

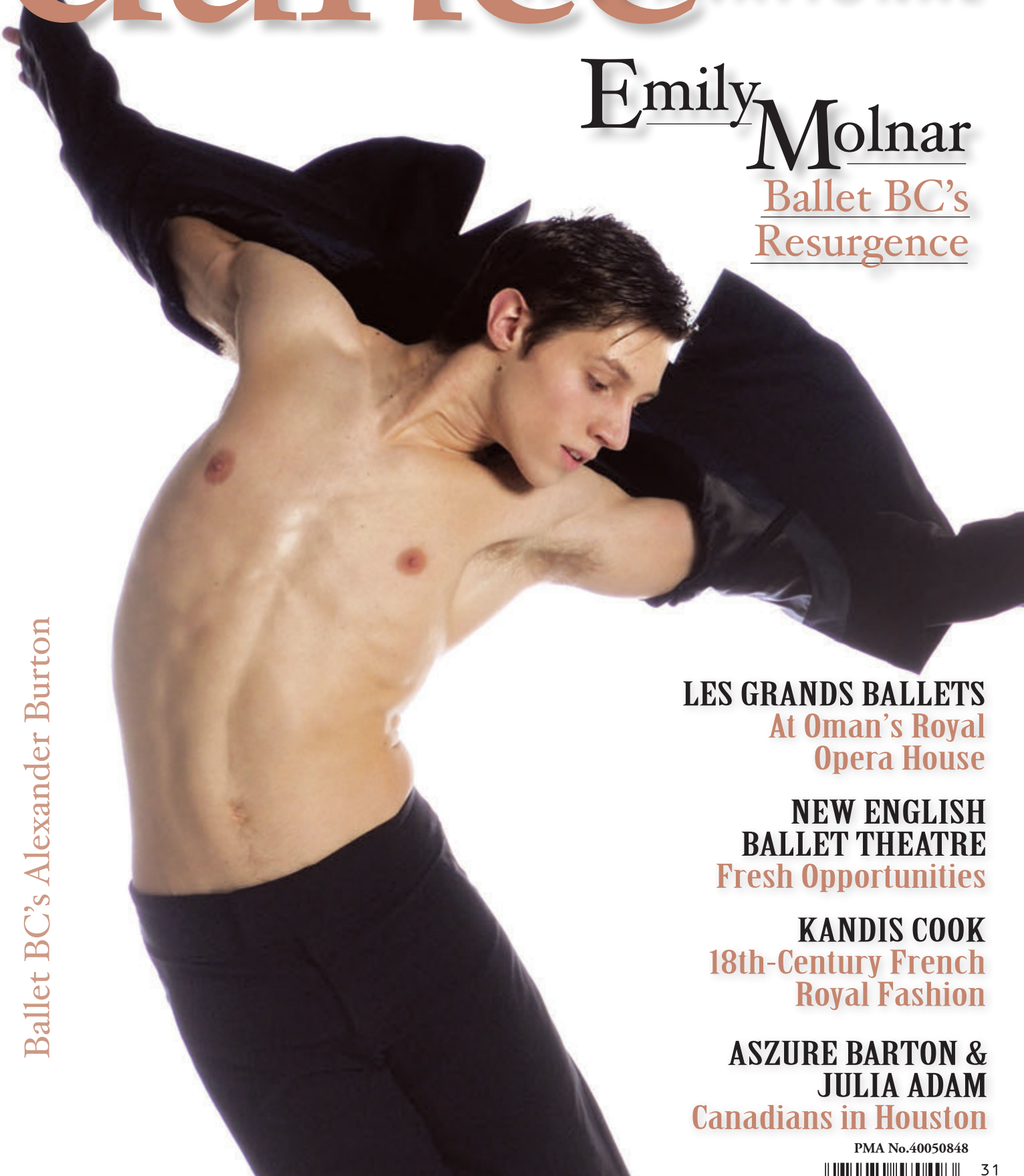
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# dance INTERNATIONAL

CLASSICAL AND CONTEMPORARY DANCE IN CANADA AND ABROAD

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*Multiplicity, Forms of Silence and Emptiness*  
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DI Magazine

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Ballet BC's Alexander Burton  
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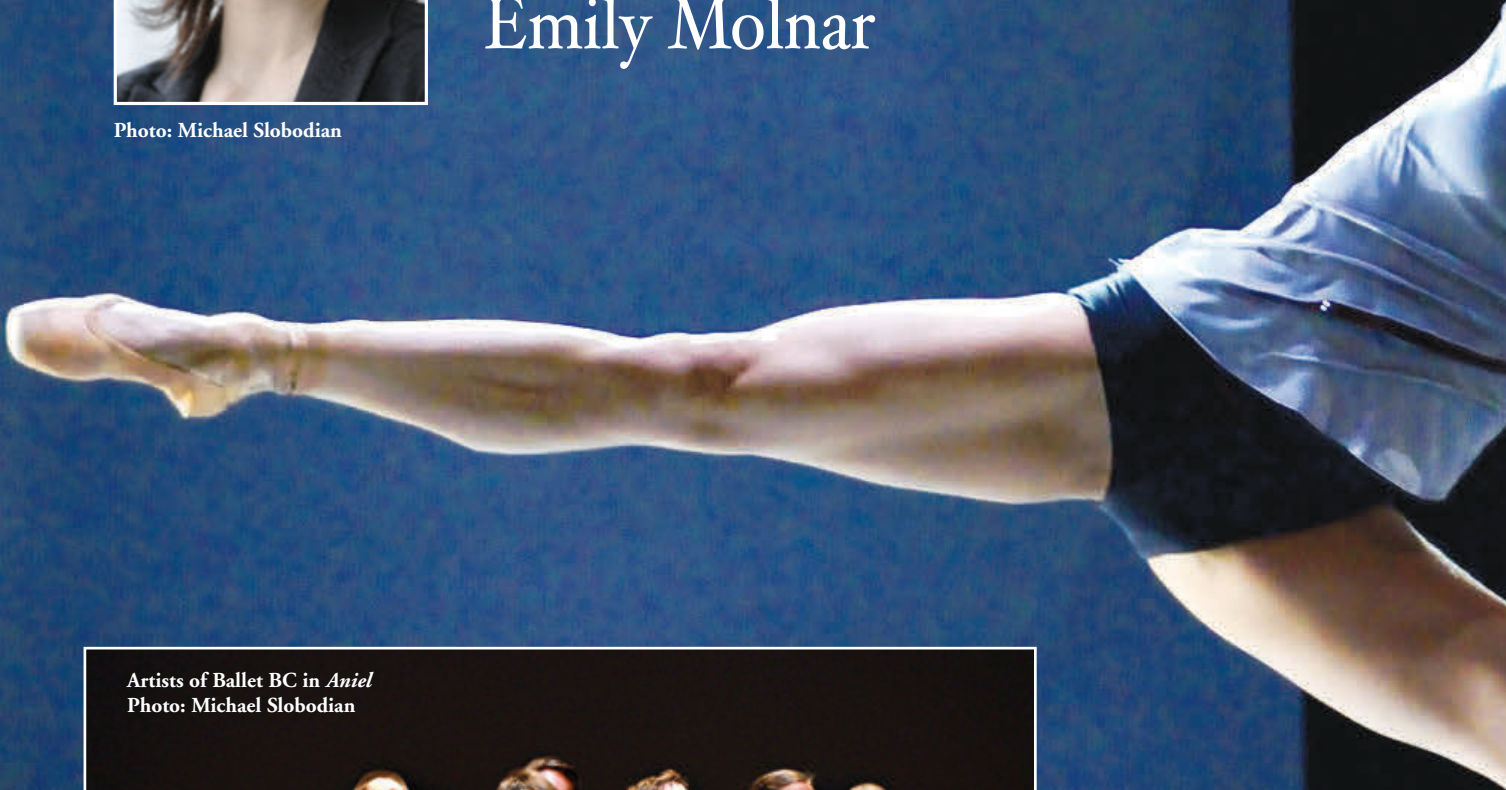
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# Reviving Ballet BC



Photo: Michael Slobodian

An interview with  
Artistic Director  
Emily Molnar




Artists of Ballet BC in *Aniel*  
Photo: Michael Slobodian



Background: Makaila Wallace, Peter Smida and Alexander Burton in Ballet BC's *Muse*  
Photo: Michael Slobodian





**J**ust four short years ago, Ballet British Columbia was facing extinction. Jump to 2013 and the company's turnaround has been extraordinary. With the subscription base and single ticket sales climbing each year, and the inventive programming garnering critical acclaim, the company has never looked healthier.

by Paula Citron

Artists of Ballet BC in *Petite Cérémonie*  
Photo: Michael Slobodian



The credit goes to Artistic Director Emily Molnar, 40, who was appointed in 2009. The ever-humble Molnar cites the collaborative effort of her team for Ballet BC's newfound success. Nonetheless, the roots of Ballet BC's recovery lie in the life and times of Molnar. If we are a part of all that we have met, then Molnar's peripatetic career has laid the foundation for the artistic director that she has become.

In a lively conversation during a long phone call, Molnar talked candidly about her life in dance and her mandate for Ballet BC.

**PC: Did you come from an arts background?**

**EM:** Not really. My parents met at the University of Utah where my father was on a football scholarship. He's Canadian and she was from Montana. I was born in Regina. My father played football with the Roughriders, but he was also a civil engineer. My mother did take dance in university, but she was lots of things — a flight attendant, a school teacher, a retail manager.

**PC: How did you get into dance?**

**EM:** I was always in motion so my grandmother suggested dance classes. I

“I loved working with the creative process, engaging with a choreographer to create a work. I loved pushing myself to the extremes. I knew then, as a teenager, that my career would be in the contemporary ballet world.”

started creative movement when I was five. My mother bought me pointe shoes when I was six. When the teacher saw me trying to dance in them, she decided I better learn the right way, even though I was too young. The Saskatchewan Youth Ballet was my haven. The Russian teachers there gave me my strong classical training, but I also learned folk dance. From the very first, I knew I wanted to dance. It felt right. It was my life. The world made sense to me in a studio.

**PC: So then it was on to professional training?**

**EM:** I auditioned for the National Ballet School when I was nine, but I didn't get in. When I found out that I wasn't accepted because my thighs were too muscular, I worked hard to make myself long and lean. During the National Ballet School summer school, Betty Oliphant saw me and I ended up going through a battery of academic tests. Betty wanted to put me a year ahead of my age group in dance class, and she wanted to find out if I could skip a grade so dance and academics would be even, and that's what happened.

**PC: And finally, it was the National Ballet.**

**EM:** Reid Anderson offered me a position at the end of Grade 12 when I was 16. Greta Hodgkinson and Rebekah Rimsay were in my class. They got into the company, while I was just an apprentice. Then William Forsythe came to create *The Second Detail*, and he wanted me for the first cast, so Reid took me into the company.

**PC: Forsythe had a great impact on you.**

**EM:** Working with him and other



contemporary choreographers like John Alleyne and Rudi van Dantzig was a great learning curve. I found another part of myself in terms of dance vocabulary and expression. I loved working with the creative process, engaging with a choreographer to create a work. I loved pushing myself to the extremes. I knew then, as a teenager, that my career would be in the contemporary ballet world.

**PC: Was your height one of the reasons why you went to Europe? You were only with the National for two years.**

**EM:** It's really crazy. I was medium height until I was 14, then I shot up to 5' 11. The funny thing is, I never felt tall, so I was unusual, a tall, quick dancer. I moved like a dancer who was much shorter. Being tall was a reality check, though. How was I ever going to get someone to partner me in the classics? I knew I had to change my career path, even though I loved the National. I got a Canada Council grant and spent a month in Europe, seeing all the great companies. I saw what was out there and it was transformative.

**PC: What was it like being a member of Forsythe's Frankfurt Ballet?**

**EM:** Forsythe's modality was working with improv ideas, so everything I knew about dance got thrown up in the air. My five years in Frankfurt were where I earned my PhD in dance because I learned so

much. It was THE place to be in terms of contemporary ballet.

**PC: But you still had a connection with Canada.**

**EM:** Yes. Artemis Gordon, artistic director of Vancouver's Arts Umbrella, brought me over during the summer to work with young dancers, teaching the creative process and choreographic language.

**PC: Why the permanent move to Vancouver?**

**EM:** It was a huge decision, but I was burning out at Frankfurt. I was saturated with creativity and the potential of what dance could be. I actually thought about quitting dance and studying anthropology, but John Alleyne, who was artistic director of Ballet BC, asked me to join his company. Dance has never failed me. When one door has closed, another has opened.

**PC: Was Arts Umbrella also a factor in the decision to come to Vancouver?**

**EM:** At Arts Umbrella I ran a company of dancers aged 10 to 14. It gave me a taste of wanting to direct something on my own, to create my own environment. I realized I had worn myself out always thinking about myself, striving to be the best artist I could be. Now I needed a larger conversation. It's funny though. I still

have to be in the studio every day. I still train with the dancers. I also love to coach a piece when a choreographer has finished the creation.

**PC: Tell me more about the Arts Umbrella experience.**

**EM:** I was in charge of the junior company in the professional programme, and that's where I developed an important skillset. I experienced the psychology of preparing for a new work. I cast the productions, rehearsed the dancers, oversaw the costume and lighting designers. I also brought in various choreographers to work with the dancers.

**PC: After spending five years with Ballet BC, you moved on to the next phase of your life, as a freelance dancer and choreographer.**

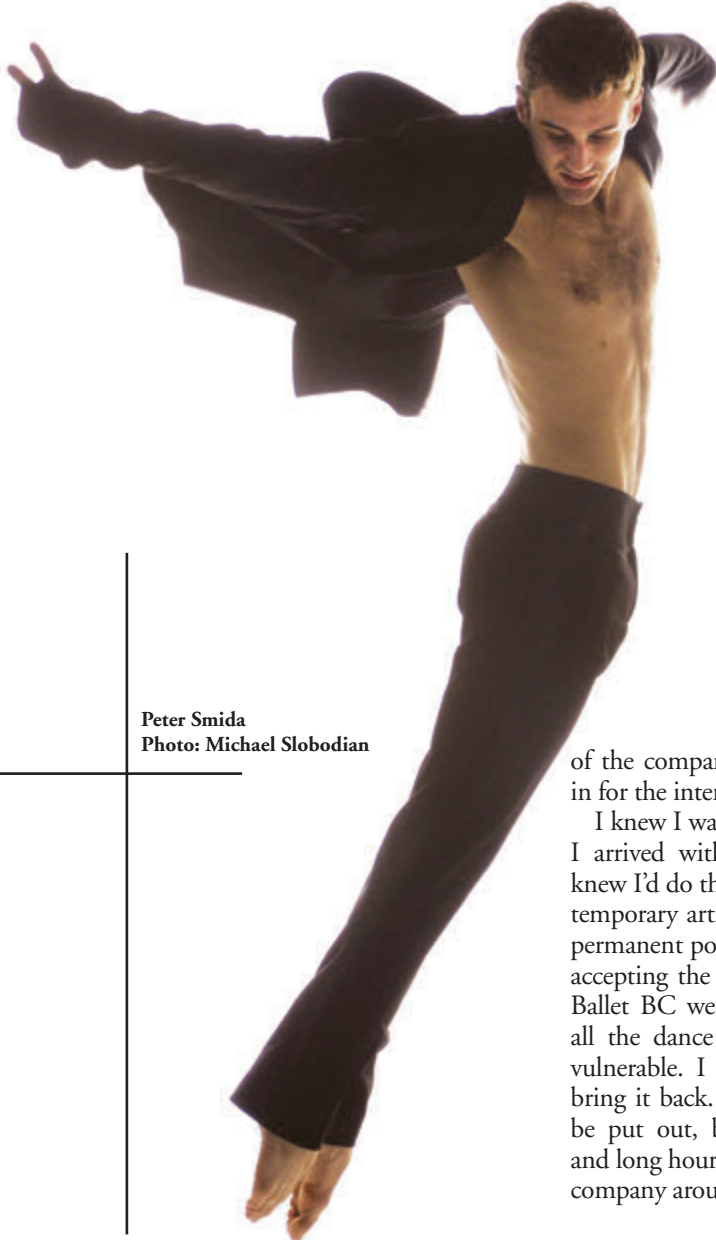
**EM:** It lasted seven years, from 2002 until 2009. That was another learning curve, dancing for people like Margie Gillis, and making choreographies for myself. I also kept up my directorship of the Arts Umbrella junior company.

**PC: What prompted you to become a choreographer?**

**EM:** It was a natural evolution, but it was also a big jump to go from dancer to choreographer — to dive into the creative landscape. I guess I was led by my curiosity and a desire to follow my own voice. As



Alyson Frez, Alexander Burton and Peter Smida in Ballet BC's *Between Disappearing and Becoming*  
Photo: Michael Slobodian



Peter Smida  
Photo: Michael Slobodian

a choreographer, you embrace the essence of dance. Your vision is the centre of the room. The act of creation is above the ego.

**PC: What was your first professional group piece?**

**EM:** *Portrait of Suspended Grace* for Alberta Ballet in 2004. It was a dance for seven men.

**PC: Didn't you think about leaving Vancouver at one point?**

**EM:** Yes, because I was doing so much work outside the city, creating pieces for Ballet Mannheim, Ballet Augsburg, Cedar Lake Dance, ProArteDanza and Morphoses/The Wheeldon Company.

**PC: And then Ballet BC came back into your life.**

**EM:** I had stopped being a dancer at Ballet BC before the problems about finances hit the press, so I was never in the heat of it. At first, I was one of the people that the board talked to when they were doing their fact-finding about the viability

of the company. Then, later, I was called in for the interview for artistic director.

I knew I wanted to run the company, so I arrived with a three-year plan. I also knew I'd do the job well. At first, I was the temporary artistic director, which led to a permanent position. Another factor in my accepting the job was my concern that if Ballet BC went down, that would make all the dance companies in the country vulnerable. I had to take the chance to bring it back. There were a lot of fires to be put out, but the passion, dedication and long hours of my team has turned this company around.

**PC: What is your choreographic mandate?**

**EM:** I want the dancers to look good, so I always build my dances around them. The thing that I love about being an artistic director is creating on the same group of dancers because I know them. When I go to another company, I always want to get to know the dancers as people first.

**PC: You have really stressed the fact that Ballet BC is a repertory company.**

**EM:** That's right. I've made new works the heart of the Ballet BC identity, and we've added more than 25 new pieces by both Canadian and international choreographers during my tenure. I believe that the art is the star. I'm proud of the choreographers we've presented, many making their Canadian debuts — Jorma Elo, Medhi Walerski, Itzik Galili, Nicolo Fonte, Johan Inger, Jacopo Godani. I tell the choreographers to make the dances that they want to make and they tell us that is the greatest compliment that a dancemaker can receive. It's exciting that they all want to come back and work with us again. We are the home of choreography, but at the

end of the day, audiences just want to see great dance.

**PC: Where do you find the choreographers?**

**EM:** Some are people whose works I've performed in, or people I've danced with. Others I hear about through networking. I also keep a sharp eye out for up-and-comers.

**PC: You talk about the sunrise to sunset job. What are the demands on you?**

**EM:** At the moment, I wear a lot of hats that would be delegated out in a larger company. I oversee scheduling, production elements, grant applications, marketing, the eblog and outreach programs. In other words, I'm hands-on, checking into everything that's going on at Ballet BC.

**PC: How has this impacted you as a choreographer?**

**EM:** I'm limited to one 25-minute piece a season, and even that is challenging.

**PC: What are your goals for the company's future?**

**EM:** I want us to be a creative hub — the ambassador of new dance through the creation of innovative works that push the art form forward. I want to empower the dancers and create discourse. I want to establish professional development workshops. I want to mount performances in alternate stages. I want a higher profile both nationally and internationally. I want us to tour, and that's starting to happen with performances this season in Oregon, California and Ontario. In terms of the Queen Elizabeth Theatre, we're starting to fill up the orchestra, but I hope one day to open the balcony and fill all 1,700 seats. Right now we have José Naves as a resident choreographer, but I'd like to develop a circle of resident choreographers and associate artists.

**PC: Where does Ballet BC stand now?**

**EM:** We've done a lot in a short period of time. We've gone from survival mode to long-term strategic planning.

**PC: With all the demands of the company, do you manage to have a personal life?**

**EM:** I was always a solitary person until I met Con, my partner of eight years. During our time together, he's developed a very discerning eye. He is non-judgmental and patient, and incredibly supportive, I couldn't do my job without that relationship. ▼



# Makaila Wallace

## The longest standing dancer at Ballet BC

by Paula Citron

At 34, Makaila Wallace is the longest standing dancer at Ballet British Columbia with nine seasons under her belt. It is a badge of honour that she wears proudly. “There are a lot of young dancers in the company and I see myself as an anchor — a guru who keeps people connected.”

Wallace is also a formidable dancer. In fact, almost every choreographer setting work on the company has chosen Wallace for the first cast. As Vancouver dance writer Kaija Pepper says: “Makaila is a company stalwart: an utterly reliable dancer who is a delight to watch. You know she can deliver without a fuss.”

The dancer quips that athleticism is in her DNA, and for good reason. Her parents are both academics, her father in kinesiology and movement research, her mother in sports psychology. The California-born Wallace started dancing at age six, combining ballet with Irish step dancing and gymnastics. Not surprisingly, Wallace also tried her hand at every sport available including swimming, skiing and soccer.

Says Wallace: “At 13, I had to make a choice between dance and sports because their training was in conflict. I think that ballet had the edge because of the music. When I was growing up, my parents played classical music during dinner which I loved. But, in truth, I think that dance chooses you.” (Incidentally, Wallace has not given up sports entirely. She met her boyfriend through rock climbing, which she does three times a week after rehearsal.)

When she was 14, Wallace began training at the Royal Winnipeg Ballet School. She chose Winnipeg because she had been impressed at the improved technique of a friend who had attended a Royal Winnipeg Ballet summer school. Her homesickness was dissipated by the joy of watching Evelyn Hart dance. “She has been my inspiration,” says Wallace. “The first time I saw her in *Romeo and Juliet*, I cried for hours. She was exquisite, and, through her, I could see what dance could be.”

After being an apprentice with the Royal Winnipeg Ballet for a year, Wallace headed to Europe for an audition tour. The Royal Swedish Ballet was her first audition and she was offered a contract. Although she was getting good roles in the company, such as the Queen of the Wilis in *Giselle* and variations in *Swan Lake*, and loved living in Europe, Wallace left after two years. She returned to her parents’ home in San Francisco and took time out from dance.

“My original thought,” she says, “was to leave dance entirely. I had started young and moved away from home when I was young. I didn’t want to sign another contract just because dance was all I knew. But when I started taking classes at LINES, I realized just how much I loved dance, so I did some more auditions, but was a lot more selective.”

If Hart was one great influence in Wallace’s life, the other was choreographer John Alleyne. In 2004, Ballet BC was remounting *The Faerie Queen*. Wallace saw a rehearsal with Emily Molnar as Puck and was totally wowed. She knew that she and Ballet BC were a match made in heaven.

Says Wallace: “John guided me into contemporary ballet, which was a real shift away from classical ballet. For example, I couldn’t roll on the floor when I was first in the company, because I didn’t know how to get from standing to the floor. I found that I could express myself in John’s works, feel myself being honest onstage. His choreography had integrity. It was like having a real conversation with the audience.” Wallace feels the same way with Molnar as artistic director. “Ballet BC is not a cookie-cutter company,” she says. “Everyone is encouraged to be an individual.”

As for her future, the dancer is slowly taking on more responsibilities in the company, such as ballet mistress, replacing Molnar in the studio. “It’s challenging communicating from the front of the room,” she says, “but I’m curious to explore rehearsing and coaching.”

And her advice to those younger dancers coming up the line: “Keep a strong ballet technique, but be prepared to rewire yourself for contemporary dance. Strip away the layers to expose the honest self. Don’t be afraid to be vulnerable. Stay connected with yourself and the human body. Be open to new ideas. Developing yourself as an artist is also important. Help create a good work environment. And most of all, a dance career is far too hard to just be a job. You have to be fully committed. If you’re flatlining, it’s time to do something else. I can truly say that Ballet BC has my heart.” ▼



Photo: Michael Slobodian

# Dance in the Desert



by Victor Swoboda

Bordering Saudi Arabia and Yemen, Oman is a desert country whose 3,000-year-old cultural history pretty well excluded professional dance shows until 2011, when the Royal Opera House (ROH) opened its magnificent doors in Oman's capital and sole large city, Muscat.

The ROH's inaugural show of Puccini's *Turandot* involved 350 foreign performers invited by Oman's ruler, Sultan Qaboos bin Said, who apparently spares no expense to promote his love of Western music and the arts.

Although the ROH has operated only a short time, its dance programming is quickly becoming the equal of major European and North American theatres — an oasis of Western culture within the Islamic world. Other such oases in the Persian Gulf region

are the Katara Cultural Village in Qatar and the large opera house that opened in late 2012 in Bahrain. In 2013, Abu Dhabi begins construction of branches of two major Western museums, the Louvre in Paris and the Guggenheim in New York. Whatever the motivation for these initiatives — whether it is to attract tourists or to educate and entertain the local Arab community — it is clear that cultural bridges are being built in the Gulf region.

Some might argue that these shows are aimed at providing entertainment for Oman's large expatriate community, estimated at one resident in three. The ROH itself is largely administered by expatriate Britons on two-year contracts. With experience in arts administration at high-profile British cultural institutions such as Covent

Garden and Glyndebourne, the expatriate ROH staff has steadily introduced tried-and-true marketing techniques to a country unused to cultural advertising.

Two dance powerhouses were the first to cross the bridge to Oman's ROH — the Maryinsky Ballet and American Ballet Theatre. An Argentine tango show, *Tango Metropolis*, also played there in March to such enthusiastic audiences that negotiations are underway to bring another tango show in 2013.

In November, Les Grands Ballets Canadiens de Montréal brought the edgiest programme yet seen at the ROH — a triple bill of works by Belgian choreographer Stijn Celis. Les Grands had made a foray into the Middle East three years earlier, appearing in Jerusalem and at the Suzanne Dellal



## East meets West in Oman's Royal Opera House with performances by Les Grands Ballets Canadiens de Montréal



Centre in Tel Aviv — home of Batsheva Dance Company and easily the most progressive contemporary dance centre in the Middle East. From Israel, Les Grands travelled to Cairo for performances at the Opera House, Egypt's premier theatre.

News of Les Grands' Cairo appearance reached the ears of Sultan Qaboos. An admirer of Stravinsky's music, the Sultan was particularly interested in Celis' work on the Cairo programme, *Noces*. Stravinsky's 1919 choral and orchestral score, *Les Noces*, inspired Bronislava Nijinska in 1923 to choreograph a vision of a Slavic wedding party that became one of the dance landmarks of the 20th century.

Apart from some allusions to Nijinska's work, notably in the women's white costumes and long braids, Celis' version made

for Les Grands in 2002 is his own. It, too, is a masterpiece, economical in its movement and powerful in its images of male and female confrontation and reconciliation. Les Grands has toured the work with great success over the years, most notably at Jacob's Pillow and at the Grand Palais in Paris in 2008.

The Sultan's love of Stravinsky's music also dictated the second work on Les Grands' programme, *Sacre*, performed to the Rite of Spring. Celis created this work on the company in 2009. As in *Noces*, there are sequences of separate male and female groupings, but gradually a mixed group forms that ultimately rejects one of the female members in what has become the standard approach to choreographing this seminal work. (It will be interesting to

see how many of the new versions planned for the centennial of its premiere in 2013 will diverge from the standard scenario.)

In both of these works, Celis agreed to make allowances for Islamic notions of modesty and conduct. In *Noces*, instead of dancing with bare legs under their short tulle skirts, the women wore sheer white stockings. Celis also modified a sequence between the bride and groom that was deemed too aggressive. In the final sequence of *Sacre*, in which the rejected woman is virtually stripped naked by one of the group, the dancer remained clothed.

Celis was unperturbed by the request for changes, since they were relatively insignificant — they did not alter the dramatic sense of the pieces. Celis was much more interested in taking up an opportunity to



introduce two contemporary works on powerfully emotional themes to an Islamic nation where even public displays of affection are frowned upon.

The opening work on the programme was a splendid trio, *Anima*, which Celis created for the company in 2012. The choreography set to music by Chopin and Scarlatti exploited the lightness and line of classical ballet. Veteran company member Jérémy Galdeano and Yadir Suarez Llerena, an elegant Cuban dancer recruited in 2011, gave excellent support to the object of male affections, Bryna Catherine Pascoe, who greatly impressed with her captivating port de bras (perhaps too captivating in a long solo, which at certain instances lost focus).

Although there were several dancers performing in Oman who had been part of the original 2002 *Noces* cast, the company's roster had changed over the past decade, so that it was a mix of veteran and new interpreters who took to the ROH stage. The opening night performance was workman-like rather than polished, coming three days after the long flight from Montreal — two consecutive seven-hour flights separated by a long stopover in Amsterdam. The nine-hour time difference between Montreal and Muscat made for jetlag. The day

*Whether it is to attract tourists or to educate and entertain the local Arab community — it is clear that cultural bridges are being built in the Gulf region.*

after landing in Muscat was a free day for the dancers, some of whom hired cars for a trip to the desert and to a picturesque oasis three hours' drive away. But it was back to work the following day, which began with morning rehearsal at an improvised dance studio near the ROH (a dedicated studio is planned soon within the ROH itself) and ended in the evening — a long day.

Les Grands' Artistic Director Gradimir Pankov, a stickler for detail and sensitive to proper dramatic interpretation, was nonetheless unperturbed by the unpolished opening-night show. The first night on the road is often less than perfect, he remarked. In any case, on the following night, the company gave performances of all three

works that were finely nuanced and coordinated.

Facilities at the ROH were world class, which enabled lighting engineer Mark Parent to achieve subtle gradations for the sombre atmosphere in *Noces* that surpassed any previous staging that I'd seen, including at Montreal's Place des Arts. The sound system was the best I've ever heard, rendering the recorded orchestral scores with a natural sound that was so finely tuned and balanced that the small bells rang at the end of *Noces* with the sharpness of crystal.

In the week leading up to Les Grands Ballets' appearance, billboards with the dancers in flight under the title, A Stravinsky Ballet Evening, could be seen in the neighbourhood of the ROH — there were only a few billboards, and discreet at that, but as public arts promotion, it was a start. Both the local Arabic newspaper and the English-language *Times of Oman* carried photos and stories announcing Les Grands' forthcoming appearance.

The ROH's own elegantly designed colour advertisements for the company came under a general ad campaign for ROH events with the catchall title,





“Immerse Yourself.” Both of Les Grands’ performances on successive nights were about two-thirds full. Those who attended received beautifully produced colour programme booklets with photos and informative texts in English and in Arabic set in an elegant gold font. Conspicuously to Western eyes, there was not a hint of commercial advertising.

In contrast to the casual dress seen at ballet and opera performances in North America, the crowds attending Les Grands’ performances were obvious in their finery. The ROH refuses entry to Western men who fail to wear a suit and tie, and to Western women whose skirts are too short or whose shoulders are too prominently displayed. When entering the ROH, men and women must separate to go through dedicated male and female security checks. Oman is politically stable without the strife of its neighbour Yemen, but security is still enforced, though not with the obvious military presence of Middle Eastern countries like Egypt or Israel.

Intermission amid the marble and wood-paneled splendour of the ROH’s main hall was a pageant of local fashion. Omani men wore the floor-length spotless white robe known as the dishdasha and the elegantly



patterned cotton cap called the kummar topped by a colourful turban. Women came in embroidered long gowns of many colours. A night at the ballet in Muscat still has the glamour once associated with ballet-going in the West.

Of course, Western ballet is no longer the exclusive domain of kings and tsars, whereas ballet has found a place in Oman thanks only to the Sultan, whose petrodollar fortune permits him to subsidize artistic productions that could never survive on ticket sales alone. The Sultan rarely attends ROH performances, however, preferring to watch either a direct video feed or taped shows from his palace in another part of Muscat. His wealth allows him to

indulge himself on occasion, such as the time that he brought in a foreign troupe to perform at the ROH to an empty audience while he watched the feed to his palace.

In 2013, the ROH goes on a dance binge, with shows that include Moscow Classical Ballet, Royal Danish Ballet, Suzanne Farrell Ballet, Paul Taylor Dance Company and Ballet Folklorico, as well as a programme of dance companies from Central Asia.

Cairo. Oman. Les Grands’ executive director, Alain Dancyger, foresees a day when other regional countries like Bahrain and Qatar could beckon the Montreal troupe.

East can indeed meet West, at least at the opera house. ▼

# The Chance to Dance

New English Ballet Theatre creates fresh opportunities for young dancers

By Gerard Davis

It was a cold Sunday and in a studio in London's Sadler's Wells, 21 young ballet dancers were stretching and limbering up. It was quiet, a little tense even, as this was the first call-back for New English Ballet Theatre (NEBT) and roles were about to be cast for the company's debut season in July 2012. It was a process that started in the autumn of 2011 when they answered an advertisement posted on the NEBT website.

"We had a flood of applications," says Karen Pilkington-Miksa, the founder and artistic director of NEBT.

Pilkington-Miksa herself danced at what is now Pacific Northwest Ballet in Seattle, and moved to London thinking it would be good for her career. Finding work with a company proved difficult, so she started her own ballet school and formed a now-defunct dance troupe. The problems she faced at that time were to inspire the formation of NEBT.

"There's still a whole bottleneck of fabulous dancers congregating in London thinking it will improve their careers. However, the schools are producing ever-higher levels of ballet dancers, but there aren't enough opportunities for them to perform. I hope NEBT can redress some of that imbalance."

A summer season of shows entitled *Synergies* was performed at Sadler's Wells' Peacock Theatre in July last year, and Pilkington-Miksa has provided the company with a clear artistic philosophy.

"Our cross-discipline model harks back to Diaghilev," she explains. "We're uniting the best young dancers, choreographers, musical artists and visual artists in order to bring fresh new work to the stage."

The auditions took place in December 2011. Pilkington-Miksa, former Royal Ballet principal Ria Peri, Dutch National Ballet's Ernst Meisner and current Royal Ballet principals Marianela Nuñez and Thiago Soares





whittled down the 80 invited applicants to 21.

“We hire the whole company every year afresh so that there are 21 places available not just one,” explains Pilkington-Miksa. “It’s very good for the dancers’ development, knowing they’re going to be on-stage in soloist roles. All the dancers can re-audition after the season’s finished, but they have to do it alongside everyone else. We want to give as many dancers as possible the opportunity to perform.”

The sheer scale of the company is impressive. As well as the 21 dancers, there are three guest dancers from the Royal Ballet, 10 choreographers, seven visual artists, two costume designers, a director of film, a music director, a scratch orchestra of the finest graduates from London’s best music colleges, three instrumental soloists and a mezzo-soprano.

There’s also a head of dance (Peri), a ballet master (Resmi Malko) and a ballet mistress (Goh Ballet-trained Jessica Edgley).

Alongside help from arts-supporting foundations, philanthropic individuals like NEBT’s founding benefactor Sir Christopher Ondaatje and a large list of private support, the company also boasts an illustrious list of patrons that includes Carlos Acosta and Darcey Bussell.

One of the beneficiaries of this groundswell of support is British choreographer Andrew McNicol. Only 19, he’s still performing as a dancer with London-based Ballet Central, but having won the Mac-Millan prize at the Royal Ballet School he’s a choreographer with enormous potential.

“I’m always looking for new opportunities to present my work and NEBT came along at just the right time,” he says. “What I’ve come to respect about the company is that it’s not just here for its own sake; it’s here for artists of different genres and that’s something that really interested me.”

He sent a DVD of one of his pieces, *Le Carnaval des Vérités*, to Pilkington-Miksa. She liked it and he’s now reworking it on the NEBT dancers. But, like so many involved in NEBT, McNicol remains at a crossroads in his career.

#### — April 2012 —

Rehearsals have begun in earnest at Sadler’s Wells. The nervous tension of the call-back has gone; the dancers are relaxed but working hard.

“They just eat the work,” says Pilkington-Miksa over coffee. “I thought I’d have complaints at giving them so much rehearsal when, in fact, they can’t wait to see what they’re going to do next.”

A crucial aspect of the project for Pilk-

ington-Miksa is that the dancers get to work directly not only with emerging choreographers, but also with well-established names such as Michael Corder and Wayne Eagling.

“They’ve profited hugely by being thrust straight into Wayne’s *Resolution* — what a fast learning curve that was for them. Watching the interchange between them and Wayne has been fantastic.”

The company is a strong mix of British and international dancers who’ve graduated from schools such as the Royal Ballet School and Paris Opera Ballet. Two of these dancers appear at our table having just finished a morning rehearsal of *Threefold*, a new ballet by George Williamson, the British choreographer who’s *Firebird* was recently premiered by English National Ballet. Alex Harrison and Eugenia Brezzi are typical of the dancers that have found a place with NEBT.

Twenty-three-year-old Harrison was born in England, completed his training at the English National Ballet School, but then had to move to America to find work with a company — the Sarasota Ballet in Florida. During the sum-

“What I’ve come to respect about the company is that it’s not just here for its own sake; it’s here for artists of different genres and that’s something that really interested me.”

mer months he usually has to return to England to work in hospitality jobs so he jumped at the chance of performing with NEBT.

“I really want my family and friends to see me dance,” he says ruefully. “I haven’t danced here since I was 18, so it would be nice for them to see how I’ve come on. Mum’s chomping at the bit to get tickets!”

Brezzi trained in her native Italy, then France, moved to Stuttgart to attend the John Cranko School and finally graduated from English National Ballet School. She couldn’t find work so returned to France for a pre-professional course and impressed enough in the Tremplin Jeunes Ballets competition for the National Ballet of Canada to offer her an apprentice contract.

“The Canadians were amazing!” she says. “In Europe, when you get an apprentice contract, you don’t get to dance that much because you’re always third or fourth cast. As soon as I got to Canada, I realized I was going to be in just about every show and I was so happy. It was my first job in a big company and the people were really friendly.”

Unlike Harrison, Brezzi was once again out of work after her apprenticeship finished, but both are delighted about the experience they’re gaining at NEBT in working with so many choreographers.

“It’s great that many of them are young, too,” says Harrison. “It means you’re involved in their development as well as your own. George Williamson, for example, has choreographed for English National Ballet, but he’s still in his early twenties and has a long journey in front of him. To be able to say you were part of it when he was just starting out is fantastic.”

“I’ve watched some of the other pieces and they’re lovely,” says Harrison. “It would be great to have the opportunity to perform in *Resolution* or in Ernst’s Meisner’s piece. I really like Jenna Lee’s *Classical Symphony*, too; I like her movement quality.”

“I’m very excited and I hope it’s going to be a great week of shows,” Brezzi enthuses. “It’s been a great experience already; sometimes it’s hard, but Karen understands a lot, we can talk with her and she’s really open.”

#### — July 2012 —

*Synergies* opens. There’s plenty of goodwill emanating from the audience and the U.K. press; people really want NEBT to succeed. The shows are well-received and the dancers look at home on the London stage. The excitement after the first night is palpable and all the hard work has paid off with highly polished performances. For Pilkington-Miksa, however, the elation is tinged with sadness.

“I’m very proud of them all, but it breaks my heart that we aren’t carrying on dancing somewhere else this year. It’s so frustrating because a huge amount of effort has gone into this programme. Importantly, though, we have the rights to most of the ballets, so they will become part of our repertory.”

#### — December 2012 —

Five months later and auditions are underway for new dancers (with more being held in March 2013) to perform in a new show in November 2013. Of the *Synergies* dancers, eight, including Harrison and Brezzi, now have contracts with international companies. McNicol and three more of the emerging choreographers have received further commissions from different companies while Williamson has recently been appointed by English National Ballet Artistic Director Tamara Rojo to associate artist.

It’s a more than encouraging start for NEBT, and an exciting and productive future looks assured. ▼

# CLOTHES THAT MAKE THE DANCE



KANDIS COOK HAD THE TASK  
OF BRINGING 18TH-CENTURY FRENCH  
ROYAL FASHION TO LIFE

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BY KAREN BARR



Ian Casady and Melody Herrera  
in Houston Ballet's *Marie*  
Photo: Amitava Sarkar



**S**tanton Welch's *Marie* for Houston Ballet had its Canadian premiere at Ottawa's National Arts Centre, in October. The true tale of the Austrian Archduchess-turned-French Queen who dies at the guillotine was all the more brilliant with costumes and sets by Kandis Cook. The Canadian designer, who now lives in London, England, had the momentous task of bringing 18th-century French Royal fashion to life.

To prepare, Cook gathered her inspiration by travelling to the Palace of Versailles. She also watched the 1938 movie *Marie Antoinette* starring Norma Shearer and Tyrone Power, read period costume books and a history book called *The Journey: Marie Antoinette* by Antonia Fraser. A visual artist herself, Cook who studied at the Alberta College of Art and the Nova Scotia School of Art before studying theatre design at Motley's in London, looked at art from the time period as well.



Melody Herrera in Houston Ballet's *Marie*  
Photo: Pam Francis

Act I opens with Marie, just 14 years of age, at home with her brothers and sisters, under the watchful eye of their mother Maria Theresa, Empress of Austria. Throughout the ballet, Marie is dressed beautifully in shades of cream and white. Why did Cook choose these colours to represent her? "Marie was untouched. She never became cruel in any way," states the designer.

Marie's first dress reflects girlhood. The bodice is cream-coloured cotton coutil, a herringbone twill weave fabric that is tightly woven. An Austrian flare is created with red chiffon detailing. The matching cream skirt is made of nylon, with underlayers of silk and crepe de chine. Skirts in the production swirl elegantly with the dancer, due to construction. "All skirts are based on a circle," states Barbara Joyce-Evans, wardrobe assistant, Houston Ballet Costume Shop. "Stanton likes the audience to see each dancer's legs and feet."

A red travel coat of silk organza, with a silk chiffon ruffle Watteau back, is placed over the dress for travel to France. Wigs designed by Danuta Barszczewska and made by Amanda Mitchell play a big role in this production. Each one is slowly created, pulling each hair strand by strand, through a fine mesh, using a tiny needle. Mitchell reveals the process takes between 50 to 60 hours per wig.

Marie's first wig is appropriate to age and title. In a time of grey-powdered wigs, the lead character's wig is left blond, with the hair pinned up. Young yet casually sophisticated.

At the border of France, she is stripped of her clothes. There is no onstage nudity. The audience sees a flesh-coloured unitard. A white chemisette is placed over top. It's a piece of clothing that functions to fill in a gown's décolletage. Next is the bodice, which is made of china silk, with lace trim. The sleeves have an underlayer of flesh-coloured fabric to give strength and durability. The skirt is silk, with an overlay of silk lace. The fabric originally contained faux pearls. Since this is a dancing dress, the costume team stripped it of the pearls, making it lighter.

Marie meets the Dauphin Louis Auguste, heir to the throne and her new husband. His wide circle of red rouge and awkward mannerisms reveal his insecurities and inexperience. He is dressed in the white shirt, tights and slippers that form the costume base of all male dancers onstage. What helps distinguish him as royalty? To start, there is a fashionable vest. It is shorter in the front and longer in the back. Made from a cotton

upholstery fabric, it is painted with metallic swirls and edged with gold lace, in a fleur-de-lys pattern. It is adorned regally with gold buttons.

Both the jabot and cuffs snap on and off the men's costumes. The more important the man is, the more resplendent the pieces are. Think of the jabot as a ruffle worn at the neck of the shirt, like a tie is today. For the Dauphin it's a jabot of china silk and lace, clipped with a rhinestone-for-diamond-pin, replicating a rectangular-shaped shoe buckle. His cuffs are of white silk, with a lace edge and gold metallic lace detailing. The rose-coloured, silk-knotted, embroidered silk coat has nubs that stand out on the fabric. The gleam is supplied by more than 10,000 dots of silver glitter. All were hand applied. The coat has a standing collar with deep cuffs and pocket flaps. A baldrick, or wide ribbon, is placed over top, in white, red and gold. As inspiration for this costume, Cook felt, "Louis was a very soft, innocent character. I saw him as a gentle child. He was unprepared for marriage."

The couple dance their introductory pas de deux, before Marie Antoinette is dressed in her wedding gown. To give the dress a period accuracy, a pannier

Melody Herrera and artists of  
the Houston Ballet in rehearsal  
Photo: Bruce Bennett /Houston Ballet





was created. It can be best described as metal hooping that sits on the hip to help extend the sides of the skirt. A measuring tape for this particular contraption confirmed a width of 18 inches on each side. The skirt is made of the same fabric as the dancing dress; silk with silk lace, but with the faux pearls left on. It also contains loads of passementerie, which *The Complete Costume Dictionary* by Elizabeth J. Lewandowski refers to as “trim, especially heavy embroidery, guimp, braid, beads and tinsel, etc.” It was applied by hand in Houston Ballet’s wardrobe department. There is a matching bodice with sparkles and a lace peplum. The sleeves are accurate for the period — shorter in the front and longer in the back, comprised of eight layers of lace. For the ceremony, a tall powdered wig is placed over the blond wig, completing the picture. The dancer does not dance at this point, she cannot. She simply stands to be admired.

The court descends upon her. They curtsy and kiss her hand. They are dressed in rich fabrics of steel grey, brown and black. It is a vicious lot and Cook dressed them similarly, “I wanted to neutralize them as a force.” The King soon dies. This allows for a dramatic change in both life at the palace and the costumes Cook designs.

Act II shows the couple at Petit Tri-

THROUGHOUT THE BALLET, MARIE IS DRESSED BEAUTIFULLY IN SHADES OF CREAM AND WHITE. WHY DID COOK CHOOSE THESE COLOURS TO REPRESENT HER? “MARIE WAS UNTOUCHED. SHE NEVER BECAME CRUEL IN ANY WAY,” STATES THE DESIGNER.

anon, Marie Antoinette’s nature retreat on the grounds of the palace. Life is less formal here, although, Louis is now King, his wife Queen. Marie Antoinette wears a cream dress of silk organza, embroidered with light blue cornflowers, on dark blue vines and leaves. Underneath there is a skirt of silk. The bodice contains some sparkle. Around her waist is a thick belt of taffeta silk in light blue. In her hair, now the blond wig again, she wears small clips of blue rhinestone sparkle.

Louis, too, is less formal. He wears his whites with snap-on cuffs of china silk

with gold metallic. His jabot is silk chiffon of blue, purple, green, turquoise and white. His vest is yellow and metallic gold brocade with metallic braid trim and rhinestone buttons. A collarless lavender coat with more gold braid, gold buttons and sparkling rhinestones completes the ensemble.

Fun and frolic ensues, with dancing, drinking and feasting at the Queen’s parties. Louis comes and goes fulfilling his obsession with hunting indicated by the rifle he brandishes about. Within the midst of merriment, the people of France break-in upon the party. Having walked from Paris, pillaging the homes and wardrobes of the wealthy, the people are dressed in elegant clothing of the era, shown in distress and need of repair, from living in the streets.

In the final scene, the couple is in prison. Marie is in cream-grey with brown patches, reflecting her living conditions. Louis wears pieces from his court days that are in ruin. They dance the most beautiful pas de deux imaginable. It is their goodbye. First Louis is taken away and sentenced to death. Everyone knows how it ends for Marie Antoinette. She is marched to the guillotine onstage. Her head is placed on the block. The people of France surround her, shielding the audience’s view, but not what they envision. ▼

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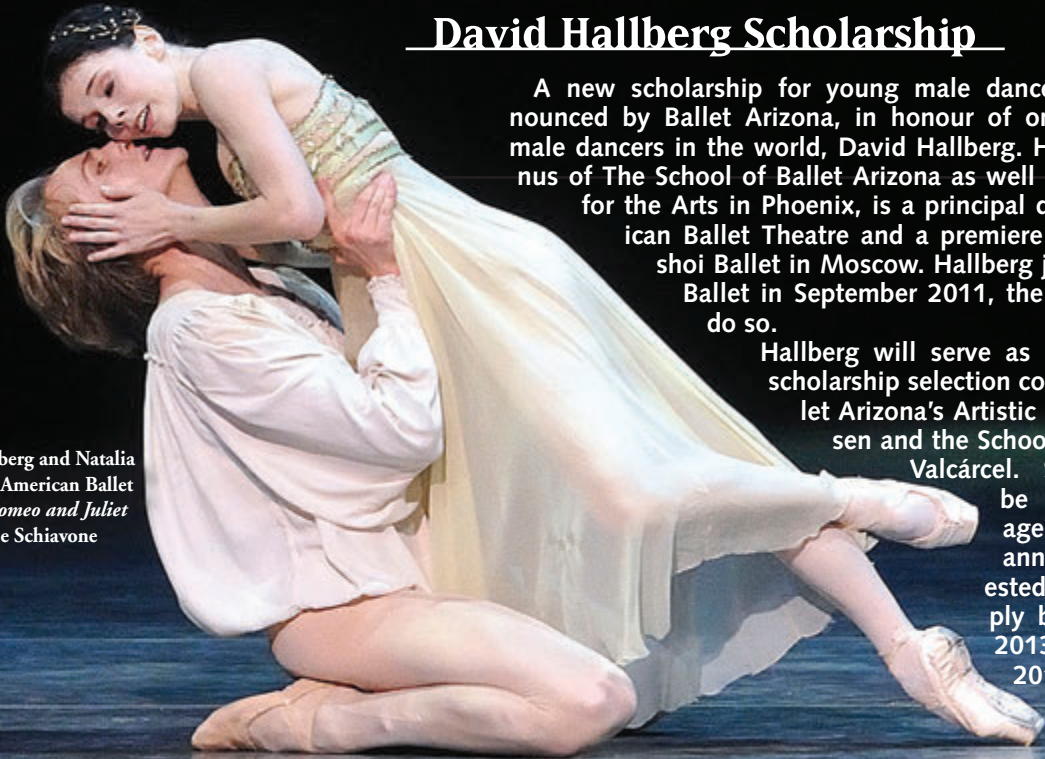
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David Hallberg and Natalia Osipova in American Ballet Theatre's *Romeo and Juliet*  
Photo: Gene Schiavone



## David Hallberg Scholarship

A new scholarship for young male dancers has been announced by Ballet Arizona, in honour of one of the leading male dancers in the world, David Hallberg. Hallberg, an alumnus of The School of Ballet Arizona as well as Arizona School for the Arts in Phoenix, is a principal dancer with American Ballet Theatre and a premiere dancer with Bolshoi Ballet in Moscow. Hallberg joined the Bolshoi Ballet in September 2011, the first American to do so.

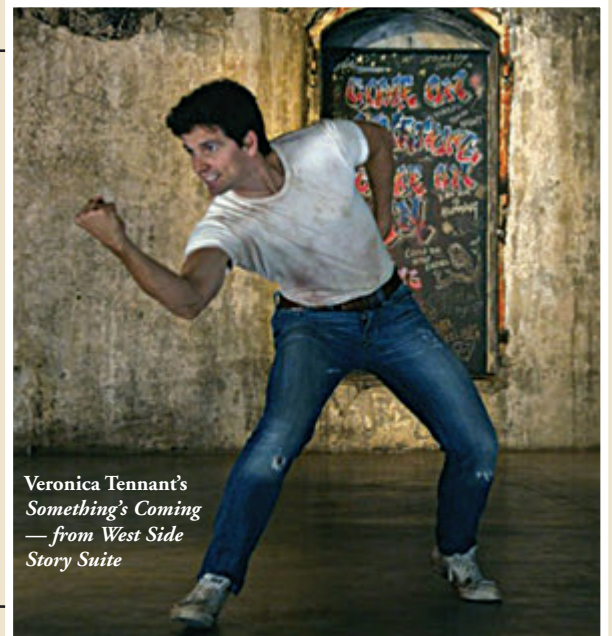
Hallberg will serve as a member of the scholarship selection committee with Ballet Arizona's Artistic Director Ib Andersen and the School's Director Carlos Valcárcel. Scholarships will be awarded to boys age 13 and up on an annual basis. Interested dancers can apply beginning June 1, 2013 for the 2013-2014 school year.

## Veronica Tennant Directs New Dance Film

Former ballerina and international Emmy Award-winner Veronica Tennant's newest film, *Something's Coming* — from *West Side Story Suite*, has been released online by bravoFACT and has been picked by CBC Television for its Canadian Reflections (Sunday nights at midnight) slot. It was also shown across Canada in January as a prelude to Cineplex's "Front Row Centre" screening of a Bolshoi Ballet live performance.

The Tennant-directed short features a duo performance by Canadian musical theatre star Paul Nolan and National Ballet principal Guillaume Côté of a famous Leonard Bernstein song from *West Side Story*, with choreography by Jerome Robbins.

Nolan and Côté were filmed separately at different Toronto industrial building locations and their performances later juxtaposed. (The film can be viewed online at [www.bravofact.com/2012/12/21/somethings-coming-from-west-side-story-suite-2012](http://www.bravofact.com/2012/12/21/somethings-coming-from-west-side-story-suite-2012)).



Veronica Tennant's *Something's Coming* — from *West Side Story Suite*

## SERGEI FILIN ATTACKED



Photo: Yuri Kadobnov/AFP/Getty Images)

Sergei Filin, the artistic director of the Bolshoi Ballet, sustained third-degree burns on his face and eyes after a masked assailant threw sulfuric acid at him outside his home.

Filin had been receiving threats before the attack, and Bolshoi officials believe the attack was related to Filin's work with the ballet company. In an interview from his hospital room with a television reporter, Filin said: "Someone's not pleased that I am leading the Bolshoi Theatre well and successfully."

Filin underwent operations for the burns on his face and his eyes.

Bolshoi dancer Galina Stepanenko has been named interim director until Filin returns. Speaking as her appointment was announced, she said: "We are all shattered by what happened and it is not easy for us. We need to be together and keep working. I wish Sergei a speedy recovery and return, but for now I am ready to help."



## World Premiere of *Krabat*

The Stuttgart Ballet presents the world premiere of *Krabat*, a new full-length ballet by Denis Volpi, in the Opera House of the State Theatre, Stuttgart on March 22. *Krabat*, based on the novel by award-winning German author Otfried Preussler, was published in 1971 and has been translated into 31 languages.

Volpi has chosen three contemporary choreographers: Philip Glass, Peteris Vasks and Krzysztof Penderecki, for his music which will be played live by the Orchestra of the State Theatre Stuttgart and conducted by Stuttgart Ballet's Music Director James Tuggle. The sets and the costumes for *Krabat* were designed by Katharina Schlipf. Volpi has collaborated with Schlipf on several ballets including the highly successful *Carnival of the Animals*, created for the John Cranko School and subsequently acquired by John Neumeier for his school in Hamburg. Vivian Arnold, dramaturg of the Stuttgart Ballet, was commissioned to write the libretto for *Krabat*. Lighting will be by Bonnie Beecher whom Volpi has collaborated with twice, including for his creation *Private Light* for American Ballet Theatre.



Marijn Rademaker as the Master and David Moore as Krabat in Stuttgart Ballet's *Krabat*  
Photo: Stuttgart Ballet

Anna Grip, artistic director at Cullberg Ballet, is leaving her post when her appointment expires next summer. Riksteatern, the Swedish National Touring Theatre of which Cullberg Ballet is part, is now searching for a new artistic director.

Grip came to Cullberg Ballet in 2006 as ensemble manager. In the summer of 2008 she took over as acting artistic director when Johan Inger left, and since January 2010 she has been the company's artistic director.

During her time at Cullberg Ballet, Grip has invited several choreographers to create works for both the big and small stage. She has also broadened the work of the company to include site-specific works and works for settings other than the traditional stage. Under Grip's management, the company has taken steps to invest in future generations of dancers, choreographers and audiences, and today it offers places on a training programme to students including those in their final year.

Alexander Ekman's debut dance film, *40 M Under* featuring Cullberg Ballet, is now available on iTunes.



Cullberg Ballet's *40m under*  
Photo: © Urban Jörén

## Peter Quanz Awarded Medal

Winnipeg-based choreographer Peter Quanz was awarded the State Medal in Literature and the Arts by President Vyacheslav Nagovitsyn of the Republic of Buryatia, Russia, on February 11. Quanz is being recognized for a series of modern ballets choreographed for the Buryatian National Ballet as part of the celebration of the Republic's 350-year membership in the Russian Federation.

Quanz created two new ballets, *Dzambuling* and *Souvenir de Bach*, with scores by composer Anton Lubchenko, who served as the director of the Republic of Buryatia Academic Opera and Ballet Theatre.

Quanz also restaged his *In Tandem* while in residence in the Buryatian capital of Ulan-Ude from February to April 2011.

The state medal recognizes a significant creation of literary or artistic work for the Republic, and Quanz is only the second non-Russian and the first North American to receive this distinction.



# DANCE NOTES

## in brief

Choreographer **Liam Scarlett** has been appointed first artist in residence at the Royal Ballet. His last appearance as a dancer with the company was in the recently performed *Swan Lake*.

Two generations of the Goh family were recognized on January 17 and 22 for their dedication to the art of classical ballet. **Choo Chiat Goh**, **Lin Yee Goh** and their daughter, **Chan Hon Goh**, the director of the Goh Ballet Academy, were honoured with the Queen's Diamond Jubilee Medal.

The next **Dance Salad Festival** performances are scheduled for March 28-30, at the Wortham Center, Cullen Theater, in Houston, Texas, celebrating its 18th season in Houston and 21st since its inception in Belgium.

**Donald Byrd** has signed a five-year contract renewal with Spectrum Dance Theater, extending his post as artistic director through 2017. He is celebrating his 10th year with the dance organization in the current 2012-2013 performance season, **BYRD AT 10**.

The 10th anniversary season of **Gloria Kaufman** presents **Dance at the Music Center** continues with **Alvin Ailey American Dance Theater** April 17-21, at the Music Center's Dorothy Chandler Pavilion. Ailey will return to Los Angeles for the first time under the leadership of its new artistic director, **Robert Battle**, with three different programmes of mixed repertory, including **Ohad Naharin's Minus 16**.

The **Isadora Duncan International Symposium**, to be held this year at George Washington University, in Washington, D.C., June 16-18, is now calling for participants, speakers, presenters, teachers, panelists and more. Find out more at [www.duncan-symposium.com](http://www.duncan-symposium.com).

**Irena Dvoroenko**, principal dancer with American Ballet Theatre since 2000, will give her final performance with the Company on May 18 at the Metropolitan Opera House in the role of **Tatiana in Onegin**.

### CORRECTION

On page 25 of the Winter 2012 issue of *Dance International*, C.M. was incorrectly placed after Leland Windriech's name at the start of his obituary. On page 54 the caption information should have read Paris Opera Ballet with guest artists Maria Alexandrova and Alexander Volchkov from the Bolshoi Ballet.

## Lunkina Leaves Bolshoi



Svetlana Lunkina, a leading ballerina with the Bolshoi Ballet, said she will live in Canada after receiving several undefined threats. Lunkina told the newspaper *Izvestia* in January that she had fled to Canada fearing for her own future as a ballerina. Internationally celebrated for her interpretation of *Giselle*, Lunkina has been a star dancer at the Bolshoi since 1997. The ballerina had been due to appear later this year in Stravinsky's *The Rite of Spring*.

## Costume Conserved



Postcard of Maud Allan posing in her *Salomé* costume, c. 1908  
Photo: courtesy of Dance Collection Danse

Dance Collection Danse has announced that Maud Allan's historic *Salomé* costume will be conserved at the Canadian Conservation Institute (CCI). The costume will provide the focal point for future exhibitions that would include other Maud Allan artifacts in the DCD archives including a bisque nodder, *Salomé* cigarettes, postcards, photographs, her diaries and papers, and other pieces of her Edwardian-era clothing.

Allan, a native of Toronto, first wore the costume in 1906 when she debuted her choreographic work *The Vision of Salomé* in Vienna. Allan's performance, later seen by King Edward VII when he was vacationing in Marienbad, was recommended to the management of the Palace Theatre in London and she went on to give over 200 performances there beginning in March of 1908.

CCI, the centre of excellence in conservation and conservation science, supports heritage institutions and preserving Canada's heritage collections so that they can be accessed now and in the future. Created in 1972, CCI is a special operating agency in the Department of Canadian Heritage.



# Erik Bruhn Prize Winners

Ida Praetorius and Andreas Kaas, both 19 and from the Royal Danish Ballet in Copenhagen, won the top \$7,500 prizes at the National Ballet of Canada-hosted International Competition for the Erik Bruhn Prize, held at the Four Seasons Centre in Toronto on November 28. Each also received a commemorative sculpted trophy.

Brazilian-born Alessandro Sousa Pereira, whose new work, *Traditional*, which the Danes performed for the contemporary round, took the \$2,000 prize for choreography.

This was the 10th Bruhn Prize Competition. The event, held irregularly since 1988, is named for one of the 20th-century's greatest dancers. The 2012 event included entrants from Britain's Royal Ballet, Royal Danish Ballet, American Ballet Theatre, Hamburg Ballet and, from the National Ballet of Canada, Emma Hawes, 19, and Brendan Saye, 22.

Hawes won an Audience Choice Award, as did Royal Ballet first soloist James Hay and National Ballet principal Guillaume Côté (for choreography). These awards were determined by the roughly 550 people (out of an attendance of 1,450) who voted via text messaging.



Alessandro Sousa Pereira, Ida Praetorius and Andreas Kaas of The Royal Danish Ballet • Photo: Bruce Zinger



## Jeni LeGon 1916-2012

Tap dancing legend Jeni LeGon died on December 7 at the age of 96 in Vancouver. One of the first African American women in tap dance to become a soloist, LeGon shared the screen with the likes of Bill "Bojangles" Robinson and Cab Calloway, wearing pants rather than chorus-girl skirts when she performed. She proved you didn't have to be a man to dance like a hooper.

Born in Chicago in 1916, LeGon got her first job in musical theatre at the tender age of 13, debuting as a chorine with the Count Basie Orchestra at the Uptown Theatre in Chicago.

She later started touring as a chorus line dancer with the Whitman Sisters, the highest paid act on the TOBA vaudeville circuit. Hollywood would be her next destination, where LeGon got a part in the 1935 musical, *Hooray for Love*, in which she partnered Bill "Bojangles" Robinson.

Despite racism in Hollywood in that era, she went on to be in many movies,

but often playing stereotypical roles like "the maid." She also performed in many musicals on Broadway and in London.

In the 1950s, LeGon started her own show, *Jazz Caribe*, which toured around the world. She finally landed in Vancouver where she set up a dance studio, turning to teaching as well as performing.

A National Film Board of Canada documentary entitled *Living in a Great Big Way* documents LeGon's career both in performance and teaching.

She is survived by her longtime companion Frank Clarin.

*Margaret Jetelina*



## Konstanze Vernon 1939-2013

Konstanze Vernon, an iconic figure in German ballet, died 21 January after a short battle with cancer.

She was born Konstanze Herzfeld in Berlin, 2 January 1939, and began ballet training at age six with the renowned Russian pedagogue and choreographer, Tatiana Gsovsky. Vernon, (her professional name), joined the ballet troupe of the then Berlin Municipal Opera at age 14 and was a so-

loist three years later. In 1963 she moved to the Bavarian State Opera as a principal dancer and it was there, in Munich, that her most important work was achieved.

Vernon soon forged a dream partnership with Heinz Bosl, sadly cut short by his premature death from cancer at age 28 in 1975. Vernon and her husband, Fred Hoffmann, three years later established a foundation in his Bosl's name to support the training of young talent.

As a dancer, Vernon excelled in dramatic roles such as *Giselle* and as *Tatiana* in Cranko's *Onegin* but also created many roles in the contemporary repertoire. Following her retirement as prima ballerina in 1981, Vernon focused her attention with notable success on training, helping introduce the Vaganova system to state academy. She later became ballet director within the Bavarian State Opera organization where Vernon successfully campaigned for the ballet division to be given its own discrete premises and independent direction of its affairs. She thus became founding artistic director of the Bavarian State Ballet (sometimes known outside Germany as Munich Ballet) in 1989, passing on the reins to Ivan Liska in 1998. During her tenure, the company's stature rapidly improved. Among Vernon's early coups was to engage Canadian Evelyn Hart as prima ballerina for several seasons in the early 1990s.

After retiring as director, Vernon again focused her efforts on training through the Heinz Bosl Foundation and Ballet Academy Munich. She fulfilled a long-held dream in 2010 with the establishment of a junior company, Bavarian State Ballet II.

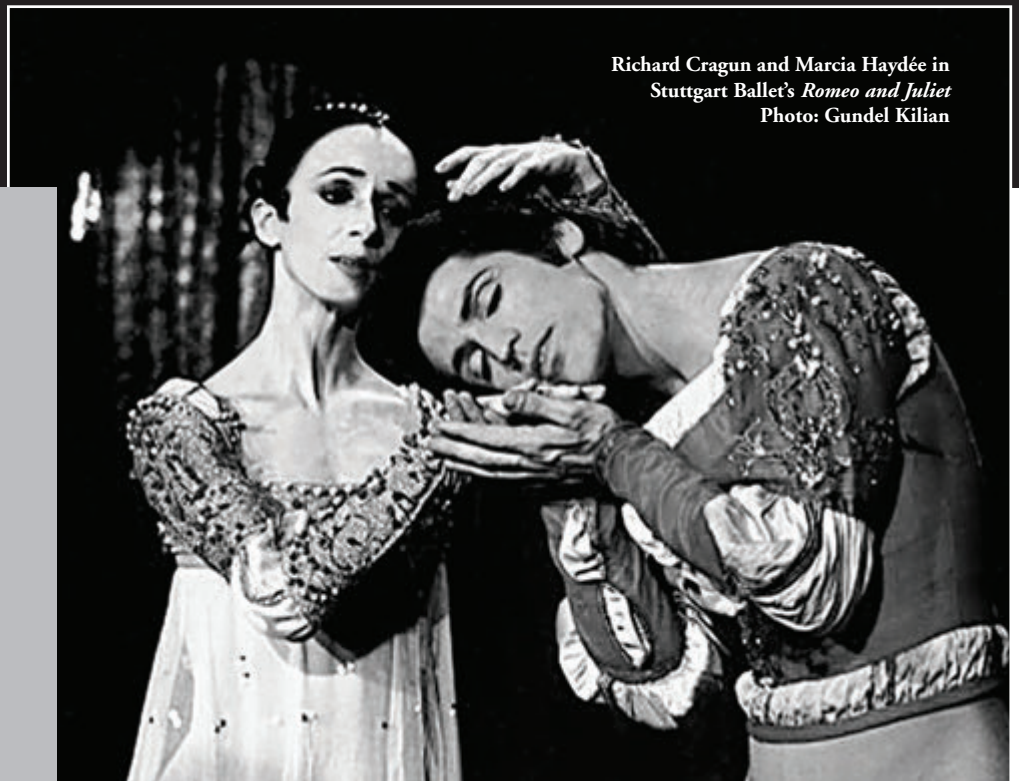
*Michael Crabb*

# Remembering

## RICHARD CRAGUN

A FINAL INTERVIEW WITH THE LEGENDARY DANCER

BY TOBA SINGER



Richard Cragun and Marcia Haydée in Stuttgart Ballet's *Romeo and Juliet*  
Photo: Gundel Kilian

Dear Toba,

Please excuse my delay in writing. Having a bit of health problems at the moment, not to worry but will get back to u as soon as possible. P.S. Please, email me your mailing address so I can send u a few cartoon examples of my B.C. drawings, etc. Hope you are well.

Fondly,  
Richard (Ricky)

**R**ichard Cragun's email from June 2012 was a response to my having passed along a request to him from San Francisco Museum of Performance and Design director Muriel Maffre. She was looking forward to exhibiting a collection of Cragun's cartoons as the opening day event at the museum's new home. I had spent six days in Santiago de Chile last May, there to interview Marcia Haydée, artistic director of Ballet de Santiago and Cragun's former partner and companion, as well as review

John Cranko's *Taming of the Shrew*. Cragun was on hand to coach the Petruchio role, which he had originated at Stuttgart Ballet and made the standard. When I requested an interview, he hesitated, and then said, "Yes, of course. It's good to do interviews every now and then. It lets people know that you are still ... around."

Sadly, this would turn out to be one of Cragun's last interviews; he died in August 2012, at the age of 67.

During our interview, Cragun told me that, at age seven and a half, he wanted tap lessons and by 11, was studying ballroom with Barbara Briggs and appearing in local theatres. Cragun's father, a librarian and frustrated actor, applauded his son's ambitions. Ballet teacher Jean Hart's brother arranged for Cragun to attend London's Royal Ballet School in

1961. "My father said he'd pay for one year, asking that I please come back," Cragun said sheepishly, "but I loved London and didn't want to return to Sacramento. I won the Adeline Geneé Copenhagen scholarship. I met Vera Volkova and studied with her privately."

Cragun couldn't join the Royal Ballet because he was unwilling to become a British subject and, at 17, was offered a contract in Bremen. "When my headmistress Ursula Morton saw it, she ripped it up in front of me: 'If you want to join a company it won't be this one. Cranko wants you for Stuttgart. You'll go there.'"

Cragun believed that his insecurity as an actor initially caused Stuttgart dancers to take him for "a pushy, rambunctious American, determined to please,



eager to impress, but lacking finesse. I was well educated, but a bit brash and made a lot of mistakes. I gave the impression of being a know-it-all.”

John Cranko helped change that and his imprint lasted a lifetime. Never didactic, the lessons were plentiful and rich. He could see through people,” said Cragun. “Their talents, complexes, fears and exposed them to help them confront them.” Rather than discourage Cragun and Haydée’s personal relationship, he utilized it to reveal its nature by creating *Taming of the Shrew* on them.

“Marcia was Brazilian and older, and he saw her as instinctive, and me as methodical, tendencies that made her freer and me more cautious. As we became dance partners, John saw that her personality was sometimes hard to handle. In *Shrew*, he played with reality to equalize the energy. Our lives have crisscrossed through his ballets and we will eternally love each other, but, after 16 years together we didn’t want to continue privately.”

Among the most memorable partnerships in ballet, he was her Swan’s Siegfried in Bonn when Ray Barra injured himself. The temperaments in *Swan Lake* are black and white, hot and cold, and Haydée delved deeply into them, but Cragun needed time to discover his more layered character. The pressure he felt from Haydée as the senior partner positioned her metaphorically “three steps ahead” of him, yet sensing that while younger, he was not inexperienced. Their romantic relationship ended while dancing *Romeo and Juliet* in Washington, D.C. Public scrutiny was overwhelming. “The phone didn’t stop ringing: ‘Is it true that they’ve broken up?’ It took us months to dance together again, but we did because we loved and missed it so much!”

Cragun danced with the most notable ballerinas of his era: Makarova, Fonteyn and Fracci, and attributed his success with them to having begun partnering very young. “Cranko taught that the male dancer is a gentleman no matter how difficult the ballerina’s personality. Gelsey Kirkland had a poor personal and onstage relationship with others, but knew my reputation as a good partner, and was determined to show me that she was an angel. And, indeed, I found her to be so.”

Few boundaries sorted the personal from the professional. “I am known in my dance career as the virile Petruchio, and through a misunderstanding was cast as a Romeo physically but not theatrically, and so Cranko led me to myself psychologically and theatrically. The roles

I’ve danced taught me more than anything else in my life: Kowalski to Marcia’s Stella, the Jew in *Traces*, crazed Carabosse (is this a man or a woman?) — where Cranko said I needed a Kabuki dancer’s attack to be alluring to a man.” Cragun credited his “duality as a human being,” to the gravitational pull exerted by the theatre.

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**CRAGUN DANCED  
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If Cranko, who eschewed stardom and its attendant shallowness, didn’t intend that Cragun become a celebrity, what

durable legacy did he leave the young artist? Cragun learned to explore the inner self free of inhibitions, to completely become the character.

“He convinced you of your worth as an artist. He did this with Yergen Rosa, and the designer Elizabeth Dalton. He saw a diamond in the rough in Marcia and gave her the magic to believe in herself when he honoured her wish to dance Tatiana in *Onegin*.”

Cragun said that if he could have had a second vocation, it would have been as a painter or sculptor. He showed me photos of the cartoons he had exhibited. When we spoke of bringing them to San Francisco, he asked me, as a former performing arts librarian, where I thought he ought to donate his papers. The question caught me by surprise as premature — an uncharacteristically morbid concern on the part of someone so invested in living in the moment. I suggested the San Francisco Museum and Library for the Performing Arts and mentioned alternative sites, such as the Jerome Robbins Collection at Lincoln Center or a Stuttgart repository. Cragun beamed and said, “I’m a Californian! I’m going to leave my papers to the San Francisco Museum and Library.” ▼



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Francis Fontaine photographie

# Canadians

by Toba Singer

## in Houston



Aszure Barton

When I learned that Houston Ballet was planning a September 2012 programme called Women@Art featuring Julia Adam's *Ketubah*, Aszure Barton's *Angular Momentum* and Twyla Tharp's *The Brahms-Haydn Variations*, I invited the two Canadian-born choreographers, Adam and Barton, to discuss their careers.

Both received their training at the School of the National Ballet of Canada. After dancing with the National Ballet of Canada, Adam danced as a principal with San Francisco Ballet. A recipient of the 1997 Isadora Duncan Award, Adam has set or staged works for San Francisco Ballet, Nashville Ballet, Ballet Memphis (where she is currently artistic advisor), ABT II, Joffrey Ballet, Robert Moses' KIN, Marin Ballet, Oregon Ballet Theatre, Diablo Ballet and others.

Barton has been commissioned to create new works for Mikhail Baryshnikov, Fang-Yi Sheu, the National Ballet of Canada, Sydney Dance Company, the Juilliard School, Les Ballets Jazz de Montréal, the Martha Graham Dance Company, ABT II, Hubbard Street Dance Chicago and U.K. Laban Institute, among others. She recently choreographed the Broadway production of *The Threepenny Opera*, and has performed internationally with Mikhail Baryshnikov's Hell's Kitchen Dance, the National Ballet of Canada, Les Ballets Jazz de Montréal and Aszure Barton & Artists. Barton was

An interview with Aszure Barton and Julia Adam, both part of Houston Ballet's Women@Art programme



Photo: David Allen

Julia Adam

designated a Paul D. Fleck Fellow at the Banff Centre. She is the resident choreographer for Les Ballets Jazz de Montréal and has been an artist-in-residence at the Baryshnikov Arts Center (BAC) since 2005.

**TS: What in your earliest training charted a path that invited encouragement and inspiration to not just imagine making work, but also actually summoning the will and confidence to do it?**

**AB:** A deep sense of shared experience and an urge to make people laugh — the idea of creating something that was fun, emotional, physical, communal and fantastical. I had a family that supported and encouraged creativity fully, and creative teachers, including Sandra Gray, whose productions were always so sparkling and imaginative, and she was fearless in my eyes. I had creative support at the National Ballet School: Mavis Staines (my director) believed in and really encouraged my passion for choreography; Glenn Gilmour, who cast me in my first performance at National Ballet School and allowed me to feel confident; and the Stephen Godfrey Choreography Showcase originated when I was 15 and

at school (my classmate was the catalyst), and through that I had the opportunity to present work at the Betty Oliphant Theatre in front of live audiences.

**JA:** It has always been a passion of mine to gather people together and create something. My childhood was filled with me bossing my siblings and cousins around creating summer performances for the family.

My experience at the National Ballet school was very different than Aszure's. I graduated a decade earlier, and most of my creative compositions were everything but dance. I learned about composition in art, music and photography. We discussed dance in my History of Dance class, but I was never asked to create a dance. Only once did I choreograph something at school to Brian Eno for a girl and a boy. It was an ambient sound and I enjoyed creating shapes that looked like sculptures I had studied in my History of Art class. It wasn't until Victoria Simon from the New York City Ballet came and set *Serenade* on the school did I realize I understood more than my own part. I understood the machine Balanchine had built. I could almost guess what came next as she set the piece. I knew everyone's part! I knew when someone was wrong. I knew when the shape or the timing was off. It was like I could hover above the dance and see the whole thing at once, as if I was dancing every part. I think in that moment I discovered I was a choreographer.

**TS: During your dance careers, what specific experiences with choreographers impacted how you now work with dancers?**

**AB:** My path has crossed with so many wise teachers. For example, when I moved to New York City, a beautiful woman named Wendy Osserman came into my life. She opened my eyes to risk, improvisation, authentic movement, letting go, and helped remind me of my





Left: Houston Ballet's Connor Walsh and Melissa Hough in Aszure Barton's *Angular Momentum*  
Photo: Amitava Sarkar

Below: Houston Ballet's Ian Casady and Lisa Kasmareck in Julia Adam's *Ketubah*  
Photo: Jim Caldwell

own ways and weirdnesses that had been eclipsed by form and fear.

I learned to not be afraid of the absurd and to not take myself too seriously. I had the training, and it was time for me to find balance and be reminded of what made me tick early on, which is my own sense of humour.

I have learned so much from the dancers I have worked with as they have had many more physical experiences. They have had the opportunity to work with so many creators and teachers in the past, and that informs us all.

**JA:** I think that the choreographers who came into the studio with a very close connection to the music and very clear ideas on what they were saying impacted me greatly. It didn't mean there wasn't space for collaboration or change of thought because that was when the delightful surprises happened for both choreographer and dancer. But it did mean there was a vision that gave the space (studio) something bigger than us. I, too, find that being open, funny and, most importantly, kind has also been very important to me.

**TS:** What process do you prefer — to walk in with a mental blueprint or to let the dancers' responses guide you?



**AB:** I love walking in to the studio bare and leaving completely full and surprised. I enjoy building a language with the dancers at the same tempo, in the same moment, together. I am not a planner.

**JA:** I do walk in with a mental blueprint, but it is a dance between the dancers and myself. I hold the space and direction, and together we create.

**TS:** What is your editing process? Do you wait until the piece premieres to edit, or do you make major changes beforehand? Do you invite others to look at the finished piece and give you feedback before it goes live? If so, who would you be likely to ask?

**AB:** A constant in my work is change.

**JA:** I have a team of people around me with whom I am in constant conversation about the work I am creating, from my designers (lighting, set and costume) to the dancers. These are the people whom I trust to give valuable feedback. They must reside in a world close to mine. Otherwise, I lose my path if I take in too many different thoughts.

It is a tricky situation because my creative world feels so private and intimate.

There have been times when I have felt observers stomp all over the work, and it really devastates the process. Under circumstances where there wasn't so much time pressure, perhaps I would be more willing to listen to others' thoughts, but in the world we live in, there is no time to fall apart and start over.

**TS:** In your experience, what has gotten in the way of successful collaboration? What has optimized it? Please give examples from your work.

**AB:** The dancers I have worked with in the past never cease to amaze me. Their willingness to struggle through a challenging or awkward moment and not give up on the task at hand is really beautiful. For example, years ago I created a work titled *Lascilo Perdere*, where there is a duet between a man and a woman that is sensitive, simple, but very challenging. This defenceless duet has a connection that is challenging to sustain. The dancers themselves let me know that they weren't going to give up until it worked, and voilà, they did it! They created something that is unimagined.

**JA:** I think mostly what gets in the

way of successful collaboration is time because not having time leaves you no breadth in the creative process. The time constraints make me feel like I have to only move forward. The lack of time given onstage for working through a piece ultimately gives you no space to change anything or redirect an idea. I move from piece to piece and learn from what didn't work.

**TS:** Do you find yourself favouring a certain kind of dancer for all your work, or do you tend to cast according to the requirements of a specific piece?

**AB:** I enjoy creating with dancers who are interested in working hard, having fun, working as a team, realizing the importance of being one of many, and who can lead when asked to; dancers who are patient with themselves and others, and have the ability to listen and to make choices and trust themselves as well as me. The dancers should be open to change, understand that a respectful and positive environment is integral and that the work itself is the most important element in the process — not having ownership, but a sense of com-



Connor Walsh and Melody Mennite in Azure Barton's *Angular Momentum*  
Photo: Amitava Sarkar



Houston Ballet in Julia Adam's *Ketubah*  
Photo: Jim Caldwell



munity and trust in the work itself. Having a good time is a priority.

**JA:** I am moved by so many different kinds of dancers. The only requirement is the willingness to try and a deep connection to the music.

**TS:** In dance, but in ballet specifically, there are more women dancers than men dancers, and we have to assume that more little girls than little boys showed their proclivity for choreography by making up dances in their living rooms. Why then are there only a handful of women choreographers in ballet as opposed to modern dance?

**AB:** I will let Julia answer the next two questions — both Julia and I are Canadian and there are many wonderful female choreographers in Canada!

**JA:** I think we can look to our training to explain this phenomenon, and perhaps to our families. In the training of a classical dancer, we ask for no voice. We are asked to imitate and repeat. There is no request to improvise

or create; just do. Yes, the men are included in the daily aspect of the training, but because there are so few of them and we need them so desperately, they are allowed to be who they are. Whether they miss a rehearsal or mess up, they are forgiven and still dance the part they are given. On the other hand, the girls are seen as replaceable. There is always someone else who can take your part, who probably looks very much the same as you do. How does a ballerina build her self-esteem and own her originality and recognize any desire to want to create something, or have an idea or a voice that is solely her own?

Maybe we also need to look at how we raise our daughters. Let them really be who they are, and not conform to what is always expected.

Aszure is correct about the fact that there are many Canadian women who venture out and become dancemakers. Is it because we witness a country that had many dance women in prominent roles? Gweneth Lloyd and

Betty Farrally founded the Royal Winnipeg Ballet. Celia Franca and Betty Oliphant founded the National Ballet of Canada and the National Ballet School. Ludmilla Cheriaeff founded Les Grands Ballet Canadiens. Aszure, Crystal Pite, Dominique Dumais, Emily Molnar, myself, all came from ballet backgrounds and have the desire and talent to make dances. Anne Ditchburn, Marie Chouinard, Pat Miner, Peggy Baker, Anna Wyman are a few female choreographers that I watched growing up in Canada. They were modern based, but crossed over to the ballet side.

**TS:** What obstacles must be surmounted in the ballet world or affirmative action taken in order for women to choreograph more often than sporadically?

**JA:** Rethinking the way we treat our girls in the training, creating more venues for choreography and inspiring young women to trust that what they have to say is important. ▼

# Havana International Ballet Festival

The National Ballet of Cuba survives with a seemingly endless source of talent found on this small island

— by Gary Smith —

Who would have guessed 91-year-old Alicia Alonso, matriarch of the National Ballet of Cuba, would provide the most exciting and exhilarating moment of dance at the Havana International Ballet Festival in late October?

Who would have believed Canadian choreographer Peter Quanz would tear the roof off this sometimes staid, relentlessly old-fashioned festival of dance with two handsome pieces?

And who would have suspected some of the finest performances of this two-week showcase of Cuban and international dance would be given by young dancers, gifted, yet largely unknown to international audiences?

Alonso created pandemonium as she glided, assisted from the wings by handsome partners Jorge Vega and Lazaro Carreno. She dipped and dived, bent back in Vega's still strong arms, wafting a long cigarette holder like some latter day debutante at a 1920's tea dance. Unscheduled as it was, this last minute end-of-the-evening spectacle had the audience of Cuban devotees and international critics and artists on their feet shaking the walls and rattling the roof of the Grand Teatro de Habana.

Called *Portrait to Remember*, the work to music by Ernesto Lecuona, was a tribute to what were described as first dancers of the National Ballet of Cuba.

This little romp was so sophisticated, so steeped in nostalgic splendour, that it took the audience to some grand and special place lost in the vaults of time. For anyone old enough to have been there the first time around, this was a moment to treasure. For anyone too young for that, it was something to file away as an iconic moment of ballet history.

After the dance, Alonso bowed gracefully at curtain call after curtain call, held audience on the mobbed stage, then retired to her dressing room attended by three doctors and a nurse.

Great care is taken with icons in this



Cuban capital. And make no mistake, Alonso is second only to Fidel Castro when it comes to Cuban giants.

"I'd love to go out and drink champagne," Alonso said. "Just like the old days."

"No, you go home to bed," the doctors ordered.

Champagne, or not, it was a grand evening the audience felt privileged to share.

For the record, the other dancers in the piece were Marta Garcia, Maria Elena Llorente, Orlando Salgado and Osmay Molina.

Quanz, the Canadian choreographer who has produced work for American Ballet Theatre, Maryinsky Ballet, Les Grand Ballets Canadiens, the Royal Ballet and the National Ballet of Canada, just to name a few illustrious companies, has arguably done his best work for the Royal Winnipeg Ballet and the Hong Kong Bal-

let. In Cuba, Quanz reproduced his beautiful ballet *Luminous* for some exquisite young dancers who gave it sensuous appeal and heart-stopping sophistication.

As with any really splendid piece, *Luminous* morphs nicely according to those who dance it. The young Cubans tore into with such passion, such joy, such exquisite sense of discovery that the ballet, about love, loss and the revivification of the human spirit, was easily the best thing at this smorgasbord of dance.

Also a joy, though not nearly as profound in intent or execution, was *Double Bounce* Quanz's pas de pizazz for Viengsay Valdés and Dani Hernández. A party piece built around a flat tutu that bobs madly about, this is a sexy little bonbon of a ballet Quanz originally created for his own Q Dance company and has now set on these two Cuban stars.

To say they dance it with energy, style and a whole range of emotions doesn't really convey the way the piece takes you by surprise. Valdés pulls out the stops doing her feisty fouetté turns, and Hernández circles the stage with airborne jetés.

Ann Armit's costumes are terrific and if you can imagine the ballet framed by better lighting and set against an evenly coloured cyclorama, you can understand what it would look like on a major North American stage.

Serafin Castro, a lovely visceral dancer, remains underused in the Cuban company, but Quanz understands the value of his toned body and sexy smile. He danced beautifully in *Luminous*, making every move a joy to watch. This is one dancer who ought to be front and centre more often than he is.

Young dancer Grettel Morejon was a standout in the Quanz piece, too, as well as in Alonso's 1955 work *La Commedia ... danza* where she was a frisky Colombina.

Camilo Ramos was lithe and handsome, romantically involved with his



partner Yanela Piñera in Eduardo Blanco's fresh and youthful *Idilio*, a love duet on a golden beach that is so Cuban it reeks of sunshine and sand.

Of course, the signature ballet *Giselle* remains a strong Cuban force in Alonso's company and Hernández and Anette Delgado worked to create its magic spell, even if they did sometimes reach over the top. No matter, the performance was punctuated with applause for every trick these two mustered.

Not nearly so successful was an *Onegin* pas de deux from the last act of Cranko's ballet that was difficult to watch. Hideous costumes and hammy acting robbed the work of its requisite passion. Onegin was in tail coat, blue shirt and long black tie. Tatiana was in a filmy cerise skirt and white top resplendent with a huge fringe that hung like damp spaghetti. Horrible.

Costumes aside, neither Sadaise Arencibia nor Javier Torres had any notion of how to express the drama of this brilliant piece. When Torres tore for the back of the stage at the final moment of anguish and dashed right through an ugly, blue-striped backcloth, he gave the piece a disturbing and inadvertently comic ending. John Cranko would be horrified to see his work mangled this way. It failed to work on even the most primitive level.

Alonso's choreography for *La Fille Mal Gardée* did nothing to erase golden memories of Ashton's brilliant staging for the Royal Ballet. It's so splendid with its clogs, ribbons and rooster that a make-do version just doesn't work.

Similarly, Alonso's staging of *Romeo and Juliet*, called here *Shakespeare y sus mascararas*, had some lovely moments, but not even gifted dancers Delgado and Hernández could make the piece work as well as Cranko's Stuttgart Ballet version. Adding Shakespeare to the story was clever, but the character wasn't used well enough to give the story weight or drama.

Guests from around the globe danced in Havana, too, with New York City Ballet stars performing *Apollo* rather nicely with Adrian Danchig-Waring looking stunning in the title role.

Two pieces by choreographer Tom Gold were less enchanting. *Gershwin Preludes* is a decent enough party piece danced nicely here by Gretchen Smith and Stephen Hanna, but *Tango Fantasia*, Gold's sultry suite of dances to Astor Piazzola music had four false endings and an attenuated feel and look. The local audience loved it all madly, however, having so little chance to see performers from the United States.

Carlos Acosta, Cuban of course, but a star in New York and London who makes trips home to Havana to help the local team, gave a solid performance in Miguel

Altunaga's *Memoria*, dancing around a large pool of light, hopping in and out of its orbit and generally showing off his still spectacular body. With so many young dancers onstage in Havana, he was wise to do something that suited his present strengths and abilities. He brought the house down of course. He's Acosta after all.

Torres, also a Cuban refugee who makes his career moves these days at Northern Ballet Theatre in Britain, gave a fine account of Hannah Bateman's *Hamel's* solo, proving you can do a hundred and one things with a white shirt, tight black pants and a bare chest.

Whatever faults it had this time round, the Havana International Ballet Festival remains an important point of contact with artists from around the globe, as well as the Cuban company that hosts it.

That company remains vital, even though so many of its young stars have "defected" for richer lands and more interesting dance opportunities. The National Ballet of Cuba survives with a seemingly endless source of talent found on this small island. The way that talent is shaped and encouraged is still a wonder given the sad economic conditions in Cuba and the lack of input for cultural growth by choreographers around the world. ▼



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# dance on DVD



## La Fille mal gardée

Classics, First DVD Release, 2012

The small book that accompanies the DVD tells the history of *La Fille mal gardée*, in English translated to *The Badly Guarded Girl*. The ballet had its beginnings in Bordeaux, France, in 1789. This version is by choreographer Sir Frederick Ashton for London's Royal Ballet. The first performance was at Covent Garden, January 28, 1960. Two years later, BBC captured it on tape.

It opens at the farm, where tired workers stretch and yawn to begin their day. The animals rise. Several dancers in chicken costumes and one lucky rooster, pluck, preen, leap and scratch. Immediately, one senses they are in for a unique ballet.

A young woman runs down the stairs. This is our first glimpse of Lise, played by Nadia Nerina, with all the character of a film actress. She dances to show delight with life, churns her butter and tastes the sweetness.

Ribbons play a big part in the choreography. For the first scene, Lise uncurls it as if by magic. In her carefree solo she uses it like today's rhythmic gymnasts. What is the cause of such happiness? Why it's a young man of course, Colas, played by David Blair.

She ties the ribbon to the barn door for her true love to find and seals it with a kiss. And so begins our story, which in the case of all intriguing tales, is full of

complications that the protagonist must overcome.

Colas returns from the fields to look for his beloved and finds the ribbon. This leads to a gallant solo that shows strong jumps, spins and footwork. A dazzling display as to why he is the leading man. On his search for Lise he encounters her mother, Widow Simone, portrayed by a man, Stanley Holden, with great hilarity and a lack of feminine grace. She makes it quite clear he is not welcome. Objects are hurled. Chasing begins. Lise is promised to another.

The young couple manages to steal moments of togetherness. In their first pas de deux, the ribbon is once more in play. Each takes one end, swirling toward each other and wrapping themselves in it. When she coyly jumps away, he uses it to pull her back. The ribbon is used to facilitate elaborate patterns. At one point, it is for a large scale game of cat's cradle.

Enter dancer Alexander Grant, in the role of Alain, son of a wealthy landowner. Grant makes a comical yet touching portrayal of a goodhearted man, too shy and bumbling to compete with Lise's one true love. Alain must be forcefully shoved into the home of Lise and Widow Simone, by his father Thomas, played by Leslie Edwards. The boy's legs are stick-like trying to run backward, all the while carrying a flower for Lise. When no one is looking he rides his umbrella like a horse, indicating his childlike ways. Lise stifles giggles. She sees him as an adorable creature, not a future husband.

Mother and daughter are taken to Thomas' farm, along with Alain. Colas, secretly, is not far behind, carrying France's favourite beverage — wine.

The wheat fields provide an expansive stage for the company's corps de ballet to perform. Film captures what the stage cannot. There are aerial shots of the group scenes, close-ups to show full facial expressions, wide shots and angles. Everyone looks to be having fun. Frolic ensues as Lise and Alain dance. She gets lost in the dancing circular crowd. The corps girls whisk Alain around. Lise and Colas dance some beautiful pas de deux. The pair is technically stunning.

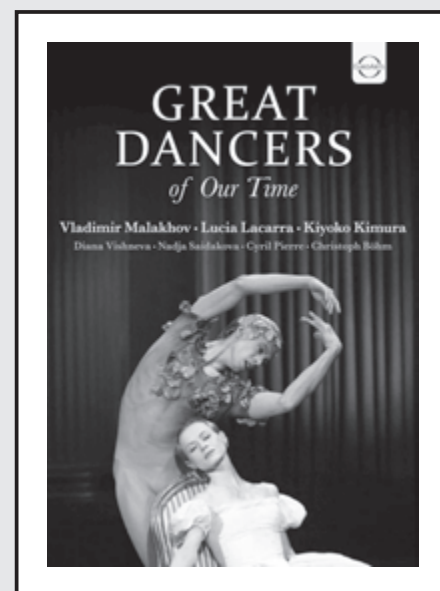
Widow Simone is given the spotlight with several other dancers for a high-spirited clog dance. It's a loud stomping, skirt-lifting and heel-clacking hoot.

The scene's finale again uses ribbons for a group Maypole dance around a butter churn. Alain gleefully dances underneath, while the smitten couple sits in the centre, as an anchor.

The winds of change arise with a rainstorm, like a book foreshadowing the ending of a story. Alain opens his trusty umbrella and is whipped in the air.

How does this story end? If, like me, you haven't seen this ballet before, and even if you have, buy the movie. It's sure to provide great amusement. After watching it, I can't fancy another cast exceeding the perfection of this one.

Karen Barr



## Great Dancers of Our Time

A production of EuroArts, in co-production ZDF and in co-operation with ARTE

**G**reat Dancers of Our Time is a DVD that focuses on three dancers, each one asked to choose their favourite performances. It starts with a tribute to Russian-born dancer Vladimir Malakhov. His first choice is Kenneth MacMillan's *Manon*, in which Malakhov partners Russian ballerina Diana Vishneva. The scene shows him seated at a desk, writing with a quill, in the role of Des Grieux. Vishneva, as Manon, stretches and rises from a brass bed. She dances up behind her beloved and playfully snatches away the feather.



The two dance an achingly beautiful pas de deux, and Vishneva shows the flexibility of her poised upper body, as well as her dramatic abilities. As light as air en pointe, he swirls her. He lifts her over head in a series of combinations so elegantly achieved, they defy effort.

A solo, Renato Zanella's *Voyage*, is next. The adagio of Mozart's A major Piano Concerto K. 488 haunted Malakhov and begged to be staged. It's a contemporary ballet with fits and starts. There is movement in one direction, with sharp changes into another, side stepping one way before spinning opposite. It's a piece about what has disturbed the dancer's life most — travel. Walking and running in circles. Sitting and then standing. Snippets of mime are also placed within the choreography. A dramatic dancer. An actor without words.

Finally, Malakhov chooses Mikhail Fokine's *Le Spectre de la rose*. In it he dances with Russian ballerina Nadja Saidakova, who pretends to fall asleep in an armchair. A dream sequence follows, with Malakhov dancing the masterful role created for Vaslav Nijinsky. Saidakova sleepwalks through a pas de deux, en pointe, for almost the entire sequence, before resuming her slumber in the chair. Malakhov flits and floats, like an imaginary otherworld creature. Soon, the ballerina rejoins him, matching every step with the grace of a woodland sprite.

A tribute to Spanish ballerina Lucia Lacarra begins. She reveals she loves to play characters. Among her favourite — the Swan from *Swan Lake*. The clip shows her with real-life partner in both dance and love, husband Cyril Pierre. In the pas de deux, she starts on the ground and uncurls up to the arms of Pierre. She executes each move with slow, perfect precision. As Tchaikovsky's tempo changes, the pace picks up slightly, but the fluidity remains with partnered lifts and spins. Lacarra also performs the solo from Act II of *Swan Lake*.

Emphasizing her love of drama, Lacarra selects Val Caniparoli's *Lady of the Camellias*. It's the story of a woman who feels passion for a younger man. She is ill and their love will never be fully realized. The duo is pure refinement. Pierre is dressed in a black tie and tuxedo. Lacarra is in a floaty white dress. It's a touching piece of joyful dance. The music changes at the end. The notes cascade downward. She backs away, hand across her mouth, then her throat. In his arms, she rolls her body into a ball.

Flip the switch. Enter Japanese ballerina Kiyoko Kimura and the works

she has chosen by choreographer Uwe Scholz. There are no storylines in these pieces, which make both the music and colours all the more vivid.

The first selection is a solo. Kimura has her back to the audience, silhouetted by a spotlight, against a backdrop of black. She is dressed in a long blue-grey dress and begins to dance to Bach's Cantata Jauchzet Gott in allen Landen, BWV 51: No 1&2. This barefoot contemporary work follows the rapid-paced soprano voice. The dancer stops to reflect and absorb the musical notes, when the singing stops. When it begins again, Kimura's arms seem to be conducting an orchestra. Her actions sometimes slow down and become sharp. Soon the music is all consuming and she becomes its vortex; stretching, contracting, reaching and condensing.

Next is Mozart's Piano Concerto K.271 *Jeunehomme: Andantino*. Kimura's partner is German dancer Christoph Böhm. A sleeker piece, the couple is dressed in black. Her legs are highlighted in white tights. At first she hunches toward him and pushes herself away in a straight line. He lifts her overhead and places her down en pointe.


He leaves her alone onstage. The music changes. She dances, but then hesitates. She stops and looks to the distance with longing. This set of actions is repeated. She stumbles, her arm bent against her forehead in distress. Can she go on? Her partner returns and she falls into his arms.

Finally, there is Anton Bruckner's Symphony No. 8: Adagio, Böhm once again her partner. The dancers are dressed in aquamarine, dancing on deep royal blue floors. Gently, he moves her around, while she stands en pointe, back arched. There are combinations of double pirouettes, broken by short lifts. He holds her directly over his head. Her head is angled toward the floor, with one leg pointing toward the sky.

Near the end, the couple is back to back. She is facing the audience. He threads her arms through his. He lifts her up with his arms spread wide, resembling a crucifix. Is he the cross that she must bear?

This trio of fascinating dancers on this DVD makes it definitely one to add to your dance collection. With each viewing it just keeps getting better.

*Karen Barr*



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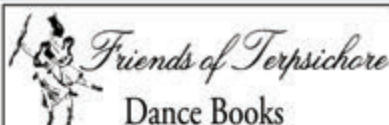
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**A**szure Barton is a great short-form choreographer, able to thrash out startling bits and pieces of virtuosic movement. This focus on working the moment is fine for pieces of 20 or 30 minutes: *Les Chambres des Jacques* for BJM Danse, *Blue Soup* for her own New York-based Aszure Barton & Artists and *Vitulare* for Ballet BC were lively and witty, and fun to watch. *Awàa*, running more than an hour, became a numbing wash of about a million short intense scenes that may or may not connect, each one offering a climactic burst of energy, and each one probably containing enough material to expand on and make one of those “short stories” Barton does so well.

*Awàa* was at the Norman Rothstein Theatre in October as part of Aszure Barton & Artists’ fall tour, superbly danced by Lara Barclay and six men. The three slender, intensely muscled African-Americans — Jonathan Emanuell Alsberry, William Briscoe and Davon Rainey — tended to form a trio and riff off the loose-limbed, rhythmic power of African-styled dance. Tobin Del Cuore and Andrew Murdoch tended to do solos or duets with Barclay that were balletic one minute, edgy and percussive the next. It’s harder to generalize about Nicholas Korkos, who mostly appeared in the group sections.

Barton pushes each movement to its showiest, and the timing is sharp and snappy. Large and small red balloons are visually dynamic props, and Del Cuore’s underwater video projections were lovely — floating toes and faces to begin, an empty rocking chair and a cloud of white fabric to end.

*Awàa* premiered last summer at Ottawa’s Canada Dance Festival, but the material still didn’t seem worked together. Previews and publicity material noted ideas about the feminine, and the programme features a quote by 19th-century American Universalist minister Edwin Hubbell Chapin about “the power, and beauty, and heroism, and majesty of a mother’s love.”

But, rather than pursuing her subject matter, Barton appears to have been seduced moment-by-moment by the possibilities offered by the dancers’ undisputed skill and wide vocabulary. Their exciting range is not unusual today, and is perhaps the defining image of early 21st-century choreography, which no longer falls into the once dominant categories of modern dance and ballet.

England’s Aakash Odedra is also expanding the vocabulary of theatrical choreography, in his case through the form of kathak. What is possible, what is needed, when kathak is no longer performed in the temple or the court but onstage? Odedra posed these questions during a talk at Scotiabank Dance Centre presented as part of Jai Govinda’s annual festival of Indian classical dance.

The four pieces Odedra danced on the festival’s opening night — two choreographed by himself and two by contemporary kathak pioneer Kumudini Lakhia — all used traditional kathak vocabulary, but his costume was a stark black tunic, edged in muted gold, and he didn’t weigh himself down with jewelry and makeup.

In the final Sufi-inspired *Mohe Apne Hi Rangmena*, filled with a remarkable series of turns, he wore a simple white gown. In all four, Odedra seems to abstract the

moves, making even the storytelling work about lines and shapes. This sat oddly at times next to more traditional staging, as in his *Jiya*, when Odedra incorporates large-scaled, dramatic smiles and structures the work in short sections that each end with a climactic moment demanding applause, like the variations in a classical ballet.

Earlier in November, Crystal Pite — the Vancouver choreographer who until recently was also based in Frankfurt — had two sold-out showings of *The Tempest Replica* at the Playhouse Theatre. The 80-minute piece, which premiered in Germany in 2011, closely follows Shakespeare’s *Tempest*, though Pite has her own thoughts and creative agenda to add to the mix. The first part features Eric Beauchesne as a manipulative Prospero, while the other six dancers are clothed and masked in white, too present to be ghosts, more like sketches of real people. Only Beauchesne is in ordinary pants and trousers, his face visible: this is his dream. Then, in the second part, the scope opens up — everyone is unmasked and in street clothes.

*The Tempest Replica* is beautifully staged, with shadow plays and text projected onto the backdrop, including scene descriptions, key lines from the original play and even humour, as when a burst of zzzz’s floats upward while Miranda (Cindy Salgado) sleeps. In the final lover’s duet between Ferdinand (Jermaine Maurice Spivey) and Miranda, they flow around and beside each other with quiet commitment. Elsewhere, the movement and the plot tosses and turns dramatically, as befits the stormy tale of magic and revenge. ▼



The 2012 version of BJM (Les Ballets Jazz de Montréal) has little in common with the company that was born in Montreal 40 years ago except for one vital characteristic — its dancers.

Throughout BJM's sometimes rocky history, enthusiastic dancers have been its greatest success story. They have breathed fire into every piece presented, whether simplistic or complicated, good choreographies or bad. Audiences on four continents flocked to see them and continue to do so. They were — and are — among the best anywhere and have made BJM one of Canada's best-known and most-travelled dance companies.

For much of its history, BJM was known for feel-good dances performed to jazz music. A decade or so ago, it began to adopt a more mainstream contemporary dance approach, exploring dark as well as light themes. This was particularly true of its 40th anniversary programme presented September 27-29 by Danse Danse (itself celebrating 15 years).

That three-part programme began excruciatingly with *Fuel* by choreographer Cayetano Soto. To a cacophony of screeching industrial sounds against which dancers morphed into anxious, jagged, claw-fingered robots, it was a misery to watch. The challenge of being obliged to live through the 22-minute horror made me angry with BJM. What was it trying to prove? That it cared little for its audiences? That it risked its reputation confident that dancers would triumph over the torture?

Barak Marshall's quirky and murky narrative piece, *Harry*, showed influences of Israeli dance master Ohad Naharin, with whom he has worked. Fun and fast, this story about a man trying to adapt to social forces let dancers' individual dramatic talents shine. Ensemble scenes of powerful, simple movements were set to rhythms as diverse as Israeli folksongs, Puccini, Mahler, pop songs, jazz and klesmer.

Dancers' voices were drowned in the din, Greek tragedy-like programme notes confused, but a good time was had by all and audiences departed wreathed in smiles just as they have been doing for BJM's 40 years.

Intending to celebrate its long-awaited move into new quarters, Les Grands Ballets Canadiens de Montréal opened its fall season October 11-27 with a big treat: Jiří Kylián's first narrative ballet, *Kaguyahime: The Moon Princess*, in Place des Arts barn-like, 3,000-seat Salle Wilfrid-Pelletier.

Gradimir Pankov, 74, now in his 14th term as artistic director, conceived the programme. But although the sumptuously staged East-West ballet was magical, the new home was not ready and the move was postponed for three more years.

*Kaguyahime: The Moon Princess* was inspired by an old Japanese folk tale. Under Kylián's mastery, it was an opulently staged, Kabuki-laced, thundering, throbbing, drumming face-off between

Except for the Princess, the dance often came second to other theatrical elements. Still, the unique cross-cultural ballet succeeded in making memorable theatre. It easily deserves remounting when Les Grands finally moves to its new home.

Also inspired by literature, staging was everything, too, for Crystal Pite's latest production, *The Tempest Replica*, for her company, Kidd Pivot, October 1-12. The Vancouver choreographer has a habit of one-upping herself with each new composition. But to tackle one of Shakespeare's most psychologically complex plays? Only Pite would dare.

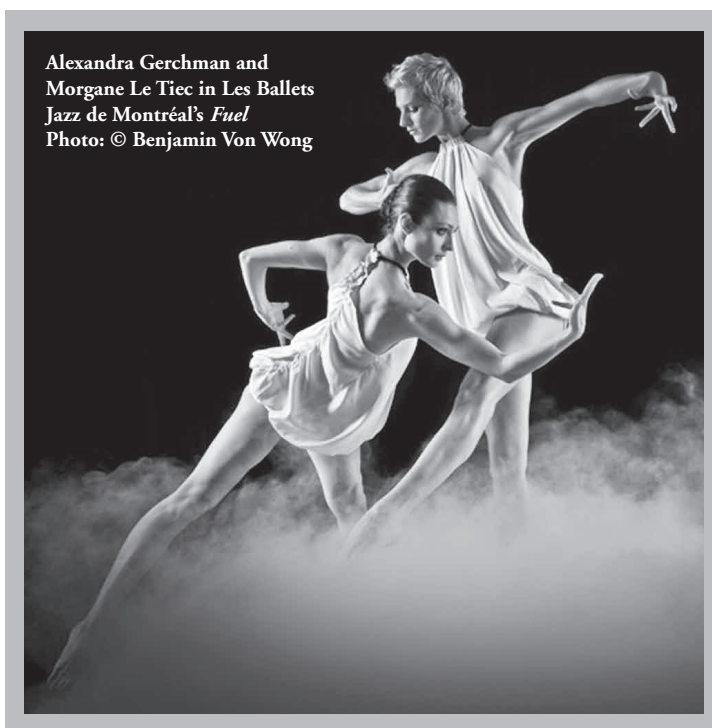
And succeed mightily, inventing a new way to tell a story into the bargain.

Divided into two parts, *Tempest* began appropriately with the mother of all storms as demanded by magician Prospero. Washed up on a desert isle were faceless, hooded characters in white — a spirit-servant, a monster, enemies — whom Prospero manipulated like robots. Snippets of the plot were projected on a storyboard backdrop. These were spiked with bits of Pitean humour like the "Zzzzzz" that rose vertically on the backdrop when a character fell asleep.

The same personalities returned as real people in Act II, exercising their wills against Prospero's. Intensely danced, this tale of revenge and forgiveness played itself out with ever-inventive intelligence. It made a fabulous ending to Pite's current series of choreographic adventures. She's taking a hiatus next year.

It's difficult to end this column without at least mentioning three high points of the November menu: José Navas' *Diptych*, a kind of homage to Merce Cunningham and Paul Taylor; Anne Plamondon's solo, *Les Mêmes yeux que toi*, in which she left no doubt that she has joined the league of deep diving emotional dance divas like Louise Lecavalier and Margie Gillis; and the long-awaited Montreal debut of Alberta-born, New York-based Azure Barton with *Awáa* and *Busk*.

Such imagery, intricacy, emotion! But in the Prelude to *Diptych* did Navas hint that he may leave dance? Navas is a cultural hero whose dances invite us to explore space, architecture, passion and freedom, and in so doing learn more about ourselves. We need him. I hope I heard him wrong. ▼



Alexandra Gerchman and Morgane Le Tiec in Les Ballets Jazz de Montréal's *Fuel*  
Photo: © Benjamin Von Wong

Japanese Kodo drummers and Western drum batteries, and battalions of black-and-white figures representing worldly chaos that causes the Moon Princess' return to her home in the sky.

In a visual and aural feast, the Moon Goddess floated out of the universe to walk among humanity as a three-part gagaku ensemble in period dress playing reedy ancient Japanese court music. Portrayed on different nights by two dancers from the corps de ballet, Eva Kolarova and Sarah Kingston, the extra-terrestrial princess was a strong, dramatic presence whose meditative, stylized walk and one-legged balances trumped everything else — the exciting drumming, elaborate lighting, turbulent, acrobatic dancing and even the giant gold silk curtain used to engulf her.



The Royal Winnipeg Ballet's enchanting storybook season continues with ethereal classic *The Sleeping Beauty* choreographed by Marius Petipa at the P.W. Enns Centennial Concert Hall, March 6-10. Last performed in March 2008, its newest production will once again be staged by Anna-Marie Holmes, internationally acclaimed as the leading authority on 19th-century classical ballet, and former soloist with the 73-year-old company during the early 1960s.

The ballet includes Tchaikovsky's lushly romantic score performed by the Winnipeg Symphony Orchestra, with costumes by Anne Armit and Shannon Lovelace, sets and properties by Michael Eagan, and lighting by Michael J. Whitfield.

The season wraps up with Jorden Morris' blockbuster hit *Moulin Rouge – The Ballet*, which has consistently sold out houses and won new dance fans across North America with its ooh-la-la since its 2009 premiere. The full-length story ballet tells the story of two lovers, Nathalie and Matthew, who travel to fin de siècle Paris to seek their destiny at the world's most famous music hall.

The popular show includes costumes by Armit and Lovelace, sets and properties by Andrew Beck, and Pierre Lavoie's lighting design and runs May 1-5, following its five-city American tour in January 2013.

Alberta Ballet presents *Celebrating Mozart* featuring Artistic Director Jean Grand-Maître's searing *Mozart's Requiem* as well as a world premiere by principal dancer Yukichi Hattori this spring. The show will be presented March 21-23, at Calgary's Southern Alberta Jubilee Auditorium before heading north to Edmonton's Northern Alberta Jubilee Auditorium, April 5-6.

Grand-Maître's epic work, which received its world premiere in March 2008, pays tribute to those who have lost their lives in modern conflicts, while showcasing five of Alberta's largest arts organizations, including an onstage choir of more than 100 voices and four internationally acclaimed soloists. Unfolding as a series of tableaux, the neoclassical work shows both profound suffering, as well as eternal hope

The bill also includes Hattori's satirical *Pomp Without Circumstance*, depicting the "dangerous beauty of the upper class nobility and their world of artificiality, make-believe and game playing." Now in his seventh year with Alberta Ballet, the Tokyo-born dance artist is quickly growing an avid fan base, equally renowned for his powerfully athletic dancing and inventive choreography last seen during the company's Men's Studio Series in April 2012.

Lastly, Albertan audiences will get to see one of their own fêted, as Grand-Maître prepares to tear up the stage — again — with his newest creation *Balletlujah!* featuring music by Edmonton-born, Canadian singer/songwriter K.D. Lang. The nearly two-hour production set in the Canadian Prairies is the latest in the company's contemporary pop series that has also included works inspired by musical icons Joni Mitchell, Sarah McLachlan and Elton John. Lang collaborated closely with the tireless choreographer during its creative process, even wittily titling the semi-narrative ballet herself





as graduating students from the School of Toronto Dance Theatre, reflecting Browne's lifelong passion for instilling a love of dance in emerging artists.

The season continued with *The Trilogy Project*, featuring three new duets choreographed by former company member Lesandra Dodson, January 26-27. Now based in Fredericton, Dodson's choreography blends highly charged physicality with subtle characterization, with her work last seen during Winnipeg's Contemporary Dancers mixed repertoire show *Shuffled* in November 2011.

Montreal-based dance artist Sasha Ivanochko brings two world premieres to town, April 25-28. Her gritty new show features a duet exploring the sculptural body as metaphor for psychic and sexual transformation, performed with a former member of Winnipeg's Contemporary Dancers, Brendan Wyatt, as well as an ensemble work created for current company dancers: Kristin Haight, Kayla Henry, Lise McMillan, Mark Sawh Medrano and Johanna Riley.

Winnipeg's NAfro Dance Productions celebrated its milestone 10th anniversary by hosting its first major international dance festival Moving Inspirations last fall. The three-day event held November 1-3, brought together African and contemporary dance artists from across

Canada, including Compagnie Danse Nyata Nyata, Ballet Creole, Muriva Dance, COBA and KasheDance, as well as Calgary-based choreographer Michèle Moss and New York City's Sean McLeod Dance Experience. Local companies included Winnipeg's Contemporary Dancers, Theatre Flamenco, Drive Dance, Young Lungs Dance Exchange, Gearshifting Performance Works, as well as students of the Royal Winnipeg Ballet School's Aspirants Programme and the School of Contemporary Dancers.

Moving Inspirations also, notably, marked the city's first major dance festival since the Festival of Canadian Modern Dance series held during the 1980s, established by Winnipeg's Contemporary Dancers former artistic director Tedd Robinson. Keynote addresses were provided by Montreal's Zab Mabougou, widely considered the pioneer of African dance in Canada, as well as McLeod.

"This festival is about showing where we came from and where we're going to," the company's Mozambique-born, founding Artistic Director Casimiro Nhussi stated during an interview. "But it's also about sharing and breaking boundaries. Dance is dance, and if you appreciate it, you will appreciate any kind." ▼

Winnipeg's Contemporary Dancers presented its emotional *Toward Light: A Tribute to Rachel Browne*, which paid homage to its revered founding artistic director, January 8 and 9, at the Shaw Performing Arts Centre. The production also formally launched the Rachel Browne Trust, dedicated to preserve and disseminate Browne's significant body of works that includes more than 80 pieces. Browne passed away unexpectedly last June while supporting performances by the company and the School of Contemporary Dancers at the 2012 Canada Dance Festival.

The five-member company toured the nine-piece programme of Browne's signature works to Toronto's Harbourfront Centre Fleck Dance Theatre, January 12, as well as Vancouver's Scotiabank Dance Centre, January 15; two cities where many of Browne's works have been staged. The multi-city production also showcased graduating students from the School of Contemporary Dancers, Canadian Contemporary Dance Theatre and the Victoria School of Contemporary Dance in the three tour cities, as well

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Arlene Minkhorst, SCHOOL DIRECTOR

Photo: Crapiewski Photograph Inc.



The Hong Kong Dance Company made a welcome early January appearance at the cavernous Sony Centre with a charming, if not always coherent, evocation of an iconic work of Chinese art, *Along the River during the Qingming Festival*.

The oft-copied 12th-century silk scroll painting, the original now housed in the Palace Museum in Beijing is a detailed and lively panorama of life in and around the Song dynasty capital of Bianjing, (now Kaifeng, Henan province). Packed with characters, it is an enduring memorial to the prosperity of its era and to the full panoply of its daily life, from fields to street to temple to palace.

Hong Kong Dance Company artistic director and choreographer Leung Kwok-shing was inspired in 2007 to mark the 10th anniversary of the founding of the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region by creating a dance work drawn from the painting's imagery, using a programmatic score derived from the same source by Chinese composer Shi Zhi-you.

The resulting two-act work, *Qingming Riverside*, is itself a dance panorama that reflects the painting's often bustling energy, but Hong Kong Dance Company executive director Gerard Tsang's narrative frames it within the story of the painting's historical creator, Zhang Zeduan, and his observation of the life around him.

It's a poetic conception that mixes myth and reality, water nymphs and mortals, and although it does not entirely serve to bind *Qingming Riverside's* 16 scenes into whole cloth, it does not get in the way either.

What it does tend to do is relegate the estimable Liu Yinghong, portraying Zhang Zeduan, to observer status when his dancing abilities clearly warrant more exposure.

At times, *Qingming Riverside* does begin to feel like one of those predictable Chinese variety shows, but thankfully never descends into their easy vulgarity or lurid spectacle. Sam Leung's set and Eddy Mok's costumes are elegant yet restrained; their colour palette always pleasing and subtle. There's a dignity that suffuses the whole show.

Choreographically, the content is almost all folk dance or its derivations. This leaves scope for a range of group, solo and small ensemble numbers, some sedate and almost ceremonial, others athletically robust and exciting.

One was, however, left hoping the Hong Kong Dance Company will return with some of its more contemporary repertoire. These are such very engaging performers.

The fall season was, as always, dominated by the National Ballet of Canada and this past year by a particular work, the company's co-production with Britain's Royal Ballet of the Christopher Wheeldon-choreographed *Alice's Adventure's in Wonderland*.

The company launched its performing year by taking the family-friendly dance spectacle on tour to Los Angeles — its first trip there in a very long time and its debut at the Music Center — and then opened its Toronto fall season with a further 16 performances. Again on tour, the same ballet took the company in mid-January to the Kennedy Center in Washington, D.C. Added together, that's more performances of a single ballet than the annual, high-density holiday season run of *The Nutcracker*.

But this was not quite the same *Alice's Adventure's in Wonderland* Toronto audiences first saw in June 2011. When the Royal Ballet scheduled a revival of the work for March 2012, Wheeldon took the opportunity to refashion it.

As the choreographer explained, he quick-

ly acknowledged that his 70-minute first act was far too long and busy. Wheeldon also accepted that the through-line love story embodied by Alice and the garden-hand-turned-Knave of Hearts, required a stronger presence on the latter's part.

Wheeldon's remedy was to extend the work to three acts, carving off a chunk of the original Act I, now given a brand new climax, to make a new Act II. In the process he also found opportunity to give the Knave more of the needed stage time so the character is not overlooked in the unfolding narrative.

By and large, although with two intermissions it makes for a much longer ballet, the work benefits greatly from Wheeldon's changes.

With this popular work grabbing so much attention, it was surprising how well a much shorter following run of *Giselle* fared. Peter Wright's long-serving production, tinkered with in detailed points over the decades, remains dramatically plausible and compelling.

With a local shortage of suitable men of Albrecht calibre, the National Ballet welcomed back former company member Zdenek Konvalina, now of English National Ballet, and Canadian-born Stuttgart Ballet principal Evan McKie as guest philanderers. But perhaps the highlight of the short *Giselle* run was the Albrecht debut — just a matinee — of first soloist Naoya Ebe.

Ebe, though an elegant dancer, is not always the most emotionally forthcoming.

But here, partnering principal Jillian Vanstone in her Toronto *Giselle* debut, he blossomed wonderfully. Their second act was achingly romantic and heartwarming.

They are well matched physically and Vanstone's natural vivacity clearly rubs off on Ebe. ▼



The fall season didn't really begin until St. Petersburg's Maryinsky Ballet (100 dancers strong) and orchestra (a great, passionate ensemble who dispatch Tchaikovsky as if he were their birthright) launched a week's engagement of *Swan Lake* at Berkeley's Zellerbach Hall in October. When, in living memory, has the company looked so spectacularly good on an American visit? It wasn't a matter of individual performances. No one this time equaled Diana Vishneva's saucy Kitri during the company's last appearance here four years ago.

On this occasion, one found immense satisfaction in the look of the troupe, down to the unearthly precision of the corps in Petipa's second act. Not an elbow or wrist seemed askew in the white swan extravaganza.

But this was more than another example of rote precision. These 24 young women posing and constantly reforming in striking patterns embodied the classical ideal that has always set the Maryinsky apart from merely mortal companies. One sensed a newly acquired sharpness of attack. It was there in the *danse des coupes* at Siegfried's birthday, and that energy buoyed the national divertissements in Act 3 (which are usually a trial) and in the intricate interlacings of black and white swans in the otherwise abstracted final act.

How the Maryinsky danced on October 10 certainly impressed more than *what* it danced. We were again subject to Konstantin Sergeyev's 1950 revision of 1895 Petipa-Ivanov. The Soviet authorities probably dictated the happy ending for Siegfried and Odette, which makes no sense in the narrative structure and fuses poorly with the Tchaikovsky music. Then, Sergeyev wanted the production to look modern, so he (or an anonymous malefactor) cut all the mime. The loss was very keenly felt in Odette's first appearance, but story values suffered throughout the evening.

And, of course, a Soviet-era *Swan Lake* means too many outings from that annoying jester, who occupies far too much stage time with his "look at me" pyrotechnics.

On opening night, Ekaterina Kondourova introduced herself to Bay Area balletomanes. The Moscow-born dancer, now 30, seems, on the evidence of her Odette-Odile, at the height of her career. Kondourova's formidable extension, molded instep and pedigreed port de bras conspired to give us an almost heroic white swan, defiant and free of sentimentality. She doesn't communicate sufficient vulnerability in the upper body, and seems almost to welcome Siegfried's intrusion. But, in Act III, Kondourova's Odile added up a chain of non-stop thrills, down to the iconic fouetté sequence.

It is believed that the Maryinsky's male contingent has suffered in recent years, as the ballet boys flee to more profitable posts in the West. One who remained at home is

Danila Korsuntsev, who is 38, but looks a decade younger. He is very tall, possesses great hair and his Siegfried on this occasion gave us a respectable rendering of the choreography, including some terrific lifts, but rarely communicated much of the Prince's anguish or despair. The Maryinsky's Rothbart is all about dancing, and Konstantin Zverev unleashed a darkly erotic portrayal. He and Korsuntsev looked perfectly ridiculous wrestling in the fourth act climax. Despite its hallowed place in the Maryinsky's heritage, it may be time to rethink *Swan Lake* in St. Petersburg.

Speaking of heritage, Alonzo King's Lines Ballet is celebrating its 30th anniversary this year. In the past three decades, King's skewed



classicism has tested dancers and thrilled ballet companies around the world. But his pieces always seem to look better on his home troupe in San Francisco. So it was on October 19 at Yerba Buena Center for the Arts where Lines gave the premiere of King's *Constellation*. In lieu of candles on a birthday cake, the choreographer called upon electronic artist Jim Campbell to illuminate the stage with 1,000 preprogrammed LED spheres. In tandem with Axel Morgenthaler's lighting, the effect was gorgeous. Some of the spheres rolled across the stage and generated a playful episode for the company in what was 90 minutes of intense dancing in the King manner.

Collaborations proliferated. Throughout the evening, mezzo-soprano Maya Lahani wandered through, intoning scores by

Handel, Vivaldi and Strauss, and bits of Hebrew chants. King has arranged *Constellation* as a suite of 19 dances, ranging from solos to full company ensembles; the latter, with their energetic unisons, have rarely captured the choreographer's imagination, so he has mostly directed his attention elsewhere. One grouping, assembling five dancers in playful combat, attempts a mixed mood, something unseen previously in King's work.

The choreographer's fractured classical style has never seemed more assured; his dancers' striving to realize that vision has never seemed more heroic in the attempt or more sensual in the appeal. The current 10-member company looked fabulous and exhibited a discipline not always evident in previous incarnations. You watch a dancer like David Harvey clasp one bent knee in his hands and spin in place on the other leg and you wonder what the human body can accomplish, given the training and the will.

The women are by no means neglected. The South Korean dancer Yujin Kim joined Lines last year and her phenomenal extensions and extraordinary balances may yet become the stuff of legend, if her sensational duet with Zachary Tang was illustrative of her gifts.

*Constellation* is far too loosely organized to deliver a cumulative statement, but one can find an organizing principle here. King seems to be exploring that point at which physical attraction and violence meet head-on and how one shades into the latter. Harvey butts heads with Tang and the choreographer transforms it into a group effort. Later, the pair clasp arms and circle the stage in the closest thing *Constellation* boasts to a love duet. The revival of the quarter was the Robert Wilson-Philip Glass opera, *Einstein on the Beach*, the four-and-a-half-hour opera that has been rarely seen since its 1976 premiere. It coasted into Berkeley's Zellerbach Hall in late October for three performances, which had been sold out for months. Mesmerizing and boring in equal measure, the production restored Lucinda Childs' innovative choreography added for the 1984 reprise.

Although Childs declined an appearance in the opera, members of her company made the case eloquently on October 26, the West Coast premiere of the project. You sensed the rigour, drive and synchrony with Glass's propulsive music in the first of the two Field Dances, as the 10 performers, dressed in white and bathed in Wilson's extraordinary lighting, whizzed across the stage from wing to wing, adding gestural details on every return. This has been called pattern or minimalist dance, but Childs' vision seems positively maximalist in the way it rearranges stage space. *Einstein* was the making of Childs; her position in the American post-modern dance pantheon remains unchallenged three decades later. ▼



New York City museums and galleries have variously welcomed performing arts, of late in good measure. Both the Whitney Museum of American Art and the Museum of Modern Art (MoMA) have done so in particular. The former, for example, as part of its 2012 Biennial exhibition's fare, gave gallery space specifically to English-born choreographer Sarah Michelson for what turned out to be a splendid event called, *Devotion Study, #1 — The American Dancer*, in March.

MoMA recently held a series of events, one of which, *Devotion Study #3*, was another stirring presentation by Michelson, directly related, as it turned out, to her Whitney presentation. Additionally, other events, all paying some homage to the city's wide-ranging celebration of the epochal Judson Dance Theater, which celebrated its 50th anniversary this year, were part of MoMA's fall offerings.

In contrast to these recent post-modernist affairs, the city's august Metropolitan Museum of Art participated in the performance arena with a specially planned presentation related to an exhibition in its Asian galleries called *Chinese Gardens: Pavilions, Studios, Retreats*. Over three days for five performances in December, the museum presented Tan Dun's *Peony Pavilion*, a reduction by the contemporary

Chinese composer of Tang Xianzu's 1598 Ming Dynasty "dream drama." The date of Tang's theatrical creation, sometimes called a "love drama," makes it a direct contemporary of Shakespeare's *Romeo and Juliet*. Originally conceived as an epic work consisting of some 55 scenes meant to be shown over a few days and approximately 22 hours in duration, the kunqu (pronounced KWIN-choo) opera got reduced by Tan to a 70-minute encapsulation of events surrounding the life, death and resurrection of the work's heroine Du Liniang. Beautiful Du, as the character is sometimes called, is depicted in a blend of music accompanied by song and dance, as having died of lovesickness for a handsome scholar she encountered in a dream. All the main characters sing, recitation-style, and enact their roles with highly stylized movements that are part of kunqu's stage vocabulary.

For a setting, Tan chose, upon being invited by the Met museum, to have his encapsulated, classic tale of an "opera" presented in the facility's Astor Court, a Ming-style garden around which the museum's galleries of Asian art are situated. The event, seating only 50 spectators per performance, with the accompanying musicians — on flutes, zither and drum — arranged around the artfully landscaped space,

played out intimately and at times hauntingly as the selected text of the narrative got projected on a little screen in the distance.

As it turned out, no peonies were present in any of the paintings on display in the Met's related exhibition, but suggestions of the fragrant, lush blossom that gives Tang's drama its name were very much evident in their delicately, lustrous way for the unfolding of Tan's *Peony Pavilion*. Delicately sensual and at times very human emotions breathed forth in the process of performing this dream/love drama. Tan's reduction of the action separates it into four key scenes: *An Amazing Dream*, *The Infernal Judge*, *The Tryst and Returning to Life*.

Though the programme promotes Zhang Jun, who enacts the role of the narrative's scholar, Liu Mengmei, over all others, the equally or even more prominent Zhang Ran as Du finds a way of making her presence the dominant one, physically and dramatically. Both performers seem to have perfected the gliding locomotive way of moving through the script's action: Zhang Jun, with a skimming pace of seamless lightness aided in part by his slightly built-up, soft, platform-soled shoes; Zhang Ran, with a more deliberate, unperceptively rocking gait, in her soft, ballet-slipper-like footwear.



The staging's choreographer, Huang Doudou, who's a trained dancer, kept the highly styled ways of kunqu movement firmly in place as he worked alongside Tan and Zhang Jun as co-directors. Kunqu's ways include gentle acrobatics, familiar in more bravura and broad-stroke doses from the arguably better known theatrics of the Peking Opera, the dance/theatre form that grew out of the more staid and formal kunqu.

Elements of a more hyperactive nature arise in the presentation's second scene, set in the underworld, where Du's spirit visits the Judge of Hell, the elegantly ferocious figure played by Ran Pengcheng. The moves here, for all the drama of the gruffly meant scene, remain ribbons of activity, with the maiden pleading for her release back into the upper world where she might actually meet the man from her dream. It all takes shape as a back-and-forth tussle of silken accents, telling of dramatic tensions, but showing little blatant force or aggressive moment.

With kunqu's de rigueur kimono-like robes fitted with characteristically overlong, chaste sleeves frequently hiding their bare hands, the two central characters need not touch one another directly to telescope their sensual connection and erotic pleasures. Prettily embodying the text's lines that say, "But now face to face stand, Wordless though hand in hand," Du and Liu interact with the finesse of formal pas de deux dynamics.

As was evident when the full stage drama was played in New York City at Lincoln Center in 1999 in Chen Shi-Zheng's extended production

of 18 hours of performing, the 1598 *Peony Pavilion* has epic proportions and a whole panoply of human types. Tan has, of necessity, taken away much of the often raucous local colour and subsidiary characters and plot asides, twists and turns, and fixed on the love story at the heart of dramatic text. In a museum chat with the Maxwell K. Hearn, the Met's curator of Asian art,

Tan made a point of stressing that in being educated in the arts, which for him happened in the States, he noted being taught to be complex, but not likewise being schooled in how to be simple.

For the crucial tryst, when Du finds herself in a love duet with the actual person, as opposed to the dream figure, of her scholar/lover, she is costumed without her outer kimono and wears a white garment with a gossamer veil of pink flowing down her back. This simple change makes her look singularly ghost-like and spiritual. Tan reserves a taste of the full work's more raw and wily and earthy aspects for the bold character of Sister Stone, played in travesty by a forthright Li Hongliang. Li's Sister enters the action with a bell-festooned wand and facilitates the resurrection of Du, who returns to make Liu her lover in fact, rather than in dream.

Originally, Tan played his affectingly composed music-and-dance drama in an outdoor Ming garden in Shanghai. The Met's indoor garden, albeit beneath a skylight ceiling, has a rather cold and confining indoor light that seemed at odds with the fresh air landscape seen in photos of Shanghai performances of Tan's *Peony Pavilion*. Still, bringing this concentrated version of an eternally compelling love story to a museum's galleries brought dance theatre of a high and rare order to New Yorkers.

With any luck, the trend to present performances in our visual arts' museums will continue, with this kunqu creation whetting appetites for more such rarefied presentations of very human situations. Helpfully, the Met has posted a video of this *Peony Pavilion* on its website at [www.metmuseum.org/peony-pavilion](http://www.metmuseum.org/peony-pavilion). ▼





Martha Leebolt and Tobias Batley in Northern Ballet Theatre's *The Great Gatsby*  
Photo: Jason Tozer

The first season of the Royal Ballet at Covent Garden with Kevin O'Hare as artistic director apparently had to begin, to suit the practical demands of the Royal Opera's "bravura" revival of Wagner's *Der Ring des Nibelungen*, with a sizeable block of *Swan Lake* that fielded seven different leading casts. Unfortunately, the company is still presenting the ballet in its 1982 staging by Anthony Dowell, which, although carefully done in collaboration with the historical research of Roland John Wiley, contains some fussy novel ideas in Acts I and III.

In Act I, the ensembles choreographed by David Bintley include a section with the dancers constantly hopping on and off portable stools, as well as a maypole dance that has none of the subtle delights of Ashton's version in *La Fille mal gardée*. Minor added characters include two mothers whose small daughters perform the comedy dance with the Tutor. Prince Siegfried is not given a new crossbow by his Princess Mother, and he and Benno, when they go swan-hunting, grab crossbows from two of the palace guards. Act III opens tiresomely with the arrival of courtiers dressed for a costume ball and holding masks. The first cast were Mariana Nuñez and Thiago Soares, but Nuñez, always technically a perfectionist, seemed as Odette to be unemotionally involved and offering none of the essential poetic feeling. Soares, an excellent partner,

is not an ideal interpreter of a romantic fairytale prince,

On November 3, a triple bill was made up of works by the three current choreographers: Wayne McGregor, resident choreographer, Christopher Wheeldon, artistic associate and Liam Scarlett, whose new title, artist-in-residence, apparently means that he will give up dancing and concentrate on choreography — an unusual step for a young dancer to take.

This initial triple bill opened with Scarlett's *Viscera*, a short work created in January 2012 for Miami City Ballet. He matched Lowell Liebermann's First Piano Concerto with challenging athletic choreography, excellently danced by the leading trio of Nuñez, Laura Morera and Ryoichi Hirano.

In McGregor's *Infra*, the complementary work by choreographer and designer (Julian Opie) is set on two levels — live dancers on the stage and, on the upper level, an electronic walkway with a constant procession of white, digitized figures of walkers on a street. The programme quotes one slight literary influence for this — T.S. Eliot's comment in *The Waste Land* about seeing a crowd of people flowing over London Bridge in a London fog. This dreamlike procession tends to hypnotize a watcher's attention away from the McGregor-style acrobatically contorted choreography, which was admirably performed by living dancers. Wheeldon's

contribution to the triple bill has been seen already with his own group, Morphoses, *Fool's Paradise*, to music by Joby Talbot that was developed from a film score of his for *The Dying Swan*. A cast of nine divided into three sets of trios, all pleasingly fluent in movement, but somehow scarcely memorable.

A second MacMillan triple bill began with the very familiar *Concerto* (1966), with music by Shostakovich, which opens with a bright and breezy, slightly quirky allegro, briskly led on this occasion by Yuhui Choe and Steven McRae, and achieves its best choreography in the andante pas de deux, often given separately as a divertissement, which was smoothly performed by Sarah Lamb and Ryoichi Hirano. Last on the evening was the 1976 *Requiem* (Fauré), eloquently led by Leanne Benjamin and Carlos Acosta. The centre work was *Las Hermanas* (music by Frank Martin, designs by Georgiadia), based on Lorca's sultry Spanish tragedy, *La casa de Bernarda Alba*, created in 1963 for Stuttgart Ballet and very successfully adopted in 1971 into the Royal Ballet touring company repertoire. Memorable casting from that staging were Lynn Seymour as the Eldest Sister, Margaret Barbieri as the Youngest and Gary Sherwood as the Man. Usually seen in smaller theatres in the past, its new staging (by Ray Barra) seemed less claustrophobically effective at Covent Garden, and the new trio of



Zenaida Yanowsky, Melissa Hamilton and Soares proved fractionally less compelling.

Birmingham Royal Ballet had a week at Sadler's Wells in October, offering two programmes. A triple bill started with a chirpy little ballet, *Take Five*, created by David Bintley in 2007 to music by Dave Brubeck. There was an earlier work by Bintley with the same title and also with Brubeck music, choreographed in June 1978 for a programme to celebrate Dame Ninette de Valois' 80th birthday. The new (and presumably entirely different) version was well led by Elisha Willis and Tyrone Singleton in a Two-Step duet, and Joseph Caley in a Flying Solo.

Jessica Lang, an established American choreographer, was commissioned in May 2012 to set *Lyric Pieces* for Birmingham. A selection of music by Grieg introduced strong Scandinavian ideas to the choreography, and Lang created interesting sets from dancer-movable elements. Leading dancers were Yvette Knight, Mathias Dingman and Iain Mackay. The evening ended with Hans Van Manen's familiar and always impressive *Grosse Fuge* (Beethoven) for four couples.

The second programme at the Wells had a topically inspired Olympic Games work by Bintley, *Faster*, to music by the Australian composer Matthew Hindson. For some reason, ballets linked with sport lack choreographic conviction, but *Faster*

was rather more successful than most, possibly because of a more appropriate score. And it was excellently performed.

It was preceded by a revival of another 1971 ballet from the Royal Ballet touring company repertoire, Joe Layton's *The Grand Tour*. To music by Noel Coward adapted by Hershy Kay, a group of 1930s' celebrities are assembled on a cruise ship, along with an American Lady, a Chief Steward and a pair of Italian stowaways. The form is episodic, and with the original cast the characterizations and dances looked attractively witty. Revived, the effect is less joyous, and, of course, neither the dancers nor the audience of today are particularly aware of (or even interested in) Gertrude Stein and Alice B. Toklas, Theda Bara, Gertrude Lawrence, Mary Pickford and Douglas Fairbanks (senior), while even George Bernard Shaw and Coward himself are merely names to them.

Last ballet of the evening was Ashton's *The Dream*, with a recent recruit from the Royal Ballet School, William Bracewell, as Oberon and Natasha Oughtred as Titania. The result was sufficiently enjoyable but in no way outstanding.

October also saw Rambert Dance Company at the Wells. They are still appealing for help with the remaining £500,000 due on the building work, which has started on the ambitious new home to which

they hope to move in this year. Their programme was distinctly mixed, opening with a very long and at times quite soporific work, *Labyrinth of Love*, by Marguerite Donlon (a choreographer especially well known in Germany) with music by Michael Daugherty. It fielded a large cast and an onstage soprano (Kirsty Hopkins), and tackled a wide-ranging and extremely ambitious scenario "inspired by love poetry and prose" from Sappho onward. It was followed by three excellent works — Paul Taylor's *Roses*, Merce Cunningham's *Sounddance* and a delightfully witty solo by Richard Alston, *Dutiful Ducks*, danced by Dane Hurst.

Plans for late 2012 and early 2013 include a staging by Bintley of *Aladdin* for Birmingham Royal Ballet and a typically re-thought version by Matthew Bourne of *The Sleeping Beauty*, where the Prince is a gardener's boy and, after the 100 years, Carabosse is succeeded by her son.

Tamara Rojo's plans for her new directorship of English National Ballet include a revival of Béjart's *Song of a Wayfarer* and Fokine's *Petrushka* (staged, of course, by Isabelle Fokine). Northern Ballet Theatre is staging *The Great Gatsby* choreographed by David Nixon, and Christopher Hampson is to choreograph a full-length *Hansel and Gretel*, using music from Humperdinck's opera. ▼

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Melbourne Festival creative director Brett Sheehy saved the best for last — at least in terms of dance. Over his four years directing the festival, Sheehy's programming of dance has been hit-and-miss, with little risk in terms of dance programming. This year's festival fared reasonably well, with performances by the Forsythe Company with *I don't Believe in Outer Space*, Akram Khan Company with *Desh*, and new works by local companies Chunky Move and Lucy Guerin Inc. At least the hits were big ones this time around, with Chunky Move's *An Act of Now* winning the Age Critic's Prize for best major new Australian work premiering at the Melbourne Festival.

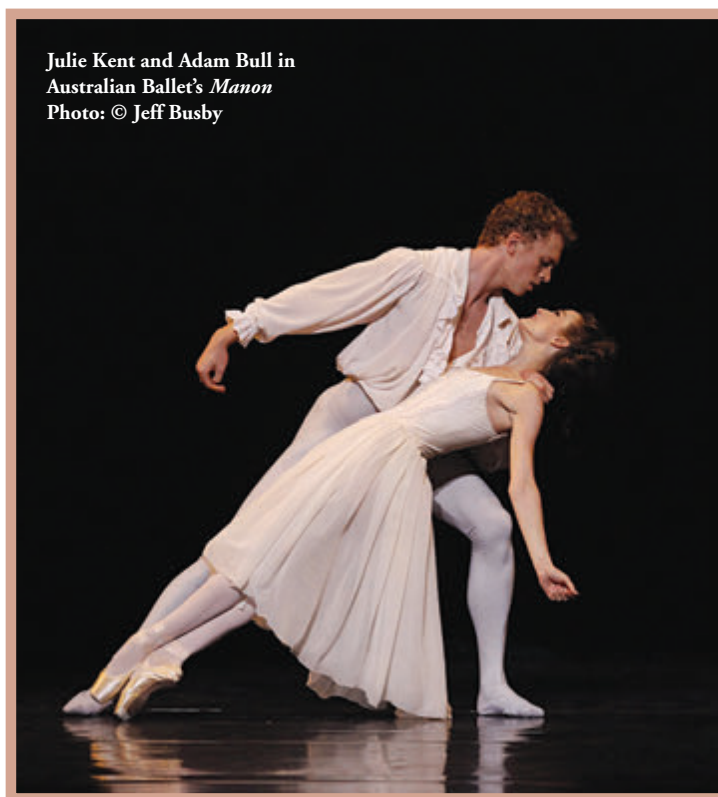
*An Act of Now* was choreographed by Artistic Director Anouk van Dijk — her first work for the company. Things got off to an unfortunate start when, on opening night, the performance was halted due to an onstage dancer injury. Fortunately, the company managed to rework the material for the rest of the season, with only seven — rather than the original eight — dancers.

The work looked at notions of distance and proximity, placing the audience on the stage of an outdoor amphitheatre in the centre of Melbourne. The dancers performed inside a glass house, which boasted trapdoors and hidden exits. Dancers flung themselves around the space, crashing into the floor, the walls and each other. Each sound was amplified through the audience's headphones, mixed with whispering voices and music to heighten the tension in the atmosphere. This was a more intimate version of the *Big Brother* household from our living room televisions; the work playing with the idea of being seen and unseen, as well as our ideas of privacy.

Less successful was the collaboration between New Zealand choreographers Sara Brodie and Ross McCormack and Leshan Song & Dance Troupe, *Fault Lines*, a work that explored the impact of recent earthquakes on communities in New Zealand and in the Sichuan Province. A collaboration masterminded by Sheehy, this work lacked the kind of organic development that you would expect from such traumatic shared experiences.

Lucy Guerin Inc. presented *Weather*. In the past, Guerin has found inspiration from broad themes and *Weather*, a work that looked at the impact of climate change, was no exception. This work brought little that was new or innovative to the concept, with dancers tossing white plastic shopping bags in the air in a kind of nod to consumerism. Moreover, *Weather* utilized many techniques we have seen from Guerin in the past — particularly in the way the dancers matched vocalization with movement. It may be time for Guerin to make a change — either in terms of collaborators or the way in which she creates work — this is a talented artist who seems a bit lost for ideas at the moment.

As the festival was wrapping up, so,



Julie Kent and Adam Bull in  
Australian Ballet's *Manon*  
Photo: © Jeff Busby

too, was the Australian Ballet's 50th anniversary season. It has been a big year for the ballet company, with the new *Swan Lake*, choreographed by Stephen Baynes, still touring nationally. The 50th Anniversary Gala was performed at Melbourne's State Theatre in early November and streamed live to outdoor venues across the country.

This was certainly a big-ticket event, with National Ballet of China, Tokyo Ballet, San Francisco Ballet, American Ballet Theatre and the Stuttgart Ballet joining the Australian Ballet onstage. The highlights were performances by the Stuttgart Ballet's Elisa Badenes and Daniel Camargo with Demis Volpi's *Little Monsters* and an excerpt from *Don Quixote*.

Australian Ballet principal artist Adam Bull excelled in his partnership with American Ballet Theatre's Julie Kent in an excerpt from *Manon*, bringing real passion to the stage. Bull's usual onstage partner, Amber Scott, performed with San Francisco Ballet's Damian Smith in Christopher Wheeldon's *After the Rain*. This work is a company favourite, and Scott and Smith brought strength and elegance to the stage.

David Hallberg, star of the Bolshoi Ballet and American Ballet Theatre, was meant to perform, but an injury prevented his appearance. The Australian Ballet's Kevin Jackson stepped in for Hallberg to partner Lana Jones in *Tchaikovsky Pas de Deux*.

The Australian Ballet performed two works in white to open and close the programme — *Overture*, an introduction to the company choreographed by Artistic Director David McAllister, and Harald Lander's *Études*. Though lovely, *Études* is an old-fashioned work that has little historical connection to the Australian Ballet. Moreover, its inclusion highlighted the fact that the Australian Ballet held an anniversary gala without featuring a significant work by an Australian choreographer.

Highlights of the upcoming 2013 season for the Australian Ballet will be a new *Cinderella* by Russian choreographer Alexei Ratmansky and a triple bill, *Vanguard*, with works by Jiří Kylián, Wayne McGregor and George Balanchine.

Ending the dance season in Melbourne for 2012 was Sydney Dance Company, with *2 One Another*. Since he took over the directorship from Graeme Murphy, Spanish choreography Rafael Bonachela has set about revolutionizing the company. Today, Sydney Dance Company seems to represent the city of Sydney itself — urban, slick and architectural. *2 One Another* is a work that has been around all year; the work was a part of the mid-year Australian Ballet gala, Let's Dance, and was later screened in full on television. The company excels in this kind of highly athletic, physically demanding work, with particularly outstanding performances by Natalie Allen and Andrew Crawford. ▼



Outside it is bitterly cold, but it can be warming to think back on many strong dance performances this past autumn. The main premiere with the National Ballet of Norway was an evening of choreography by Nacho Duato and music by Johann Sebastian Bach.

The ballet is in two parts, the first of which is titled *Multiplicity* using 13 works by Bach. The music varies from introspective piano solos and sonatas to grand choral works. The second part, *Forms of Silence and Emptiness*, uses nine pieces, prominently featuring the organ, especially when Toccata in D Minor fills the room.

Duato has managed to get under the skin of the music, and he is using the dancers as instruments in a literal sense. When Bach, performed with force by Ole Willy Falkhaugen, is dancing with Emma Lloyd as a cello, it is as if the two are dancing with and against each other. One gets the feeling that the composer wants more from the instrument than the instrument can give, and they are breaking borders in the artistic fight of bringing both the music and the dance as far as possible.

The core of Duato's choreography comes from aesthetics rather than storytelling and his movements are never-ending. The dancers run on the stage like mercury, never ever completely still.

Trying to reach out to a new audience in October, the National Ballet invited audiences to a music hall, in the style of 1830s' London. The hall was decorated with heavy materials and fake palm trees, round tables, wine instead of beer, and one of Norway's most popular actors, Bjarte Hjelmeland, doing the job as compère. He introduced the dancers, who performed highlights from ballets by Balanchine to Cherkaoui, from Ashton and Glen Tetley to Christian Spuck.

Spuck created a lovely sendup on everything that can go wrong during a grand pas de deux, hilariously danced by the Cuban couple Yolanda Correa and Yoel Carreño. Tetley's beautiful work *Ri-*

*cercare* was extremely well performed by Claire Constant and Niklas Mattsson, and the audience showed its appreciation with strong and prolonged applause.

In November, the director combined an evening with the simple title *Mesteraften 2012*. Again the span of this evening was enormous both in the dance and the music. It started off with a very well-danced *Symphonie in C* by George Balanchine. The dancers had lots of energy and technically they controlled every moment in all four movements. To follow up was Jiří Kylián's piece *27'52"*. It is a piece danced by three couples, given the names of the colours, Purple, Yellow and Red. It is a quiet work with a

company for nearly 20 years. It was sad to see her leave since she gave such a lovely performance in *Sacre*, but that is the tough life of a dancer.

Also on the main stage of the Norwegian National Opera and Ballet in November was a guest appearance by the Netherlands Dance Theatre. The company came with two ballets by Lightfoot/León, the couple who are running Netherlands Dance Theatre at the moment. They brought two pieces, *Sehnsucht* and *Schmetterling*.

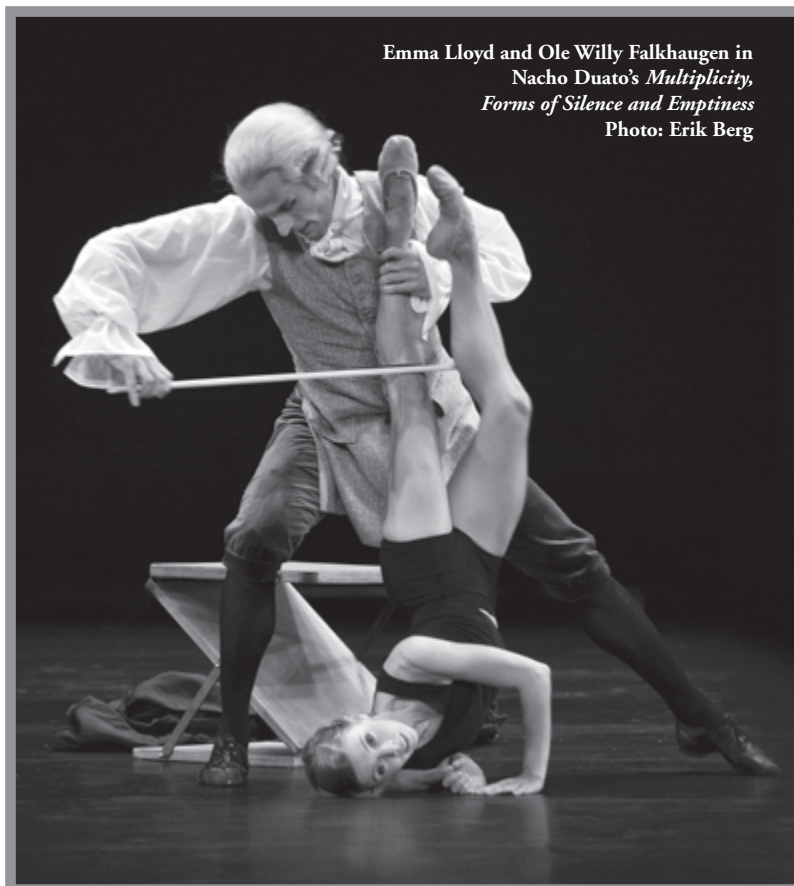
The first is dedicated to their fathers and has many humorous moments, and *Sehnsucht* also shows the theatrical abilities the two brings to the stage. They are also responsible for the scenery, which among other elements consists of a room that can turn around 360 degrees. That creates moments very challenging for the dancers.

*Schmetterling* deals with death, and the ballet is dedicated to a colleague of Lightfoot/León. The dancers are strong and mature, which is especially positive to *Schmetterling*. Among the male dancers are two Norwegians, Jon Ole Olstad and Silas Henriksen — Henriksen had a main role in both ballets.

Oslo Dance Festival, CODA, took place in mid-October and celebrated its 10th anniversary this year. From Holland to Dansens Hus came the choreographic duo Emio Greco and Pieter C. Scholten with their new

work *La Commedia* inspired by Dante's inferno performed in a circus ring where the dancers account for the seven days of the week, which here also represent the seven mortal sins.

Oslo Danse Ensemble, a group who has specialized in jazz dance, had an opening in the beginning of December, *Move*. Three newly created works were on the programme. First out was *Morph* by a duo named Subjazz; a piece by Jo Strømgren, *Kvart*, who is keeping busy at the moment, having something like 10 new productions coming up; and Tine Erica Aspaas doing *As if we were the same*, her first work for the company. ▼



Emma Lloyd and Ole Willy Falkhaugen in Nacho Duato's *Multiplicity*, *Forms of Silence and Emptiness*  
Photo: Erik Berg

lot of intensity and the dancers Cristiane Sá, Craig Cathcart, Emma Lloyd, Kristian Støvind, Christine Thomassen and Aarne Kristian Ruutu, gave a fantastic performance.

To finish the evening was the strong and extremely difficult work by Glen Tetley, *Sacre du Printemps*. I say difficult because it is so physically hard to dance, especially if one does it in correct Tetley style. Stamina did not last all the way to the end — some of them became too light in the movements — but the dancers did go for it.

This ballet was the farewell to Hungarian-born ballerina Beatrix Balazs, who has been dancing with the



**L**a *Bayadère* was the second premiere in the Ballets Russes-inspired autumn season, a ballet that has never before been in the repertoire of the Royal Danish Ballet. As his co-director, Nikolaj Hübbe had Russian Eva Draw, now in her fourth season as teacher for the company. Trained at the Bolshoi's ballet school, Draw has the style in her blood

and has also danced the title role. Thus, the additional variations of the collaborators blended well into that of essential Petipa.

In order to bring the drama about the eternal love triangle “out of the museum,” they created their own version and moved the plot to colonial times in India. Instead of the love story between the bayadère

(temple dancer) Nikiya and the warrior Solor, who must marry the Rajah's daughter Gamzatti in the traditional version, the conflict was now the quite impossible alliance between Nikiya and the British colonel Sir William, who chooses the marriage of duty to the vice-consul's daughter, Lady Emma, but regrets and performs the ultimate solution to his betrayal.



Camilla Ruelykke Holst, Mads Blangstrup as the Brahmin, Victoria Falck-Smidt and the corps of temple dancers in Nikolaj Hübbe and Eva Draw's new version of *La Bayadère*  
Photo: Costin Radu



The change in setting gave Richard Hudson a chance for extra variation in the costumes. The English ladies' dresses were in period style with fringes and beading in pale nuances or in soft tutus in Anna Pavlova-shape that reached below the knee. The gentlemen wore a uniform, colonial style with the military stamp of a ruling empire. The contrast to

the Indian people became evident in their brightly coloured costumes, for which Hudson had looked at miniatures from Rajasthan found in the Danish David's Collection.

The scene is set with both an English hunting party and wildly dancing fakirs. Graceful female temple dancers circle around a Brahmin priest and end jointly,

turning into the statue of the Indian god Shiva. The two cultures meet in the clandestine rendezvous between the lovers, but their pas de affection is detected by the Brahmin, himself in love with Nikiya, and later disclosed to the vice-consul and overheard by Lady Emma. Conscious of her superior position, she confronts Nikiya, who passionately refuses to give up her love and attempts to stab her rival, which seals her fate.

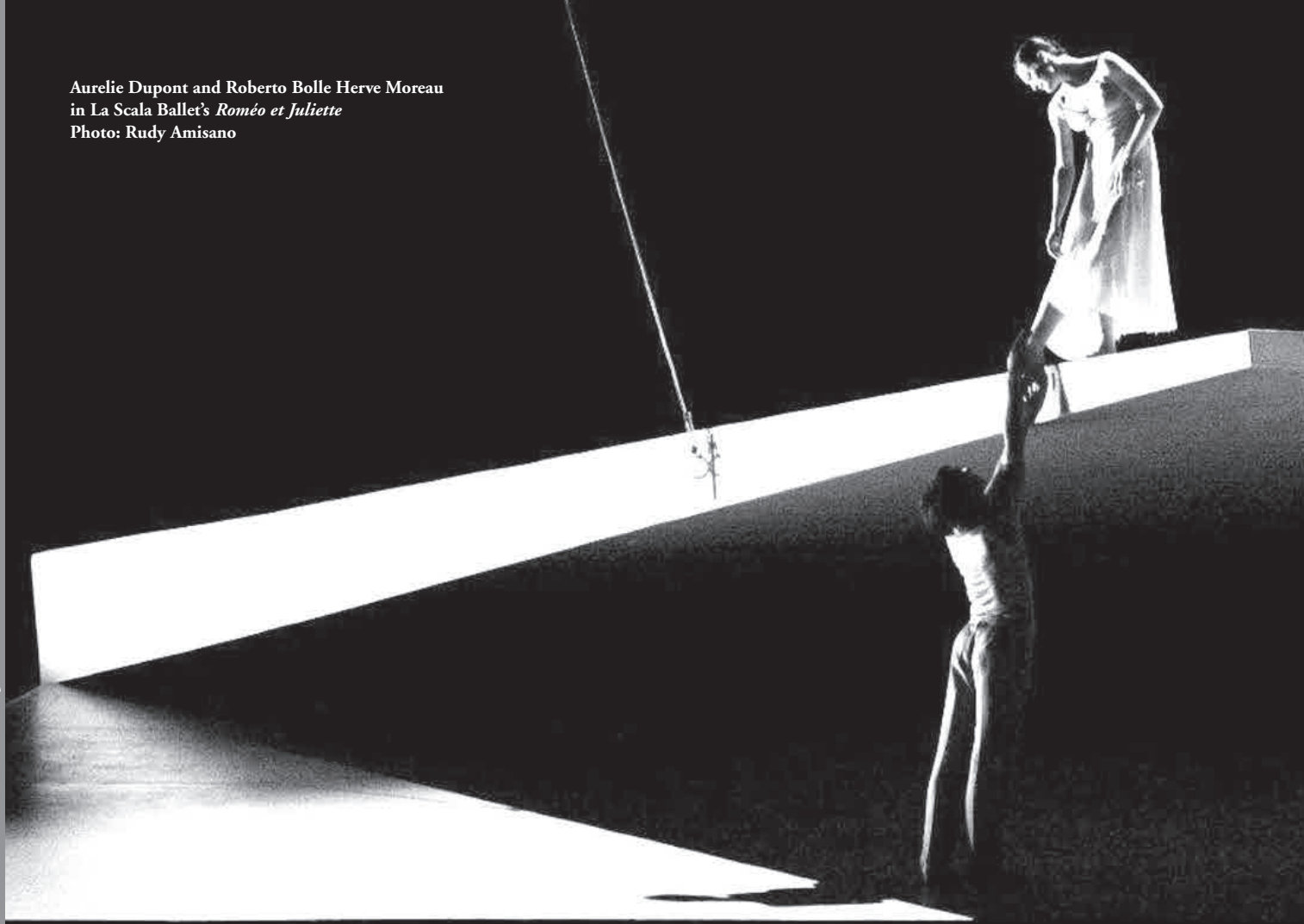
In Act II, the engagement of the English couple is celebrated with a parade including a very lifelike elephant with swinging trunk. As this version has discarded the original Act IV, some of the festive dances were moved to this act. The celebrated couple dance their pas de deux in Indian costumes presented to them and surrounded by a double trio dressed up in contrasting colours. The Golden Idol that performs a solo of sheer virtuoso feats was here in a costume derived from the Ballets Russes ballet, *Le Dieu Bleu*, a tribute to Vaslav Nijinsky in one of his famous roles.

The director duo also included a neat dance for the ballet children, where the costumes surprisingly unfolded into peacock's tails at the end. Eventually, the distressed Nikiya is forced to dance, but is bitten by a snake concealed in a flower basket she believed was from Sir William, which had raised her hopes. As he turns away, she refuses the Brahmin's antidote, but as she dies he rushes to embrace her lifeless body.

Act III opened with the remorseful Sir William shooting himself (not just smoking opium as in the traditional version) — a logical consequence of the altered dramaturgy. The white silhouette of his spirit rose from his body against a trellis wall that opened onto the Kingdom of the Shades, where 24 white tutu ladies proved the high standard of the corps with their serene and controlled adagio entrance in progressing lines that gradually filled the stage. The lovers met in a bonding pas de deux and in the final picture Sir William knelt in front of the forgiving Nikiya.

The three different casts in the main roles proved that they could satisfy the demands of the extrovert Russian technique, while they, at the same time, were able to fill their characters with individually convincing emotions. This highly spectacular ballet with Ludwig Minkus' tailored score to the diverse dances, still became a story about love, betrayal, regret and forgiveness that mirrored true feelings. Hübbe dedicated this staging to the late, renowned ballet pedagogue Truman Finney, who for a period also taught the Danish company. Five more performances are planned for the spring season. ▼

Aurelie Dupont and Roberto Bolle Herve Moreau  
in La Scala Ballet's *Roméo et Juliette*  
Photo: Rudy Amisano



In the last days of 2012, the events in the Italian performing arts field occurred so fast and frantically it seemed like a slapstick comedy. After more than 40 years, the closing Italian parliament, just a few days before Premier Mario Monti's resignation and the call for a new election, voted on a new law for the performing arts, which would govern the national economic and cultural politics for theatre, music, dance and circus.

Some innovations on the document will change the current situation for the opera house foundations — mostly all on the edge of financial abyss. Indeed, just three weeks before the announcement of the new law, the general manager of the National Performing Arts Ministry, Salvatore Nastasi, had already explained to a large Italian dance operators' audience the trend of the new law: an improvement of economic support to independent dance companies and to distribution networks, an important decision for improving regional artistic residences of companies and dancemakers, and the reorganization of the financial support for the promotion of dance culture (labelled as Enti di Promozione).

But, above all, the powerful manager had sent a clear message, declaring that in his opinion the ballet companies of opera houses, so duly attached to protections

of the powerful unions, are due to vanish from the opera houses in five years, as soon as the latest dancers will reach retirement age (46 years old). He endorsed the opera houses' intendants to cancel the ballet companies for their unproductiveness and low artistic standards.

Moreover, he made us understand what the arts ministry's intentions are about: to approve the creation of only one national ballet company, which will have the duty of preserving classic repertoire and performing in Italian principal theatres — a dream Carla Fracci has been fighting for for years and now apparently is very close to fulfillment.

Well, just a few days after Nastasi's statements, the most important opera house ballet company, La Scala Ballet, stood out for vacuity, confirming with its actions Nastasi's awful opinions about opera houses. On the occasion of the Milan premiere of German dancemaker Sacha Waltz's *Romeo et Juliette* to Berlioz's tragic Symphony — created for Paris Opera Ballet in 2007 — the unions requested the theatre pay an additional fee as the dancers had to perform on a bending platform they considered an extra source of stress and the choir had to sing onstage, dressing in costume, sometimes moving their heads in a defined way and, above all, memorizing the text of Berlioz's lyrics.

At the obvious refusal of the intendent to pay the extras, the company decided to go on strike and the ballet premiere was cancelled. No other comment is required. Immediately the news went international in newspapers and online, amplifying the echoes of this foolish decision.

On the contemporary side of Italian dance, an important event was the New Italian Dance Platform organized in Brindisi and Lecce in the sunny and delicious southern region of Puglia at the end of November. It was promoted by the national association of the regional distribution networks and sustained by the Italian Performing Arts Ministry with the aim of promoting Italian dance to international operators. The Puglia days can be considered the first step of a biennial project (the next one should be in Tuscany in 2014).

Although not all the proposals seemed appropriate to an international event, and in some cases performers' inadequate technical command was too evident, the platform made one realize that a new generation of choreographers is emerging in Italy. Some of them are still derivative of styles and poetics, pretentiously stuffing their pieces with a lot of conceptual and postmodern clichés.

Anyway, there are personalities to follow in their progress. One of the most



La Scala Ballet in Sacha Waltz's *Romeo et Juliette*




interesting is Sicilian Roberto Zappalà, a hard worker who has been developing his vision of dance for 20 years and from traditional modern jazz has arrived at a personal contemporary vocabulary that is dynamic and expressive.

In the last season, his former *Semu tutti devoti Tutti*, inspired by the wild ceremonies of Catania people in the name of Saint Agata, captured the attention of Paris audiences at Théâtre de la Ville. In *Instrument 1*, seven strong males celebrate the masculine identity as conceived by Sicilian tradition, in a clever and ironic mix of suggestions from the myth of male beauty deviating from Ancient Greece to Dolce and Gabbana postmodernism, and the rhythm of the archaic mysterious music of the Sicilian instrument, the maranzano.

Not completely convincing, but with artistic and intellectual honesty, *Il Sacro della Primavera (The Rite of the Spring)* confirms Michela Lucenti's radical talent. In this piece, set upon a DJ mixing of Stravinsky's *Sacre* with jazz and techno musics, Lucenti expresses the uncertainty and discomfort young people are living in these difficult years. Her body quivers with dazzling stamina in the space; her rushes are nervous and the contacts with partners aggressive and violent, but always carefully controlled.

Among the younger groups, I liked the dreamlike dance theatre, so allusive and delicate, of sophisticated Gruppo Nanou, from Ravenna, here with *On Air*: a silent movie atmosphere for three waiters imagining, for a while, to take the place of the people they have to look after: living their lives, feeling their


emotions. But who are they really? The three dance smart little fragments of ballroom dances that are suggestive of old Cole Porter songs, and a perfect smoky light design reminded us of the atmosphere of ancient movies — or maybe the ghost ballroom scene in Stanley Kubrick's *The Shining*. ▼



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Munich's Bavarian State Ballet opened its season this fall with a revival of its 1998 production of *La Bayadère*, which was back then the first version of the ballet on German soil. Although Munich cannot be suspected of being wary to act big — it suffices to enter the splendid National Theatre to get an idea what “big” in Bavaria means — this *Bayadère* nonetheless remains a lightweight adaptation that seems to have been guided not by innate respect of tradition, but rather by this hazardous urge to improve and adjust to what is called contemporary taste.

After all, as assistant director Wolfgang Oberender reminds us in the programme book: a long, romantic 19th-century fairytale ballet about an Indian temple dancer also needs to earn the respect of those in the audience attuned to Forsythe and Bausch.

Well, there is the famous Marius Petipa choreography, of course, in its “original” guise or as handed down by Russian companies. Truth be told, the Munich *Bayadère* was created before the Sergeyev choreographic notations of Petipa's final staging, now kept at the Harvard Theatre Collection, became accessible — and used to admirable effect by Sergei Vikharev for the Maryinsky Ballet in 2002 — although I doubt whether a historically informed reconstruction was ever intended had they been available. In any case, the choreography was entrusted to Patrice Bart, chief ballet master at the

Paris Opera Ballet, who made a mix of the Petipa choreography as seen in the Russian versions — and brilliantly revived in Rudolf Nureyev's 1992 production for the Paris Opera, which Bart only knows too well — with steps of his own.

Many of today's dancemakers fear lengthy ballets. So does Bart; he downscaled *La Bayadère* to a two-act version of two scenes each, running for a mere two hours, 10 minutes. Although he devised (with music director Maria Babanina) a final scene dropped from the traditional Russian stagings, he cut a lot of the existing dancing and mime.

Even with the main scenes intact (the first meeting of Nikiya and Solor; the wedding pas de deux of Gamzatti and Solor, followed by Nikiya's solo; the Kingdom of the Shades), I couldn't help feeling that the omission of several mimed or danced

passages leading toward these key moments seriously affected the dramatic coherence and overall credibility of the ballet.

On the other hand, Bart's choreographic invention is never anything more than adequate and definitely no match for Petipa — reworked by Soviet hands or not. It all reminded me of the interview with Kirill Melnikov, the former Kirov and Bavarian first soloist, when he deplored the absence of a Marius Petipa Trust to oversee and protect the legacy of the old French master.

What is sorely missing from the Munich *Bayadère* is not only the grandeur, but also the theatrical touches that make the original such a compelling spectacle. The first scenes are a shorthand version of *La Bayadère*. The entrance of Nikiya is a total non-event. She appears onstage without any of the dramatic or musical preparation that makes her stand

by the corps, demi-soloists and principals obscured by Bart's tendency to add male dancers and extra steps, and make the work of the corps look more complex than that of the principals.

Complexity is also what ruins the entrance solos that Bart interpolated for Gamzatti and Solor, allegedly to give their characters more psychological depth without having to rely solely upon the mime. Gamzatti's solo looks stylistically as well as musically awkward (the music is borrowed from Minkus' ballet *Nuit et Jour*), while Solor's entrance (this time to music from *Paquita*) is overchoreographed, almost “Nureyevsque” in its pointless abundance of steps. They tell us nothing about the characters, except that they look uneasy in dancing the solos. Vakhtang Chabukiani revising the ballet for the Kirov in the 1940s also substituted mime by dance (as in the meeting

of Nikiya and Solor), yet his unerring feel for the style and spirit of the work seems lost on most of our contemporary dancemakers, who only think they can do better.

“If it ain't broke, don't fix it”; thankfully, that old principle has guided the Kingdom of the Shades — absolutely filling the stage with wonderful classical dancing, it remains the beating heart of this ballet and in a way the redeeming moment of this production. It was moreover good to note that the Bavarian corps de ballet

made a stronger impression here than in the preceding scenes, where they seemed rather off on the night I attended.

The Bolshoi's Svetlana Zakharova guested as Nikiya and the evening belonged to her. While there is far less room for character development, Zakharova quite naturally imbued each scene with meaning and intensity, as if conjuring up the missing images by the impeccable elegance of her whole being as well as by the maturity of having danced a dozen or so different productions of *La Bayadère* during the last decade. She is a standout within the group — her physical gifts, the polish of her plastique, the solidity of her technique, the eloquence of her upper body, the magnitude of her projection, all make for an almost unearthly presence. Her Shade, with her trademark blend of silk and steel, was a blessed moment. ▼



out from the crowd even before we have laid eyes upon her. Arguably we can live without the usual fakirs, but Nikiya's first meeting with Solor is unconvincingly staged and again there is no buildup preparing us for that key moment.

Bart also threw out the sacred fire above which Solor in the traditional version pledges his love for Nikiya. But why then does Nikiya refer to a sacred fire in her mime-duel with Gamzatti? Details? Perhaps, but overlooking them is exactly what makes these old ballets look shallow.

To place Gamzatti and Solor with their backs to the audience during Nikiya's soliloquy isn't a very good idea either, as it prevents us from seeing their reactions to the bayadère's plight. In effect, the whole wedding act is quite weakly staged, with complete numbers cut and the clear hierarchy of danced sections



A holiday treat at the Paris Opera this season was *Don Quixote* with myriad different casts including guests such as hot commodity Svetlana Zhakharova, as well as Maria Yakovleva and Denys Cherevychko from Vienna Opera Ballet. Bona fide home étoiles also took turns in the roles of Kitri and Basilio while others belonging to lesser ranks were also given a shot.

It would, of course, have been tempting to check out all the casts, if a little time-consuming, but the prospect of having to sit through Nureyev's extended production repeatedly sounds a bit daunting, too.

Argentine-born new étoile Ludmila Pagliero, who premiered this long series, was not necessarily on ballet buffs' priority list in recent history. Her naming in *La Bayadère* at the end of last season came as rather a surprise to most and she had not yet drawn much attention at the beginning of this one. Well, she obviously had some hidden tricks up her sleeves. Here's one Kitri that can instantly win hearts by just racing across the stage. Not to mention her brilliant technique, compelling balances and contagious lust for vida.

Blond, athletic étoile Karl Paquette held his own as best he could, but was just not the ideal match for such a rocket. Nor were sujets Mathilde Froustey and Pierre-Arthur Raveau ideally suited. Still, and probably bitterly, stuck in the sujet category, Froustey has yet been a favourite amongst many ballet aficionados. A petite dancer with delicately chiselled arm and leg work, she would be a perfect Aurora. But with rock solid balances and pertness all her own, she showed she could hold her own even as a fiery Spaniard.

Of the three casts I saw, the winning couple was by far première danseuse Alice Renavand partnered by the young François Alu, who was only promoted to sujet a couple of months prior to *Don Q*.

A beautiful girl of mixed Asian origin, Renavand has been in the spotlight for some time mainly due to her inspirational interpretations of contemporary roles. She, however, showed in *Don Q*

some roaring technique and an aura that I'm sure radiated to the farthest corners of the gigantic Bastille auditorium.

Since he joined the corps, Alu has stood out as top of his class and been promoted to the next rank effortlessly. He is an astounding technician who also holds the stage like a pro. His swaggering Basilio is all the more irresistible as he can deliver the goods with equal panache and some staggering tours en l'air.

The two visibly got on like a house on fire and the sheer chemistry between them, aside from their respective technical skills, definitely turned the performance into one of the best, most exciting evenings of the season.

London-born Akram Khan first took the world by storm with his virtuosic and fascinating performances of kathak, a traditional Indian dance that made

tions and the success of such pieces as *Kaash*, Khan is now a man in great demand who has since choreographed for Kylie Minogue's tour and was responsible for the dance section of the opening ceremony of the 2012 Olympic Games. But, of course, a man can only fly so high; life always makes sure that he falls back to the ground. In January 2012, he suffered a severe Achilles' heel injury, a blessing in disguise as it were as it actually earned him his participation in the Games while being forcibly kept away from rehearsing his new piece and solo, *Desh*, shown in France in December at Théâtre de la Ville, the place that has been inviting him to Paris from the beginning.

Presented as an autobiographical solo, the work may, in fact, be seen as a piece of redemption through a return to his long-forgotten roots.

Born of Bangladeshi parents, Khan confesses he never much bothered as a kid or a teenager to listen to his father's stories about his homeland (the meaning of "desh"), much, of course, to Khan senior's grief.

Such lack of communication is somehow reflected throughout the piece in the fruitless attempts at getting through to someone named Jui on the phone or in the opening and closing scene showing him banging some mysterious raised iron plate with a sledge hammer.

The piece follows a deliberate three-week trip he made to Bangladesh and echoes clichés linked



to the country such as the street pandemonium as well as the idiosyncratic faun and flora brought to life thanks to some snazzy visual animation by film company Yeast Culture. Also evoked is a monsoon via some eye-pleasing curtains of ribbons through which Khan moves about with obvious delight and his own special rhythm.

him so big he started working with stars with whom he delved into more narrative and autobiographical spheres. His first collaboration was in 2005 with Belgian whiz kid Sidi Larbi Cherkaoui in *Zero Degrees* followed in 2006 by the aptly entitled piece *Sacred Monsters* with super-dancer Sylvie Guillem, paving the way for his new autobiographical stance.

In 2008, he was back with *IN-I*, a piece graced with sets by none other than Anish Kapoor and hyped thanks to his partnering with movie star Juliette Binoche who, though not a dancer per se, threw herself into the venture with a pair of black slacks, a red T-shirt, and some intense and frankly impressive fervour and stamina.

On the strength of his virtuosic skills as a dancer, his resounding collabora-

tion and the success of such pieces as *Kaash*, Khan is now a man in great demand who has since choreographed for Kylie Minogue's tour and was responsible for the dance section of the opening ceremony of the 2012 Olympic Games. But, of course, a man can only fly so high; life always makes sure that he falls back to the ground. In January 2012, he suffered a severe Achilles' heel injury, a blessing in disguise as it were as it actually earned him his participation in the Games while being forcibly kept away from rehearsing his new piece and solo, *Desh*, shown in France in December at Théâtre de la Ville, the place that has been inviting him to Paris from the beginning.

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## Vancouver

The riot of colour that closed Ballet BC's November mixed bill came as a shock to the opening night audience, who laughed at the sight of the company's 17 dancers cavorting in hot pink, emerald green, orange and red street clothes in Emily Molnar's *Aniel*. The good-natured splash of colour was a great insider joke from Molnar, also the company's artistic director. Molnar's work is usually ultra-serious, and the black-on-black aesthetic of much contemporary dance was once a staple of Ballet BC's repertoire. With *Aniel*, Molnar surprised her audience with a playful closing ballet.

The first work, *A.U.R.A.* (*Anarchist Unit Related to Art*), marked the Canadian debut of Italy's Jacopo Godani, a colleague of Molnar's from her days as a dancer with William Forsythe's Ballet Frankfurt. *A.U.R.A.*, which was premiered by Ballet Mainz, is one of those in-your-face ballets, opening with pounding music, bright lights and two young men in tight black shorts, their bare torsos criss-crossed with black lines, looking like gladiators thrown into an urban arena.

Movement for the eight men and sev-

en women, costumed the same and all wearing socks, featured muscular thrusts and hard jerks, their fingers spiky and stiff. The unison work was superb, and from the get-go the dancers were deep within Godani's emphatic world, their arms, torsos and legs unfurling with determined voluptuousness. *A.U.R.A.* didn't really go anywhere, though, and it was overly driven by the cracking, banging music by Munich-based 48nord, which sometimes screeched with what sounded like a nail being hammered into a piece of steel.

Godani's lighting design was the star of the piece (he also did the costumes). After the opening blast, there's a lovely play of shadow and light on the dancers' bare limbs before the stage goes murky as two dozen fluorescent light strips glow from high above. Later, the fluorescent strips descend row by row to a few feet above the dancers, an impressive march of technology.

*Muse*, which followed, is the second work by New York-born Nicolo Fonte danced by Ballet BC (the first was *Like You* in 2005). This one, created on them, is set to music by "post-classical" string quartet ETHEL. Fonte, an ex-dancer with Les Grands Ballets Canadiens and Compañía Nacional

de Danza in Spain, has created a warm piece for seven men and five women filled with dynamic physical connections and just enough relationship between individuals to carry a dramatic edge.

A white strip crosses the stage floor from back to front like a runway, down which the women take turns parading — unfurling their limbs and torsos with a lighter touch than in the previous piece, and tipping down off their pointe shoes, partnered by up to five men at a time. This isn't the kind of scenario where a single woman is tossed and manipulated by her male partners; there's a more subtle play of energy and effect going on here.

The pas de deux by Darren Devaney and Dario Dinuzzi provides a dramatic centre to the ballet. The two slender men come together slowly centre stage, where their long legs extend through space and around each other; they take turns holding their partner's weight or facilitating the flow that upends them in turn in brief handstands. After their close encounter, Fonte positions the couple at opposite corners of the ensemble formations, providing a hint of drama. What is their relationship? Why are they now so far apart?



And then we had the goofy good fun of *Aniel*, set to rousing jazz sounds by New York's avant-garde John Zorn, including three selections from his Book of Angels. Molnar's *Aniel*, titled after one of Zorn's angels, is full of sassy sa-shays and slow solo waltzes. There are musclemen who kiss their bicep, and slinky, smiling solos from a happy trio: Livona Ellis, Rachel Meyer and Makaila Wallace. One scenario has Connor Gnam enter stage left and gently use his breath to blow Alexis Fletcher down to the ground; several others enter and blow her back up.

The company's roster includes three young apprentices, but everyone pulled their weight in this varied trio of works, an enticing launch to Molnar's fourth season as artistic director.

*Kaija Pepper*

## Seattle

**P**acific Northwest Ballet's November programme featured four world premieres (three choreographed by company members), exhibiting both the largesse of company donors and the skill of the dancers and musicians who have to several times dramatically change style. This is the second production in Pacific Northwest Ballet's 40th anniversary season, and impressed partly for its bold theatrical elements.

In Andrew Barte's *arms that work*, warm-coloured lighting plays upon the loose-fitting, taupe-coloured costumes of Mark Zappone, and against a large central prop. Margaret Mullin's *Lost in Light* showcases Alexis Mondragon's silvery linen tunics, and small, jeweled hats. For Mark Morris' *Kammermusik* No. 3, dancers appear in Zappone's magenta-coloured tunics with a magenta cyc designed by Michael Chybowski that eventually reduces to a narrow strip of colour. In Kiyon Gaines' *Sum Stravinsky*, a blue velvet curtain drapes around the back of the stage. The dancers' stretch leotards and tutus with panels of various shades of blue are accented by Randall Chiarelli's superbly crafted lighting.

Barte's first piece to be choreographed for the mainstage opened the programme. Principals Kaori Nakamura, Carrie Imler and Jonathan Poretta, and soloist James Moore attacked this work, providing unforgettable moments with extreme extensions, and accenting every movement. A favourite part was the opening pas de deux, danced with a lone figure, Jessika Anspach. Barret Anspach's contemporary score, in its lyrical

moments, tones down the harshness of the movement.

At one point, Anspach stops her gorgeous riff of a soliloquy and — joined by other dancers — moves into the elastic cords of the central prop as in a cat's cradle game, but with their entire bodies rather than just their hands. Barte has choreographed generous movements here — reaching gestures and spiral turns straight to the floor, as well as unusual lifts.

Mullin's piece, also a first for the mainstage, offers graceful, lyrical moves set to Dan Coleman's beautifully toned music. In this piece, Kylee Kitchens and Jerome Tisserand dance a tender pas de deux, and Seth Orza and Laura Gilbreath dis-

sweeps and swoops, with plenty of core work, across the floor. The pace is somewhat frenetic — trios and other groupings race onstage, staying close to the wings, then exit. Standouts in the two casts I saw were Mullin (dancing with a trio of men) and the spry Orza, moving en ménage. Kitchens and Elizabeth Murphy, as well as Tisserand, Moore and Poretta, danced light and breezy moves with stable landings and extensions — while others seemed to have a distracting urgency about them. Page Smith's cello solos in the Hindemith score, holding her notes and producing a strong tone against the brass, were astounding.

Imler and Poretta — and in another cast Sarah Ricard Orza and Moore —



play great strength in counterbalanced moves. Together with couples Benjamin Griffiths and Brittany Reid, Carli Samuelson and Kiyon Gaines, and Chelsea Adomaitis and William Lin-Yee, they perform with breath and balance, especially important in the sometimes-difficult lifts.

On this programme, Morris debuted his first commissioned ballet for Pacific Northwest Ballet, set to Paul Hindemith's cello concerto *Kammermusik* No. 3, Op. 36, No. 2 (literally, chamber music, but here played by full orchestra, conducted by Emil de Cou). Morris focuses on pointe work and some basic technique — almost to the point of glumness. Nevertheless, the dance

proved their worth as powerhouse couples in the first movement of Gaines' *Sum Stravinsky*, his second ballet for the mainstage. Gaines knows how to show off the dancers to advantage; the only section that was somewhat disappointing was the Allegretto — danced both nights by Maria Chapman and Karel Cruz. This movement seemed under choreographed for Stravinsky's Allegretto music. Nevertheless, Chapman was a tease in this piece with her taffy-like moves. Gilbreath and Orza made a handsome couple, seeming to barely brush the ground in demanding petit allegro. And Lesley Rausch and Batkhurel Bold were striking in their well-timed lifts. This piece depends heavily on Stravinsky's

peppy, modern and deliberate rhythms, and brims with energetic movement.

This and the other pieces on the programme are modern and audacious. Even when using the most basic of steps, these ballets seem brand new. Kudos should go to Pacific Northwest Ballet for encouraging and supporting the emerging skills of these inventive company artists.

Gigi Berardi

## Stuttgart

Watching the past hold hands with the present is always an emotional thing. At **Stuttgart Ballet's** celebration of the 50th Anniversary of *Romeo and Juliet* in November, it was also an uplifting, heart-racing experience.

A still lovely Marcia Haydee, once a fragile young Juliet in Cranko's landmark ballet, clutched her present-day counterpart, Alicia Amatriain's hand, as they bowed together. Juliet past and Juliet present, they were a forceful reminder that links forged in classical ballet are powerful indeed.

Haydee, now playing Juliet's Nurse, remains a brilliant dance actress capable of turning steps into dramatic arcs of meaning. When she melted into Amatriain's arms, there was such a sense of kinship, such affection and respect, you knew you were watching something special.

The way one generation can influence and complement another is part of the great process of artistic legacy. This is what makes ballet more than just an evolving art form. In the evolution there is at best a continuum that allies the best of the past with the present.

Tears started early and went on late. Curtain call after curtain call acknowledged how important this Cranko masterpiece is to the world of dance. How ingenious of Stuttgart Ballet to honour its position in this way.

As Stuttgart's legendary stars appeared through the evening, adding nostalgic support in small but pivotal roles, the audience succumbed to hero worship, applauding each icon with devotion and love.

Birgit Keil's Lady Capulet was so luminous, so lovely she made you remember



past, this *Romeo and Juliet* also paid homage to the great stars of the present. They nailed this great ballet, finding passionate excitement in choreography that has yet to be equalled.

Friedemann Vogel was a beautiful Romeo. Stretched elongated movement, arms of exquisite grace, head sculpted like some young David, he found every moment of drama in Cranko's steps and Shakespeare's story. He was equalled by the lovesick passion of the beguiling Amatriain whose quicksilver luminosity and exquisite acting suggested a soul on fire. This is a partnership of remarkable energy, grace and fiery connection.

When Juliet spies Romeo across the floor of the Capulet's ballroom, there is an electric shockwave of longing that provides a necessary spark of connection. When these lovers at first sight surge toward each other, hands touching, eyes melt-

ing distance and space between them, there is that fire of desperation that allows young lovers to risk everything. This is easily the most erotic, mood-drenched moment in all ballet.

When the lovers meet in the moonlight, beneath Juliet's moon-splashed balcony, their hearts are on fire. Delirious lifts, frantic little pirouettes, arms searching space, bodies locked in embrace: this is brilliant physical realization of Shakespeare's great poetry. When they soar together as if time stood still, we understand the consuming passion that drives them on.

Amatriain melted in Vogel's arms, but she was never an innocent devoid of lethal spirit. She was never someone who fails to understand the great risk she's taking. For his part, Vogel burned with an unquenchable intensity. His jetés explored the outer reaches of space. His tours en l'air were whirling spirals toward the unknown.

Amatriain was liquid fire as she reached toward infinity. When she danced Juliet's little backward bourées, she moved away from the centre of her world questioning every idea she ever had about family and consequence.

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Far from a night that dwelt on the

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a lusty Mercutio and Marijn Rademaker as a dreamy Benvolio.

This *Romeo and Juliet* looked stunning in Jurgen Rose's evocative designs. There was such a moody feel to the lively Verona streets and dank Capulet tomb. No one has ever equalled Cranko's vision of this great love story and seeing it once again danced to perfection reminded us just how special this ballet is.

The evening was preceded with a slideshow of Richard Cragun in homage to his great career with this company. It was a profoundly moving start to what was a remarkable night of dance.

Gary Smith

## London

The Royal Ballet commemorated 20 years since the death of inspired British choreographer Kenneth MacMillan, with a mixed programme of his one act works at the Royal Opera House. The 1966 ballet *Concerto* offered a delightfully light-hearted start.

Created for the Stuttgart Ballet, its abstract choreography is performed in simple but vibrant costumes and closely matches the accompanying Shostakovich score. Its first movement is fast, zingy and conveys the music's military flourish. The challenge for dancers is to perform virtuosic turns and jumps with exact timing and flawless synchronization, a task at which Yuhui Choe and Steven McRae excelled, though the supporting corps de ballet were unable to match their precision. The third section is of similar style, but in epic solo form after one of the original cast members broke his foot at the last minute. In this, Claire Calvert shone with clean lines, neat jumps and seemingly inexhaustible energy reserves.

These bouncy segments engulf a central andante that MacMillan created after seeing Lynn Seymour warming up for performance. A couple share eye contact only at the beginning and end of their lingering pas de deux, with a curious relationship open to multiple interpretations developing in between. As modest as it is beautiful, the duet has no showy pirouettes or big

leaps, but requires incredible strength and partnering skills. Marianela Núñez and Rupert Pennefather make the most sublime present-day casting one could imagine, meeting the choreography's trials with exquisite potency and phrasing.

MacMillan based tense psychological ballet *Las Hermanas* (*The Sisters*) on Federico García Lorca's 1936 play, *The House of Bernarda Alba*. With sensuality, repression and betrayal as its core themes, it's no wonder former Royal Ballet Director Monica Mason describes it as "right up [MacMillan's] street."

In Nicholas Georgiadis' claustrophobic household set, a newly widowed mother insists her five daughters remain at home until marriage. The eldest is engaged, but the affair between her suitor and youngest sister is soon exposed, leaving the fiancée banished and eldest

broken through flexed wrists and bent knees. Dancers even open their mouths as if to scream and it is only the liberated younger sister who is able to move lyrically when away from familial confines.

As the eldest, Alina Cojocaru flaunted her engagement, revelling in the opportunity for freedom. Her late-night duet with cruel fiancée Thomas Whitehead contrastingly conveyed the character's underlying fear and sexual naivety; one gesture in particular, the circling of clasped fingers around her face, was indicative of her extreme awkwardness.

Beatriz Stix-Brunell made an appealing younger sister; her fierce final walk suggested her suicide was not a result of shame (as is typically suggested), but instead a desperate attempt to escape the miseries of her subjugated domestic life.

MacMillan's tribute to fellow choreographer and friend, John Cranko, completed the bill. *Requiem* uses Gabriel Fauré's gorgeous choral music with dancers embodying varying identities from angry-fisted mourners to waiflike spirits. Choreography is intensely passionate with sculptural poses, complex lifts and group formations all intrinsically connected to the score. One of the simplest but most striking segments is the solo to Pie Jesu, a prayer for eternal peace, for which MacMillan took inspiration from observing his young daughter at play. Choe and Leanne Benjamin provided different but equally delightful interpretations with Benjamin seeming light and ethereal and Choe instead imbuing movements with a more dramatic and earthy quality.

Considering that MacMillan spent the majority of his career in the United Kingdom, it is surprising (and a testament to the lack of support MacMillan received here) that the three works chosen were all made in Germany. This aside, the bill was a superbly fitting tribute to the choreographer who dared to challenge balletic window-dressing and replace it with brutal and emotional works that reverberate powerfully with a combination of fervour, confrontation and charm.

Laura Dodge



sister condemned to spinsterhood. The youngest then hangs herself in a provocative end that warranted an audible gasp from the Royal Opera House audience on opening night.

MacMillan's choreography is filled with repressive metaphors; movements are uneasy and restricted with hands often grasped together and body lines

## Monte Carlo

Since, in 1976, John Neumeier used *Swan Lake*'s libretto as a dramatic starting point for a complete new scenario, maintaining its dramatic plot but in a new realistic context (it was about Ludwig of Bavaria's tragic story), this ballet has become a true ballet archetype, which the most different of dancemakers have felt the need to investigate. It is the destiny of the classic, indeed, to offer endless keys for its comprehension. The latest one to take the challenge is Jean Christophe Maillot, **Ballets de Monte Carlo**'s director and principal choreographer, whose *Lac* dominated the events calendar of the latest season in the sunny Principality of Monaco.

A dancemaker whose cultural heritage is strongly neoclassic, but with a strong-minded will to make this language and theatrical vision absolutely in tune with contemporary tastes, Maillot has already rewrote other classics with an original flavour as happened in *Nutcracker* (which he set in a Circus) or *Sleeping Beauty* (making a dark version of the tale in his *La Belle*). But *Swan Lake* has not only a libretto to remake: it's a monumentum to choreography with Ivanov's genial creation of the swan dances. How to face it without seeming arrogant?

Maillot worked with his dramaturg, the celebrated Goncourt prize winner Jean Rouaud and chose to start from the dramatic focus of the plot: Odile's forced bestowal as the prince's fiancée, in spite of his passion for Odette. Aided by the powerful dramatic temperament of his amazing ballerina Bernice Coppetiers, Maillot pushes himself beyond the traditional borders of the tale and gives her, as the Queen of the Night (Rothbart's female correspondent) a pivotal role, suggesting that her desperate will to impose her daughter Odile as the prince's bride is the revenge of an ancient and secret liaison with the prince's father. Is maybe Odile the prince's stepsister, too? Who knows. And indeed it does not really matter.

Luckily, the dramatic line of *Lac* does not slip into a saucy mess, but remains focused on the bids of this black mother

to avenge an injustice and her fight to give back her child her rights against all the difficulties, above all the pure love the prince has feeling for Odette since his childhood, that not even her spell transforming the girl in a white swan can beat. Pure love prevails and cathartic death will be the only solution to the tragedy.

Maillot can tell a story simply using classic ballet idioms: his way of developing the plot is clear and readable. Taking away all the redundant parts of the ancient ballet scenario, in the first act he takes us immediately in the spot of the drama, showing the attempts of the Queen of the Night to introduce her daughter Odile among the prince's suitors: any girl has a solo describing her character — a different kind of female typology — and Odile's one is strong, voluptuous, imperial, a strange mixage between sensual woman and wild bird. A perfect contrast with Odette's frail tenderness, Maillot maintains from the original, although here he cleverly outdistances the Ivanov's choreography and recreates his own swan movements, insisting above all on the expressive and dynamic use of arms and hands to emphasize Odette's transformation from bird to human being. His style, blending academic steps rigorously en pointe for girls, to contemporary fluidity, has smooth neverending dynamics yielding softly into the music: a quality that makes his way of telling the story natu-

ral and coherent. Maillot knows also how to use the classic forms in a new dramatic way, making for example a classic quintet occasion for the different characters (the prince and his parents, the Queen of Night and Odile) to express clearly their feelings and relationships: a perfect example of contemporary dancemaker in the stream of classic tradition.

As usual, as in all Maillot's productions, *Lac* has a very refined set and décor in white, grey and black nuances: a rock mountain as a symbol of the insuperable dark sides of soul designed by Ernest Pignon-Ernest and pretty simple and elegant petit robes by Philippe Guillotel for the swans and the court.

Ballets de Monte Carlo is a high-level ballet company whose Bernice Coppetiers is surely the brightest star for her dramatic presence and wonderful quality of dance. In the white swan role, long-limbed Anja Behrend showed her refined lyrical style and April Ball was a strongwilled Odile, while Stephan Bourgond was spontaneous and frank depicting his prince's feelings. Moreover, it was one more delight to hear Tchaikovsky's score performed with love, purity and passion by the celebrated Orchestre Philharmonique de Monte-Carlo conducted by Nicholas Brochet.

Silvia Poletti

## Miami

Liam Scarlett is a shrewd judge of the character of a company. In *Euphotic*, his new work for **Miami City Ballet**, which was presented January 12-13 at the Adrienne Arsht Center for the Performing Arts, he has his finger firmly on the group's pulse.

Until recently a first artist at the Royal Ballet, Scarlett quit dancing last year to concentrate on choreography. This is his second commission for Miami; musically it's a series. The first, *Viscera*, was to the first piano concerto by New York composer Lowell Liebermann. *Euphotic* is to the second and has the same dark, muscular tension.

The mysterious title refers to the uppermost layer of the sea, where light can still reach for photosynthesis. That won't help you comprehend the ballet beyond the murky, aqueous lighting. In high-speed yet fluidly classical movement, *Eu-*







As the saying goes, there are just two types of dance — good dance and bad dance. I suppose it's the same with all art forms. And the more one is exposed to dance, in all its variety, the better one becomes at discerning the difference, even within forms that might seem superficially alien because of their roots in radically different cultural traditions. Dance is not always the universal language it's touted to be. If it is, its inflections can present formidable hurdles to appreciation.

I was reminded of this last year while watching two extraordinary performers, one British-born but steeped in the Indian classical dance of his forebears; the other born in Tehran of Azerbaijani descent and a master of traditional Central and Western Asian dance.

Although the former, 28-year-old Aakash Odedra, had previously appeared in Toronto as a guest dancer, his solo performance at Harbourfront Centre in late November, under the auspices of Lata Pada's Mississauga-based Sampradaya Dance Creations, was a revelatory opportunity to comprehend why Odedra is considered a rising star of Britain's South Asian dance scene.

Odedra was part of a mixed bill under the alluring if not always strictly fulfilled title, *Alchemy*. His contribution was *Rising*, a recent suite of captivating solos made specially for him by a trio of very different A-list choreographers, in order of presentation, Akram Khan, Russell Maliphant and Sidi Larbi Cherkaoui. *Rising* opens with a kathak solo of Odedra's own devising.

Ideally, we would have seen *Rising* in its originally intended and continuous form. Instead, its components were reordered and distributed throughout the evening, perhaps to avoid any implication that the other contributions, by Natasha Bakht and Santosh Nair, were merely garnish.

Regardless, from the moment we first saw Odedra, standing back to audience, almost silhouetted by a beam of celestial light, one immediately sensed he would command the programme. It was as if his slight frame, arms raised, were drawing energy, like a divine gift, from some higher source.

Thus inspired Odedra launched into his

# Notebook

by Michael Crabb



Aakash Odedra in *Rising*  
Photo: Chris Nash

dazzling kathak solo, *Nritta*, which, traditional as it may have been in form, was very much in its speed and elevation a dance of here and now. Yet, for all its obvious technical virtuosity, *Nritta* was pure and unaffected; almost sacramental. And, when it ended, Odedra stepped quietly into that beam of light, arms again uplifted, as if gratefully returning the energy to its source.

She probably spoke for many of her fellow audience members when a revered luminary of the local dance community responded out loud: "Oh, my God!" It really was a transcendent moment that spoke beyond the specifics of a particular dance tradition.

Since this is not intended as a review, I will only add that in each of the other solos Odedra never once seemed conscious of his power to mesmerize an audience. The quality of his performance resided in its simple integrity and humility. Odedra was always at the service of the dance, not of his ego.

The other performance that shook me to the bone marrow also came from beyond my area of comfortable familiarity.

Sashar Zarif, 43, is a man in apparent

quest of his identity, understandably when one considers his past. Zarif suffered horribly in the aftermath of the 1979 Iranian revolution. Even his escape to Turkey left him a stateless refugee. Separated from his family, Zarif was finally able to settle in Canada in 1988, but while adapting to a new environment he remained drawn to his ancestral past and its rich, mystic cultural heritage. He has since become recognized as an expert on dance forms of the region once broadly embraced by the ancient Persian empire.

A few days before Christmas, Zarif drew an appreciative audience to the 1,000-seat George Weston Recital Hall, toward Toronto's northern extremity, for a joint performance with Azerbaijani music icon Alim Qasimov.

Qasimov is distinguished among other things for his championing of mugham, a musical mode with several variant branches. At one time, dance was an inclusive part of the mugham tradition's mix of song, music and poetry, but has been neglected in more recent times.

Zarif, after years of research, sought to right that imbalance not so much through an act of reconstruction as a re-imagining, based partly on traditional sources but equally driven by his instincts as a contemporary performer.

Physically, Zarif's solidity presents a striking contrast to the almost elfin Odedra, but, as we've learned, Zarif can also move with great precision and speed, as he did in *Sama-e Rast*, the December performance. But, as with Odedra, this was not virtuosity for its own sake. Even without being able to understand Qasimov's poetic lyrics, one could sense their spirit and emotion, as much by their sound as by Zarif's varying physical response.

Through his almost introspective concentration and intensity, Zarif managed to take even those inexperienced in his cultural heritage on a journey of discovery; spiritual and transcendent. One was left wondering if it was really quite appropriate to applaud. But, of course, we did.

Sadly, there's precious little dance around anymore that can connect us to life's most imponderable mysteries nor the dancers with the humility to put themselves totally at its disposal. ▼



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