Ballet. At Corpus, new ideas and forms of expression flourish under the artistic directorship of dancers Tim Matiakis and Esther Lee Wilkinson.

For *I Føling — en krigsballet (In Contact — a war ballet)*, Matiakis and Wilkinson, on this occasion also choreographers, collaborated with playwright Christian Lollike, who favours significant, contemporary issues. Lollike wanted authenticity incorporated with help from three Danish Afghanistan veterans and their stories. Two had lost legs by bombs, while the third suffered from post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD). They were already frequenting the Royal Theatre studios in rehabilitation training with dancer and Pilates instructor Josee Bowman, a driving force in the Danish Wounded Warrior Project that is supported by the Royal Danish Ballet Foundation and with growing international affiliations.

Sitting on the floor, the two veterans with amputated legs removed their prostheses, and then their muscular arms and torsos supported female dancers leaning and dancing around them. In contrast, some dancers had one of their arms or legs lengthened with a prosthesis-like extension, while others had an artificial leg attached.

One soldier spoke of the difficulty in distinguishing civilian Afghans from the enemy, which led into a beautiful scene where 33 shapes in full burkas moved slowly around in backlight on the night-blue stage to an Arabic lullaby. A female soloist gently crossed the stage and repeatedly fell down at the sound of loud shots, but got up every time and persevered, showing the human will to survive. One dancer reeled off possible dangers, and each time he shouted "roadside bomb," he flew into the air in a split jump.

Three stage-wide screens, placed at different angles, showed videos of dark clouds, combat desert views or theme-related text. At one point, dancers lying on the floor appeared on the screen filmed from above while moving like wounded soldiers on the battlefield. Varied auditory features included the pompous chorus from Beethoven's *9th Symphony* and his lyrical *Moonlight Sonata*, experimental soundtracks by Australian, Iceland-based Ben Frost and actual sounds from military actions.

Anders Poll's amazing light design sometimes formed a horizontal plane through the auditorium, where clouds seemed to drift above the audience. When used to create vertical planes at the stage sides, dark-costumed dancers appeared and disappeared through the lights like ghosts through a mirror.

Without wallowing in sentiment, the evening was an eye-opener for the audience and perceptibly worked as a positive experience for the veterans, who received a standing ovation as well as heartfelt applause from their ballet colleagues onstage.

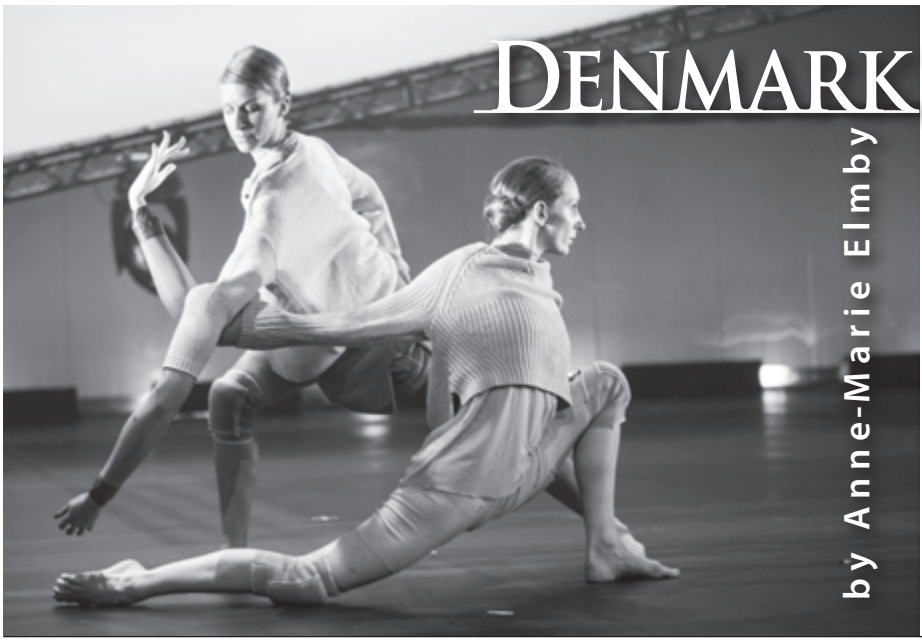
Another great idea of the Corpus directing duo is their Pop-up evenings. Five times during the past season, a dancer was given the responsibility of a single performance in a rehearsal studio. For starters, soloist Christina Michanek danced a varied bouquet of solos and read from her own thought-provoking poems.

Next, corps dancer Emma Håkansson performed her own, inspired solos with musician Mike Sheridan, who produced otherworldly sounds on his cristal baschet, an instrument composed of metal stems and 54 chromatically tuned glass rods that are rubbed with moistened fingers to produce oscillating resonance.

In her Pop-up evening, principal Amy Watson asked colleagues to choose a dream role to dance onstage and in a video that followed, they explained their choices. Sebastian Haynes, for instance, who loves the *Dying Swan*, said he knew he would never get another chance to dance this solo. Strong, male swans have been seen before in Matthew Bourne's and Mats Ek's *Swan Lakes*, and Haynes' masculine swan in black tutu was no less convincing. A *Romeo and Juliet* pas de deux choreographed by former New York City Ballet principal Adam Lüders was danced with a fine bond between Kizzy Matiakis and Ulrik Birkkjær.

For his Pop-up evening, principal Gregory Dean created the fine *L'Amour Fou* for three couples, inspired by a piano piece of the same name by Côme Aguiar. Dean also filmed a group who spoke of their life as dancers, and in between, he sang three songs to his own keyboard accompaniment.

A rare treat in principal Birkkjær's Pop-up evening was to see Sorella Englund, a mentor of his, in their duet *A Moment*, where they explored their close artistic relationship. Birkkjær also choreographed a heated pas de deux for Watson and Dean to an excerpt from Stravinsky's *Firebird,* and another emotional one for Michanek and Haynes. Musical interludes were given by entertaining pianist and singer Our Lady J, whom Birkkjær met while dancing with Los Angeles Ballet, where she plays for class when not performing as a classical pianist or with her Dolly Parton show. ▼



Josee Bowman and Kizzy Matiakis in Tim Matiakis and Esther Lee Wilkinson's *I Føling — en krigsballet*
Photo: Christian Radil

Norway

by Fredrik Rütter

When you've been in the field of dance for 40 years, it's a good reason to celebrate. This was recently the case for choreographer Kjersti Alveberg, when the director of the Norwegian National Ballet, Ingrid Lorentzen, offered her a retrospective evening that also featured some new works.

Alveberg has been one of the most prominent creators of dance in Norway since 1974. Then a dancer, she jumped at the possibility of doing her first creation for a choreographic workshop offered by the National Ballet; *Tomorrow* was later filmed by Sweden's State Television, danced by Cullberg Ballet. Alveberg learned the craft of the media very fast, and did many productions, hiring freelance dancers each time since she never had a company of her own.

Her stage and, especially, her television productions have been visually fabulous, with a range of themes, everything from Norse mythology to nanotechnology. She has also done spectacular outdoor events, such as the opening shows of the Winter Olympic games, at Albertville, France, in 1992, and Lillehammer, Norway, in 1994.

For the celebration this March, she was offered the main stage of the Operahouse, but requested instead the smaller, more intimate stage. The celebration performance was called *Alveberg on a dreamt ocean,* and it really showed what rich fantasy and creativity she possesses.

Norwegian National Ballet's spring season was dedicated to the theme of *Swan Lake*. Lorentzen signed up Swede Alexander Ekman to create a full-length ballet, *A Swan Lake,* in which he wanted to fill the stage with water. A 16-by-16 metre reservoir was the goal, but only for the second act. That meant that the stage crew had to fill it up during the interval. Something like 5,000 litres of water went into the basin. During the rehearsals, some of the dancers slid and fell with the result of several concussions, so helmets and kneepads were required, with modified versions in performance.

In the first act, Ekman takes the audience back to around 1875 when the very first *Swan Lake* was created. Two actors are onstage discussing the plot for a new ballet, and among many subjects they come up with the idea to let the women be swans. If not many steps were performed, the dancers set the record straight in the second act. But *Swan Lake* it is not. New music, written by Mikael Karlsson, fits like a glove. The combination of water and dancers sliding many metres with the water splashing around them is a visual feast. The piece is meant to be, and is, entertaining, but unfortunately it is as shallow as the water onstage.

As a contrast to the modern version from Ekman, the classical four-act *Swan Lake* was back the following week. The classical version was, like Ekman's, sold out so there is definitely room for both. The Norwegian National Ballet's *Swan Lake* was created by Anna-Marie Holmes, and since it was added to the repertoire in 1997, it has been performed 75 times. This season's 14 performances were divided into five casts, which suggests keep-happy politics since each cast only got two or three performances each. The first night starred the Cuban couple Yolanda Correa and Yoel Carreño, who are both great technicians, but this night, the chemistry between the two was missing, especially in the white acts.

Leaving the Operahouse after the classical version, a lady walking next to me asked her friend where all the water had disappeared to. "Did you see any?" she asked. They came a week too late.

The Bergen modern company Carte Blanche celebrated its 25th anniversary during the Bergen International Festival, with a show by Ina Christel Johannessen, *A Collection of Short Stories.* The company's 11 dancers participated, being active together or alone, and they all expressed their own stories, which were told (through dance, with some speaking a little) in a few seconds or through longer sequences. Johannessen, who has worked with the company since 1992, is still choreographing with a lot of energy, and is good at making intricate pas de deux.

Choreography can be used in many different settings, and doesn't only involve extreme dance and dancers. Also during the Bergen festival, the Canadian L´orchestre d´hommes-Orchestres performed songs by Tom Waits. The concert was carefully staged from the very first moment: somebody had obviously given the six singers and musicians very strict frames, within which they moved perfectly. Also the Montreal-based circus group *Les 7 doigts de la main* visited during the festival, with their explosive mix of street dancing and acrobatics, basketball and skating. ▼

Norwegian National Ballet in Alexander Ekman's *Swan Lake*
Photo: Erik Berg

Australia

SYDNEY AND BRISBANE

by Deborah Jones

You can sell *Swan Lake* and *The Nutcracker* until time stops, but mixed bills — those tend to be a different story. In Sydney, where the Australian Ballet puts on the greatest number of performances annually, the company decided on a new strategy this year for its shorter works. It would stage two mixed bills in repertory rather than just one program as in the past, and would cater to a wider range of tastes. If Wayne McGregor's hyper-extended physicality and Jirí Kylián's quirky humour didn't appeal, then the straight up and down classicism of George Balanchine and Serge Lifar might.

First up was *Chroma*, a quadruple bill headed by McGregor's 2006 piece of the same name made on the Royal Ballet, and also taken up by a number of companies, including Alvin Ailey American Dance Theater, which indicates McGregor's ability to transcend dance categories.

Chroma is not without intimations of human connection, but they are fleeting and enigmatic, as is so much else in the work. In seven swiftly moving, grandly conceived scenes, the choreographer captures on the dancer's body some of the myriad neural impulses that make it move, think and feel. Undulation, distortion and extreme articulation are a big part of the movement language, but we can also see fragments of the classical ideal shimmering through. The juxtapositions are absorbing: small and large, inner and outer, action and repose, contemporary and traditional, the body and the space it occupies, the relationships between bodies.

At its first performance, the Australian Ballet's cast of 10 didn't entirely get on top of *Chroma*'s difficult transitions, many happening in a microsecond, from crisp to liquid and back again. There wasn't enough bite and drama, although plenty of lovely moments in a work that repays repeated viewings.

Petite Mort and *Sechs Tanze* were given rousing performances, possibly a little over the top in the case of *Sechs Tanze,* but in keeping with its gaiety in the face of whatever the fates decree. Despite one or two scrappy moments, *Petite Mort* again demonstrated Australian Ballet's affinity for Kylián. In this ballet, rousing is indeed the mot juste, as the title is a euphemism for orgasm. There are men with fencing foils, women in corsets, intimations of darkness and some outstandingly sexy dancing with lots of orgasmic shudders.

It was a good night for the Australian Opera and Ballet Orchestra and the Australian Ballet's music director, Nicolette Fraillon. Joby Talbot's music for *Chroma*, which includes his arrangement of several pieces by Jack White of the White Stripes, is textured and richly coloured as well as providing a solid yet flexible base for McGregor's out-there movement. It rocks and it rolls, often luxuriously and lyrically, and the orchestra conveyed the excitement and tension.

Sechs Tanze is performed to Mozart's delightful *Six German Dances* and *Petite Mort* to the sublime slow movements from his piano concertos numbers 21 and 23. The allegro first movement from Mozart's *Divertimento in D* provided a lively entr'acte between the two short Kylián ballets.

Stephen Baynes' new *Art to Sky*, presented between McGregor and Kylián, felt uncertain in tone and looked uninspiring in construction. There was a main man (Andrew Killian), a woman who seemed to represent a romantic ideal (Madeleine Eastoe) and a ballerina with a tiara (Lana Jones), but little sense of compelling purpose. Elements of jocularity emerged that had the audience tittering unsurely.

The design elements for *Art to Sky* did not help — there was a kind of grotto effect set and inoffensive practice gear in pastel shades for the dancers. Designer Hugh Colman appeared to be having a rare off day. Only days before I had admired Colman's charming design for Queensland Ballet's *Coppélia* and he also provided the glamorous tutus for *Ballet Imperial*, part of the *Imperial Suite* program that was in repertory with *Chroma*.

Imperial Suite was all about the women. In Lifar's *Suite en blanc* there is a flurry of white tutus and only one male dance of any substance. In Balanchine's *Ballet Imperial,* a leading ballerina, a secondary ballerina and two demi-soloists reign with the backing of several supportive danseurs.

The Balanchine pays homage to the transformative era of Tchaikovsky and Petipa in Imperial Russia and the Lifar is a bouquet to classical technique and the glamour of ballet. Both are displays of style and personality or, to put it another way, the dancers don't play characters, but test their own character and mettle. Their individual qualities as artists are on display in a mercilessly bright light.

The Australian Ballet was entirely comfortable with *Suite en blanc*'s diverse set of variations to the springy music of Édouard Lalo and the first cast glittered happily when I saw it in Brisbane, as did the second cast, which I caught in Sydney. The more elusive qualities of *Ballet Imperial* were not entirely captured on either of the occasions I saw it. Few of the dancers fully embodied the sophisticated, complex grandeur of the choreography or illuminated the bold drama of Tchaikovsky's second piano concerto. Leading the first cast, Jones was the standout. ▼

Australian Ballet's Amber Scott and Adam Bull in Wayne McGregor's *Chroma*
Photo: Jess Bialek

St. Petersburg

by Laura Cappelle

Is the balance of power shifting in St. Petersburg? As the Mariinsky Ballet continues to send mixed signals under director Yuri Fateyev, last spring some of the most anticipated performances happened around Nevsky Prospect, on the other side of the city.

At the Mikhailovsky, on Arts Square, Nacho Duato's imminent departure doesn't seem to have hampered the company's rise. The St. Petersburg premiere of Ashton's *La Fille mal gardée* was well received, and the troupe continues to benefit indirectly from the issues plaguing Russia's most venerable ballet institutions. In the wake of Nikolai Tsiskaridze's shock Vaganova appointment, the Academy's ousted director, Altynai Asylmuratova, joined the Mikhailovsky as artistic advisor and coach, and brought with her a former star pupil: Kristina Shapran, who spent three years with Moscow's Stanislavsky Ballet as a principal.

A delicate, expressive dancer with coltish limbs, Shapran is the polar opposite of Angelina Vorontsova, the powerhouse soubrette who joined from the Bolshoi last year, but equally individual; in these two young ballerinas, the Mikhailovsky may have found a duo of stars to contend with the best of their generation.

Festivals have also been gathering steam in the St. Petersburg ballet calendar, none more so than Dance Open. Thirteen years after its inception, the festival, held in April and spearheaded by choreographer Vasily Medvedev, has grown into an impressive, large-scale event.

This year, an invitation to perform was extended to Dutch National Ballet, and the company's program of Hans van Manen ballets proved a fine choice for the small but ornate Alexandrinsky Theatre. The highlight was a delicate ballet created just two weeks prior in Amsterdam, *Dances with Harp*. The harp, played onstage by Remy van Kesteren, brings out van Manen's minute musicality and the starkly dramatic atmosphere of his pas de deux for three couples.

Sandwiched between *Dances with Harp* and *Corps*, seen last fall in Amsterdam, was a series of van Manen miniatures. These included *Trois Gnossiennes,* which afforded St. Petersburg one last chance to see Larissa Lezhnina, exactly 20 years after she left the Mariinsky and a few weeks before her farewell performance in Amsterdam. She danced with radiant ease, and was greeted in style by the Russian audience.

The traditional Dance Open Gala followed the next night. It is usually a star-studded affair with impressive production values, though some of the most exciting performers were let down by their choreography. American Ballet Theatre's Misty Copeland had little to do in Marcelo Gomes' trite *Paganini*, while the Royal Ballet's Melissa Hamilton and Eric Underwood contorted their way through an excerpt from Wayne McGregor's first narrative ballet, *Raven Girl*, any hint of story well out of sight.

In the awards ceremony held afterward at St. Petersburg's Ethnography Museum, the Grand Prix deservedly went to Dutch National Ballet's Anna Tsygankova, gloriously mature and musical in *Delibes Suite*. Other standout turns came from Yolanda Correa and Yoel Carreño in *Diana and Acteon*, and Remi Wörtmeyer in a short, comic solo he created to Offenbach; Carreño and Wörtmeyer shared the People's Choice Award with the same number of votes.

The pièce de resistance was Medvedev's own recreation of the Grand Pas de Deux Electrique from a lost Petipa ballet, *Bluebeard*. By Medvedev's own admission, only a few steps could be reconstructed from existing material, with the rest an educated guess. The result is solid and musical, but hardly distinctive, with sections bringing to mind *La Bayadère* or other 19th-century ballets; more could be made of the theme of this wedding divertissement, the miracle of electricity (as in *Sleeping Beauty*, it is introduced as a gift and a symbol of modernity). The Bolshoi's Kristina Kretova and Semyon Chudin lent verve to this *Bluebeard* alongside a corps of four couples from the Jacobson Ballet Theatre, and were awarded the Ms. and Mr. Virtuosity Awards for their efforts.

Across town at the Mariinsky, more company premieres were scheduled in the spring than the company had seen in a long time; after McGregor's *Infra*, Ashton's *Sylvia* proved a success on the historical stage and will be back next season.

The Mariinsky's punishing performance schedule means that rehearsal time is often too limited, however, and casting remains a contentious issue, with a curious disregard for a dancer's natural emploi. Still, British dancer Xander Parish was promoted to soloist after an assured, elegant performance in *Sylvia*; his joint debut with Yulia Stepanova in *Swan Lake* also proved refreshingly different from what other recent casts have offered. The company seems to have noticed Stepanova's instinctive musicality and soulfulness at last, and we should see more of her.

At the Vaganova Academy, meanwhile, the dust has settled, but changes continue behind the scenes. Tsiskaridze has introduced a raft of new rules, and, more worryingly, plans are being drawn to go back to an eight-year rather than nine-year program. The extra year (added in 2006) allowed dancers to graduate with a higher education diploma rather than just the Academy's diploma, and was designed to prepare them better for company life. If the plan goes ahead, 2015 will see two graduating classes — and more questions about the new administration. ▼

The Bolshoi's Kristina Kretova and Semyon Chudin in Vasily Medvedev's *Bluebeard*
Photo: Vladimir Cherenkov

Stuttgart Ballet
Clug, Volpi, Béjart
by Gary Smith

Whim W'Him
Bartee, Ochoa, Wevers
by Gigi Berardi

Les Grands Ballets Canadiens
Stijn Celis / *Orpheus' Gaze* and *Transfigured Night*
by Linde Howe-Beck

Sarasota Ballet
Ashton Festival
by Michael Crabb

Prague Ballet
Petr Zuska / *Solo for Three*
by Victor Swoboda

Youth America Grand Prix
Final Round and Galas
by Kaija Pepper

Stuttgart Ballet

Clug, Volpi, Béjart / Mixed Bill

Two Stuttgart Ballet works that premiered in June at Stuttgart Opera House — Edward Clug's ultra-masculine *No Men's Land* and company choreographer Demis Volpi's all-female *Aftermath* — revealed not only the choreographic inspiration of very different choreographers, but also the strength of the company's female and male dancers. Each piece also offered new and startling visions of the choreographers.

Clug's work often suggests a balletic ebb and flow between male and female dancers. There is a sexual tension that propels physical energy forward. With *No Men's Land*, Clug banishes women from the stage and concentrates on the attributes of some very muscular men. The opening image of a masculine chorus line is jaw dropping. Twenty young men stand topless, rippling muscles and taut legs ready to launch into physical attack. Talk about testosterone. It's like the old time Folies Bergère turned on its head.

There is much militaristic stomping of feet. Heads swivel and bob. Legs catapult these robo men into space. With quick sudden motion, feet flicking mechanically, toes pointed, eyes staring straight ahead, this phalanx of masculine power moves forward.

Dancers pat each other down, much like security guards searching for weapons. Sometimes they hug in silence. There is often an emphasis on hands, fluttering, flicking, sending messages like some form of semaphore. A man dances on with a bag over his head. Why? Who knows. Perhaps it's about disguise or escape.

Music by Slovenian jazz musician Milko Lazar is dissonant and dislocating. Lighting is harsh and always white. Bodies are caught in its glare, sculpted like chess pieces that suddenly move.

There was some spectacular dancing, as when Louis Stiens' body catapulted across the stage, his visceral energy both masculine and feminine. Perhaps this is the ideal combination Clug is looking for. Robert Robinson gyrated like a robot on hyperdrive, connecting with the ballet's strangely kinetic powers. There was also a thrilling solo from Brent Parolin, who, when separated from the tribe, is an image of provocation.

Near the work's close there was a stark and dramatic moment when the dancers paired off. One man's arm extended between the legs of another, like a giant phallus. Ultimately these phallic symbols drooped and fell away. The band stood transfixed. One man knelt in awe in front of its slowly diminishing power.

No Men's Land seems to question what it really means to be a man. Are men simply testosterone machines? Do we admire only the strength and physicality of their forms? Shouldn't there be more to it than that? Clug might have a point.

Volpi is another choreographer who documents intense male-female relationships. With *Aftermath,* he explores what it means to be a woman, featuring Alicia Amatriain struggling to break free of some sort of fiendish corps de ballet and its mechanical, orchestrated and repetitive dance. The band of women behind her kept forcing her into line, demanding she stay in check.

There is a sense of worship of sameness, a celebration of technical achievement at the expense of creativity and artistic expression. There is always a sense of entrapment, and Volpi builds the tension in his piece nicely. These could be swans in *Swan Lake*, wilis in *Giselle*, dryads in *Don Quixote*. You don't even know who the dancers here are: there are no personalities in sight. With the exception of Amatriain, this was a faceless band.

As the outsider, Amatriain struggled against their force. She became more desperate, more determined to remain separate and apart.

Volpi's piece was danced with utter commitment by a fine contingent of dancers. Michael Gordon's composition, after which the ballet is titled, helped to propel the piece forward.

At the conclusion, when the automatons gradually disappeared into a black void at the back of the stage, they took the tormented outsider with them. Ah, but the trick is it doesn't stop there. For several desperate moments you heard the clacking of pointe shoes, growing louder and louder from offstage, the hideous clack of frenzied destruction.

Aftermath could be Volpi's comment on how technical dance skills can threaten to swallow up the artist's true integrity, to waste artistic imagination. Given the way some audiences and artistic directors demand more and more tricks, Volpi's *Aftermath* is a frighteningly realistic possibility.

In between these startling dance pieces, Maurice Béjart's beautiful *Songs of a Wayfarer* from 1971, danced splendidly by Friedemann Vogel and Oscar Chacon, proved classical ballet is far from dead.

— GARY SMITH

Above: Hyo-Jung Kang and ensemble in Demis Volpi's *Aftermath*
Photo: Ulrich Beuttenmüller

Bartee, Ochoa, Wevers / Mixed Bill

It's nearly impossible to get bored or distracted in a Whim W'Him performance. The material artistic director Olivier Wevers premieres is diverse and unpredictable — his spring program, #UNPROTECTED, was no exception.

Wevers ensures consistency by collaborating with the best. On his team this time is lighting designer Michael Mazzola, costume designer Mark Zappone (on loan from Pacific Northwest Ballet), choreographers Annabelle Lopez Ochoa (an award-winning Colombian-Belgian) and Andrew Bartee (a dancer who leaves Pacific Northwest Ballet at the end of this season to join Ballet BC), and his dancers: curious, quirky, determined, expressive. Wevers has said in interviews that he chooses his dancers for their diverse personalities and sense of humour, but also their ability to interpret his movement and add to the character of the group as a whole.

It would seem that Wevers chooses his choreographers with a similar lens: personality, wittiness and creativity of movement. Ochoa has choreographed three works and restaged two others for the five-year-old Seattle company. Bartee, a fledgling choreographer, has produced one other work for Whim W'Him, and a handful of pieces for Pacific Northwest Ballet Company and School.

On the stark, softly lit stage of Seattle's Erickson Theater, with no wings or backdrop, the dancers are unprotected — their distinct personalities manifest in three very different premieres: Ochoa's *Les Biches*, Bartee's *I'm here but it's not the same* and Wevers' *Above the Cloud*.

Les Biches is another striking piece from Ochoa. Somewhat ritualistic (but not to the extent of Bronislava Nijinska's version), Ochoa's creatures ("biche" is French for "doe") are part-human, with sleek, skin-coloured leotards and '50s-style bathing caps that hide both hair and femininity. The look of the women is harsh — especially with their bright red, claw-like finger extensions. Their movement is undulating and deliberately forceful, flaunting their instinct and strength. With splayed claw-fingers, the dancers are downright scary.

Geneva Jenkins, Mia Monteabaro, Tory Peil and Lara Seefeldt brilliantly captured the occult nature of les biches. Peil is the alpha female, the demon mama of the group, who cajoled the others to join her in extreme contortions. The dancers taunted each other, pleading to break away.

Monteabaro danced with Seefeldt in a ghoulish scene that had them recoiling from and then touching each other, looking like contact improvisation. Jenkins then took centre stage, staring down her willful sisters. Later, Seefeldt luxuriated in her line and walk. Her short, high leaps en ménage provided a welcome distraction. The dancers then moved against ever-changing, amoebic-like projections on the back wall. All walked backward, melting into those projected images. Music by the eclectic and unpredictable Aphex Twin and Lisa Gerrard, an indie artist with mainstream elements, was hauntingly rhythmic.

Bartee's *I'm here but it's not the same* is about the inevitability of change. On a dark, bare stage, five dancers (Thomas Phelan joined the four women from the first piece) in hoodies and casual pants create a beautiful geometry onstage. A line of five blurs into a formation of four dancers plus one, five later merge into groupings of two and three. Spatial changes continue throughout — dancers move into different diagonals across the stage, one by one, but also together. Seefeldt, the lead character, was stunning with her extreme gestures and exacting placement in her solos.

Wevers' *Above the Cloud* features archetypal spirits and clouds that can shadow, hide and cushion. The full troupe performed, with Kyle Johnson and the indomitable Jim Kent joining the other five.

In this witty piece, the white-clad dancers in athletic trunks and tops move amid the rich colours produced by vertically mounted blue-hue fluorescent tubes. Thick, white cushions serve as the clouds to which the dancers are attached.

Francis Poulenc's dramatic organ chords sounded, sending Kent and Monteabaro on their way leaping into the upper atmosphere. Kent and Seefeldt danced a pas de trois with one fluffy cushion, Johnson and Peil a duet full of gyrations and tight, spiral turns.

Their moves suggested a mesmerizing backward flow, a momentum similar to that in ice dancing. The relationship with the cloud-cushions is ever changing, and, at one point, the dancers recoiled from the others' fluffy pieces — forever separated from each other.

In #UNPROTECTED, Wevers has presented works featuring eccentric characters in fanciful worlds, harnessing the energies of choreographers who imagine creatures feral and human, and of dancers who master space, time and rhythm to create them.

— GIGI BERARDI

Mia Monteabaro, Lara Seefeldt, Geneva Jenkins and Tory Peil in Annabelle Lopez Ochoa's *Les Biches*
Photo: Bamberg Fine Art

Stijn Celis / *Orpheus' Gaze* and *Transfigured Night*

Judging from the handful of works Belgian-born Stijn Celis has given Les Grands Ballets Canadiens de Montréal, it's fair to say that this choreographer of full and fearless talent loves taking risks even if they cause confusion.

Once a protégé of Les Grands' artistic director Gradimir Pankov, Celis is now newly appointed artistic head of ballet for the Saarland State Theater, a German regional company. Although he has created works for many small groups, he is best known in Montreal for his masterful, music-driven (Stravinsky) *Noces*, commissioned by Les Grands in 2002, followed the next year by the full-evening story ballet, *Cinderella (The Lost Shoe).* Both ballets have a lot in common with his latest premiere for Les Grands, a two-piece program, *Orpheus' Gaze* and *Transfigured Night*, shown in May at Théâtre Maisonneuve, Place des Arts.

The evening began spectacularly with *Orpheus' Gaze*, inspired by the Greek myth of Orpheus and Eurydice in which Orpheus follows his beloved into the underworld and makes a pact with Hades not to look at her until they return to the living. His mission very nearly succeeds.

Celis, stage designer and choreographer, put a simple white outline of a house against the black backdrop as black-and-white figures below mourned Eurydice's death with fast and jagged movements. Soon, instead of deepening, the magic dissipated as big grey doors appeared from the heavens or were pushed across the stage. Everybody enthusiastically went in and out of them, carefully opening and closing each as the doors' numbers escalated. From time to time chairs for mourners came and went as well — a nice touch was the outline of one that appeared and disappeared high up on the backdrop.

Surreal? Yes. Confusing? Yes. Fascinating and fast? Yes. At some point, Orpheus the musician took up his violin (a lyre in the original myth) to charm Hades and descended into hell through one of the doors. Fortunately, he chose the right door because he did find Eurydice — only to lose her permanently because he stole the verboten glance.

Orpheus' Gaze had tremendous appeal. It charged along at great speed (another Celis trademark), melding pointe and demi-pointe, contemporary and classical styles in a ceaseless and impressive outpouring of ideas. Les Grands' young dancers met the challenges with verve, particularly André Silva as Orpheus. Tributes to dance history popped up now and then in cleverly appropriate references, whether intended or not: Celis' massed movement recalled poignant moments of *Petrushka*; Eurydice's anguished flexed feet seemed borrowed from Mats Ek; a frieze of five hand-holding women linked to Nijinsky's use of two dimensions; the quantities of quickly utilized chairs brought memories of Ohad Naharin.

Masks by costume designer Marija Djordjevic were intriguing although some were so similar they made it difficult to identify different groups in the story. Casting was brilliant, especially the very tall Robert Deskins as a Nazi-like Hades.

Orpheus' Gaze has so much going for it that I hope time and tweaking can reveal its full potential.

Transfigured Night, to Schoenberg's Opus 4, a score that had reportedly long bewitched Celis, stood up well as a plotless ballet despite its backstory about a man who accepts his beloved's pregnancy by another man. Its nine glamorous couples swept back and forth across the stage, making the music visual.

Although it was rather awkwardly and vaguely linked thematically with *Orpheus' Gaze* — both involve men's decisions regarding their mates — *Transfigured Night* seemed déjà vu. Again, Celis' taste for music-charged dynamism in the forms of passion and speed was in evidence as nine couples swooped across the stage under a splendid moon-dark sky.

Dancers in filmy blues, greys, fuchsias, purples and even ginger floated and tossed like voluptuous night creatures in turbulent, enraptured lifts and spirals, replicating the flash and swirl of the music. With only a hazy moon for light, colours and shapes created a heady romance and a translucent dance of their own as dancers whipped across the stage.

Program notes indicated a storyline, but the requisite search to follow — or even find — it, meant shifting concentration away from the action. *Transfigured Night* is an evocative, mature — if repetitive — work by a secure artist. It might be best to dispense with the story and let the ballet be enjoyed simply for its lush sensuality.

— LINDE HOWE-BECK

Les Grands Ballets Canadiens de Montréal in Stijn Celis' *Transfigured Night*
Photo: Richard Champagne

Ashton Festival

Ironies abounded during four rainy spring days on the Gulf Coast of Florida as Sarasota Ballet mounted a multi-faceted festival of performances, films and lectures in celebration of Frederick Ashton. It's a feat no other company has attempted — including, shamefully, Britain's Royal Ballet, which claims Ashton as its founding choreographer.

With 45 dancers and a bare-bones staff, Sarasota Ballet is modestly scaled and, like other American regional companies, has been buffeted by economic cycles of boom and bust. Just four years ago, its very survival was seriously threatened. Yet, from April 30 to May 3, 2014, Sarasota Ballet produced an Ashton festival, which in its organization, comprehensiveness and spirit conjured thoughts of those marvellous Bournonville celebrations periodically mounted by the Royal Danish Ballet. For the Danes, of course, Bournonville is kin. But Ashton … in Sarasota?

The key to this seemingly implausible situation is Yorkshire-born artistic director Iain Webb and his South African-born assistant, former star ballerina Margaret Barbieri. Both progeny of the Royal Ballet, they worked directly with Ashton. Since arriving in Florida seven years ago, the husband-and-wife team have erected Ashton's choreography as a major pillar of the troupe's remarkably varied repertoire.

Although in 2013 the company staged *La Fille mal gardée* to considerable acclaim in a modern 1,700-seat hall — it will revive the production this Christmas — Webb opted for a festival of mixed bills easily accommodated by downtown Sarasota's almost 90-year-old, 1,120-seat Mediterranean Revival-style opera house. This was a positive boon for works such as *Façade*, *Monotones I & II*, *Les Rendezvous*, *Valses nobles et sentimentales* and *Sinfonietta* that could easily be engulfed by larger stages.

The latter two are almost "lost" rarities, but, like most of the equally endangered Ashton divertissements programmed for the closing night gala, Sarasota Ballet has given them a unique foothold in the United States. And in modern times it appears to be the only troupe anywhere with enough confidence to stage the enigmatic and, for all its flaws, deeply haunting work that Ashton actually made in America — *Illuminations*.

Choreographed in 1950 for New York City Ballet, it's set to Benjamin Britten's 1939 song cycle, *Les Illuminations*, itself a setting of works by the late 19th-century French poet Arthur Rimbaud. Mixing realism, symbolism and surrealism, the ballet is Ashton's multi-layered attempt to get inside Rimbaud's drug-frazzled mind. While avoiding an overt depiction of Rimbaud's notorious affair with the older poet Paul Verlaine — much as festival lecture/discussions managed to skirt the issue of Ashton's sexuality — it is a torrid, otherwise sexually explicit ballet. In its total lack of chic elegance or refined abstraction, so evident in *Les Rendezvous* and *Monotones*, it is unlike anything else Ashton choreographed, which is what makes it still so perversely engrossing.

Illuminations also provided a wonderful opportunity for Brazilian company principal Ricardo Graziano to demonstrate the range of his impressive talent; he was introduced to us as an elegant danseur noble in *Birthday Offering* only to transform into a hallucinating poet.

Presenting such a range of Ashton ballets within a compact timeframe made huge demands on the dancers. There were occasional technical missteps, but these were vastly outweighed by Sarasota Ballet's thrilling embodiment of Ashton style, its musicality, plasticity and delicate perfume.

It all came to a fitting climax as the festival closed with *Les Patineurs*, a ballet that can nowadays appear frivolous, unless danced with the kind of verve and charm Sarasota Ballet exudes so naturally.

In the circumstances, where praise is owed to so many, it seems almost invidious to single anyone out, but, as the Blue Boy, company principal Logan Learned was breathtaking. Physically diminutive, he has a stage presence that for all its modest, unassuming grace is as big as all outdoors.

Ashton fans from around the world, including a sizeable and appreciative British contingent led by Sir Peter Wright — the Webbs' former boss — along with an international battalion of critics, supplemented Sarasota Ballet's devoted local audience in hailing the festival's resounding success.

Sarasota is a sophisticated, arts-friendly city, but it has taken a ballet company to plant it firmly on the international cultural map. Now that the word is out, one hopes the company is already planning another, even bigger Ashton Festival.

In a CBC Radio interview in the late 1970s, Ashton declared, perhaps not entirely facetiously, that he would rather have been a great dancer than a choreographer. "If you're a great dancer you get a good reception after every performance. As a choreographer, if you're lucky, you get a good opening night."

As it happens, Ashton got many good opening nights and in later life his frequent curtain calls famously became performances in their own right. That said, he would have luxuriated in the heartfelt enthusiasm and sheer love of his work that flowed throughout this marvellous event.

— MICHAEL CRABB

Ricardo Graziano in Frederick Ashton's *Illuminations*
Photo: Frank Atura

Petr Zuska / *Solo for Three*

A staple of Prague Ballet's repertory since its premiere in 2007, *Solo for Three* by Petr Zuska shows a company that has come a long way on the contemporary ballet road since Zuska became artistic director in 2002. Before his arrival, the company, like so many national companies in former Soviet bloc countries, was oriented around the classics.

The classics still figure heavily during Prague Ballet's year-round season, but today, thanks to Zuska, the repertory also features works by choreographers such as William Forsythe, Mats Ek, Christopher Bruce, Jean-Christophe Maillot and expatriate Czech, Jirí Kylián, along with many works by Zuska, as well.

Zuska set himself quite a challenge when he chose to choreograph a mosaic of short pieces to 43 songs by a trio of iconic songwriters — Belgian Jacques Brel, Russian Vladimir Vysotsky and Czech Karel Kryl. Each piece had to establish and resolve its own mood within several minutes, but it also had to link somehow with preceding and succeeding songs. Moreover, Zuska had to tailor the numbers to each songwriter's particular brand of protest: Brel, the bitter enemy of bourgeois complacency; Vysotsky, the harshly ironic critic of Soviet power; and Kryl, the expatriate defender of Czech culture.

Less well known in the West than Brel or Vysotsky, Kryl is as eloquent and as committed to emotional truth as the two others, and his delivery is as poignant. Unfortunately for those who do not know Czech, reading Kryl's lyrics on a surtitle screen high above the stage meant splitting attention constantly between dance and titles — a distracting but unavoidable situation.

Although the political targets of many of the lyrics are no longer current, the songs still convey the sense of three supremely independent individuals fighting against organized conformity. This stubborn individuality, which can be frightening in its intensity, was largely absent in Michal Stipa's interpretation of the difficult leading male role at a performance in Prague's ornate National Theatre in April.

Tall, blond Stipa, whose nude figure graced the cover of the program brochure presumably to titillate his fans, was simply too glamorous in a role that's supposed to symbolize three songwriters noted for their earthy, unconventional looks and dismissive attitudes. It was not a lack of effort that weakened Stipa's performance. He put impressive energy, for example, into lip-synching two songs by Brel and Kryl. But he could not find an equivalent of the songwriters' passion in his own personality, which would have made his interpretation personal and alive. A dancer with a more complicated personality — Zuska himself, for example — could have added depth to the role.

In a recurring female role, Nikola Márová opened the show with harsh laughter, setting the kind of strident tone that suited the musical material. Her duets with Stipa were striking, especially one to a Kryl song in which Stipa remained on a high, raised central platform while she performed classically inspired figures on the floor. Even though separated, their connection was apparent.

In duets involving other dancers, Mathias Deneux and Ivana Mikesová mugged appropriately to Brel's ironic, effervescent *Bon-bon*; Viktor Kocian and Ivanna Illyenko, unaffected and properly reserved, gave the right sheen of pathos to Brel's most famous plea, *Ne me quitte pas*; and Oleksand Kysil had fun as the man who pops out of line for a drink in Vysotsky's parody of mass Soviet-style calisthenics classes, *Morning Exercises*.

Lively Vysotsky songs like *Morning Exercises* and *Moscow-Odessa* — a buoyant sendup of Soviet Aeroflot complete with female dancers in blue stewardess uniforms — struck a welcome balance to the harsh loves and losses expressed in the lyrics of the majority of the songs. Such comedic breaks were a smart move on Zuska's part in a program that, at two hours plus intermission, threatened to overwhelm with heavy sentiments.

Ensemble numbers were handily performed, particularly to Vysotsky's *He Never Returned from Battle*, danced in long dark coats designed by Lucie Loosová.

In an interview with *Dance International* a couple of years ago, Zuska recalled the great response that *Solo for Three* had in St. Petersburg in 2010. Russians idolize Vysotsky, of course, and Zuska admitted some nervousness to presenting a ballet to his music. But the public welcomed the piece and local media interviewed Zuska no end about it.

Four years ago, an amalgamation brought some new talent from the State Opera Ballet to Prague Ballet. Among the notable transfers was Miho Ogimoto, a soloist who once trained at the Royal Winnipeg Ballet School. Nowadays, the company's 82 dancers are keen to try more contemporary works, a tribute to Zuska's persistence. Zuska also introduced Miniatures, an annual forum for his dancers to present their own choreographies. Local audiences, too, have become more educated about contemporary ballet, attending contemporary performances in the same large numbers as they do classical programs.

— VICTOR SWOBODA

Dancers of Prague Ballet in Petr Zuska's *Solo for Three*
Photo: Diana Zehetner

Youth America Grand Prix / Final Round and Galas

The three closing nights of the Youth America Grand Prix in New York were heady affairs. This was especially so for the dancers competing in the event, some of whom got to share the Koch Theater stage at Lincoln Center with ballet stars from around the world. Many of those stars are YAGP alumni, which must spur the aspirants on. Certainly, the blissful cheering and clapping from the top tier of seats in the jewel-studded balconies — where the young dancers gathered — provided an enthusiastic soundtrack.

There were 350 dancers, representing 30 countries, who made the New York Finals, with the last round of judging open to the public and providing the first of the closing shows. I found the Junior dancers (12-14 years old) the most engaging, with their still child-like resolve leading to more forthright, emotionally colourful performances. The Seniors (15-19) seemed cautious, perhaps having gone through more years of being groomed by coaches to bring technical clarity and dramatic purpose to every nanosecond of their variation, leaving no room for personality to break through in the heat of the actual performance. With the boys, the belief that bravura will win the day pushed some of them too far toward Broadway-style pizazz.

Yet who can doubt the ability of every dancer who made even the semi-finals — held around the globe — to engage in the complicated manoeuvres of this physically demanding art form? For the ones who do make it to New York, to date more than $2.5 million in scholarships has been awarded over the 15 years of the competition's existence.

The last two nights were galas that provided superb examples of the riches that come from mature, artistic nuance. The first evening's Stars of Tomorrow act one concluded with a Grand Defilé filling the stage with Youth America Grand Prix finalists, ages nine to 19, a thrilling statement of youth, hope and the future of the art form.

Stars of Today, the evening's second half, featured top dancers from both the host city and also from around the world. First, Alicia Graf Mack (Alvin Ailey American Dance Theater) and Daniil Simkin (American Ballet Theatre) in an excerpt from Ailey's *Pas de Duke*, to music by Duke Ellington. Simkin, in the filmed interview that preceded their piece (all the dancers spoke on film before their performances), talked about the challenge of mastering the cool swaying hips of Ailey's choreography. Certainly Mack had a grounded strength Simkin didn't, but that was part of the charm of their partnership, with her solid figure a foil for his lighter leaps and playful approach.

Evan McKie (Stuttgart Ballet) and Olga Smirnova (Bolshoi Ballet) appeared in a pas de deux from Cranko's *Onegin*, with his character's distraught indecision at the end a finely crafted portrayal of contained passion. The solo from Rudolf Nureyev's *Manfred*, danced by Mathias Heymann (Paris Opera Ballet, and a YAGP alumni), was introduced in the video with archival footage of Nureyev himself. For both good and bad, the great Russian's ghostly presence seemed to haunt Heymann in the powerful drama.

The evening's jewel in the crown was the White Swan Pas de Deux from *Swan Lake* by Bavarian State Ballet's Lucia Lacarra and Marlon Dino. Lacarra slowed each moment right down, filling every move and pose with deep interpretive riches. Her hands seemed to breathe with the music, holding and caressing the notes.

For the most part, the contemporary premieres by up-and-coming choreographers were bland. *Ameska* by Derek Hough (from TV's *Dancing with the Stars*) was refreshing for its ballroom guest artists, Paul Barris, Alexander Demkin and Roman Kutskyy, alongside American Ballet Theatre's Misty Copeland in pointe shoes.

The 15th Anniversary Closing Night Celebration began with a pre-performance talk by Sergei Filin, artistic director of the Bolshoi Ballet, who was one of the event's judges. He commented on the lineage of coaching in Russia, where there is a tradition of passing knowledge "from hands to hands." A good coach can see what a young dancer needs, including, he said, what needs to be broken in order to become a great dancer.

Then came another night of star turns. Highlights included the light, lovely and quick variations by Ashley Bouder (New York City Ballet) and Semyon Chudin (Bolshoi Ballet) from Bournonville's *La Sylphide*. Beckanne Sisk (Ballet West, and a YAGP alumni) and Fabrice Calmels (Joffrey Ballet) in Gerald Arpino's *Light Rain* were seductive, exotic creatures. MOMIX's Rebecca Rasmussen and Steven Ezra (a YAGP alumni) were intriguing shape shifters in *TUU* by Moses Pendleton, Tim Acito and Solveig Olsen.

The jewel in this night's crown? Smirnova and Chudin, who came together to bring more than a touch of dramatic warmth to their pas de deux from Balanchine's *Diamonds*, making the regally abstract work fully their own.

— KAIJA PEPPER

Bavarian State Ballet's Lucia Lacarra in the White Swan Pas de Deux from *Swan Lake*
Photo: Hideaki Tanioka

Anna Pavlova

Courtesy of Dance Collection Danse

Anna Pavlova, the most celebrated dancer of the 20th century, was born in 1881 in St. Petersburg, Russia. Determined to dance as a child, she trained at the Imperial School of Ballet at the Mariinsky Theatre; immediately regarded by her teachers as "special," her dance life was swiftly prescribed.

Pavlova brushed shoulders with the most illustrious artists working in the theatrical milieu of her era. In 1905, Mikhail Fokine created her signature solo, *The Dying Swan*.

Millions were witness to her dancing as she travelled the world with her own company, including four appearances in Vancouver, British Columbia. Nine years after her death in 1931, a remnant was found in the rubble of Vancouver's Empress Theatre when a workman discovered a little powder puff with an embroidered inscription saying, "Pavlova."

A superstar in her time, Pavlova remains a legend of the ballet world, her ethereal persona brought back to life through photos, film and art works.

— MIRIAM ADAMS

Miriam Adams is co-founder/director of Dance Collection Danse, Canada's national dance archives/museum, publisher and resource centre for Canadian theatrical dance history. Last year, DCD moved to new headquarters at 149 Church Street in downtown Toronto. Visit www.dcd.ca.

This broadsheet, which is part of the Alison Sutcliffe Portfolio, was used to publicize one of Anna Pavlova's many North American tours organized by Sol Hurok, circa 1910-1924. It measures 21.5 by 11.5 inches.

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