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# dance INTERNATIONAL

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*Dance International* covers a large territory — the world! Our regular contributors are key to our ability to do this, some of them reporting on whole countries. Fredrik Rütter, for instance, who lives in Sandefjord, outside Oslo, travels throughout Norway in his work as dance critic for *Verdens Gang* newspaper. Fredrik writes this time from Oslo, including a report on the first evening programmed by Ingrid Lorentzen, Norwegian National Ballet's new director, who we featured in our last issue.

Given the size of Australia, we've added a second correspondent there. Deborah Jones, who lives in Sydney, will alternate with longstanding Melbourne-based contributor Jordan Beth Vincent. Deborah is the national dance critic for *The Australian* newspaper and blogs at [deborahjones.me](http://deborahjones.me). Like Fredrik, she also travels, writing this quarter mostly from Perth. Her report on West Australian Ballet's production of John Cranko's *Onegin* makes a good companion piece to Gary Smith's feature on the same ballet being remounted by the National Ballet of Canada.

**Our features, reviews and news items always celebrate and investigate dance from all over.**

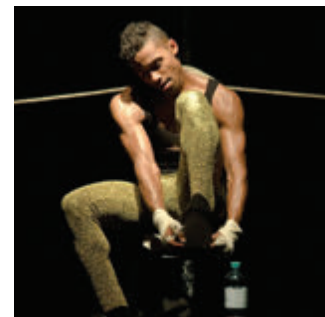
This quarter, we hear about choreographic research and development in Amsterdam from Judith Delmé, and about performances at Ottawa's National Arts Centre from Lys Stevens and Philadelphia's Academy of Music from Lewis Whittington, to mention just three.

Are there places in Canada and around the globe you'd like covered? Companies or choreographers you feel our readers should know about? Please send in your suggestions; I'd like to know what has been catching your eye in dance these days, and why. ▼

*Kaija*

Kaija Pepper  
editor@danceinternational.org

**Christian Guerematchi in  
Greco and Scholten's ROCCO**  
Photo: Laurent Ziegler



[www.danceinternational.org](http://www.danceinternational.org)





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Darren Devaney and Livona Ellis of Ballet BC  
in Emily Molnar's *16 + a room*  
Photo: Michael Slobodian

# West

## Building dance at Ballet BC and Pacific Northwest Ballet

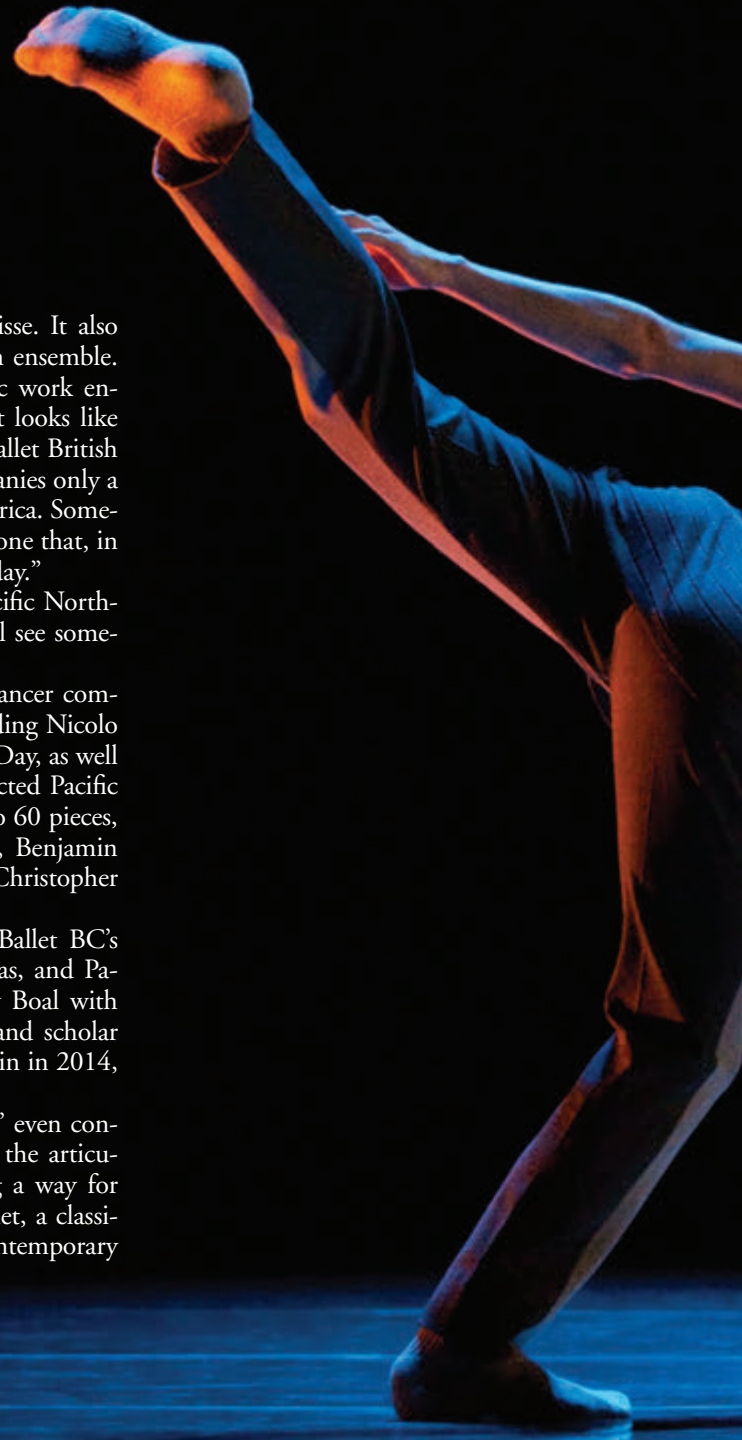
“Creativity takes courage,” famously observed Matisse. It also takes an artist or two, or, perhaps even better, an ensemble. And then? Money, a challenging but empathetic work environment and inspiring yet strong leadership. It looks like all of this is in place for both Emily Molnar of Ballet British Columbia and Peter Boal of Pacific Northwest Ballet, two companies only a few hours driving distance apart on the west coast of North America. Somewhere in the mix is also a supportive and enthusiastic audience, one that, in the words of Boal, “really doesn’t need to see what it loved yesterday.”

That is a good thing. Because you can bet Ballet BC and Pacific Northwest Ballet audiences in Vancouver and Seattle, respectively, will see something new with every program.

Since Molnar took the helm at Ballet BC in 2009, the 18-dancer company has added close to 30 new works by choreographers including Nicolo Fonte, Azure Barton, Medhi Walerski, Jorma Elo and Kevin O’Day, as well as four by Molnar herself. In the eight years that Boal has directed Pacific Northwest Ballet, the 45-dancer company has premiered close to 60 pieces, with 15 world premieres, including ballets by Victor Quijada, Benjamin Millepied, Twyla Tharp, Mark Morris, Marco Goecke and Christopher Wheeldon.

Both companies recently produced a full-length *Giselle* — Ballet BC’s contemporary retelling from Montreal choreographer José Navas, and Pacific Northwest Ballet’s newly researched traditional staging by Boal with assistance from Stepanov notation specialist Doug Fullington and scholar Marian Smith. (Pacific Northwest Ballet’s *Giselle* will be seen again in 2014, with new scenery and costumes.)

Molnar is very clear that choreographers want “ballet bodies,” even contemporary dance choreographers. “Classical training allows for the articulation in the body that most choreographers want: developing a way for the body to be fluent,” says Molnar. For Pacific Northwest Ballet, a classically trained company performing classical, neoclassical and contemporary pieces, “ballet bodies” are essential.



# Coast. Creatives

| by Gigi Berardi

Rachel Foster and Lucien Postlewaite  
of Pacific Northwest Ballet in  
Victor Quijada's *Mating Theory*  
Photo: © Angela Sterling





Says Boal, “It’s really a stretch with commissions, we need to fundraise, but every time I’ve wanted to do a new work we’ve made our [financial] goals. It’s terrific to have a number of arts organizations and donors here that consistently invest in arts and culture.”

The greater Vancouver and Seattle communities provide some key funding for their respective companies. Only about 20 to 30 percent of Molnar’s \$3.4 million annual budget for Ballet BC is from government funding at various levels, with up to 50 percent from ticket sales, and the rest from private and corporate sponsors. About 65 percent of Boal’s \$20 million annual budget for Pacific Northwest Ballet is from ticket sales and 35 percent from donations and some grants.

The companies are doing well, but make no mistake — finances are fragile and the artistic directors know it, none more so than Molnar. A series of unfortunate financial, business and artistic decisions over several years leading up to 2009 resulted in Ballet BC finding itself unable to continue operations and almost folding. According to Molnar and Ballet BC board chair Kevin B. Leslie, a combination of robust risk management and internal financial management systems since then have contributed to the company’s resiliency and solvency.

Of course, these two companies have much going for them, including the west coast itself. Northwest Washington state and southwest British Columbia share an inland arm of the Pacific Ocean known as the Salish Sea, enjoying scenic mountains and valleys, and sunny summers and damp winters. Although separated by the international boundary along the 49th parallel,

they are joined by convenient land and air transportation links and a good deal of history, as well as cultural and commercial interchange.

For many, dancing in the Seattle company is, says Boal, “a prime job in this country. Repertory is like food for dancers, and we’re aiming for variety.” It’s the defining character of each company. As Molnar says, “Vancouver is a contemporary-minded city, it makes sense.”

Is the geography of dance changing to favour the west? Both directors think so. Pacific Northwest Ballet auditions every four years, often in San Francisco and/or New York City. “But this time,” says Boal, “they’re being held only in Seattle. It didn’t make sense for talented Seattle dancers to go far away to audition.”

The freshness, commitment to new works and ever-changing repertoire is part of what characterizes the two neighbouring companies. Dance on the west coast is attracting critical acclaim and attention from the east. In the Seattle Opera House in November last year, *New York Times* critic Alastair Macaulay was present. And it’s not the first time. Ballet BC was a *Dance Magazine* 25 to Watch in 2013.

Besides the unbeatable physical geography and scenic beauty, it’s the personality of the artistic directors and distinct identity of both companies that attract dancers. At Pacific Northwest Ballet, the diversity of repertoire is also a draw, as well as the connection to New York City Ballet in terms of dancers who have trained there (about two-thirds of the company), directors who have danced there (Boal, as well as founding directors Kent





Stowell and Franca Russell) and the Balanchine rep itself — more than 40 pieces. The connection is strong — but not too strong.

“Don’t get me wrong, I adore the New York City Ballet,” says Boal. “I grew up with it and have the greatest admiration for the company.” (Boal was a dancer there for 22 years, the last 16 as a principal.) Although both American Ballet Theatre and New York City Ballet were Boal’s “ultimate” role models, “we’re really not focused on how we compare, but on what is the best dance we can do here, right now.”

Molnar emphasizes the collaborative character of the Vancouver group: “We are a smaller company, which creates an inclusive environment where the artist can develop. [As] part of the vision we have dancers that are curious about engaging and interacting with our audience.” This also reflects Molnar’s approach as a director — to empower the individuals around her rather than have a “fear-based relationship.” She acknowledges that fear can elicit predictable responses, “but more meaningful results can be found when the artists are invited to take ownership of the work and the company.”

Molnar’s career path took her to the National Ballet of Canada in Toronto when she had barely turned 17 years old. After three-and-a-half years there, she joined William Forsythe’s wildly inventive Frankfurt Ballet, and stayed five years.

“My perspective changed tremendously working with Bill and the artists of the Frankfurt Ballet,” she explains. “Living in Europe exposed me to [German tanztheater great] Pina Bausch on a regular basis as well as to the work of many other international companies.” It was a lush period of creativity for Molnar. Forsythe’s many improvisational exercises helped set the creative tone. “Everything I had learned as a dancer was being brought into question. It was liberating.”

Working with younger people, including dance groups in Canada in the summers, eased Molnar into her next big change. She joined Ballet BC, and danced with the company for five

years, becoming known as artistic director John Alleyne’s muse, before leaving to freelance. In 2009, she returned as artistic director. Molnar, now 40, recalls: “When I accepted the director position, I knew that this was where I needed to be — not onstage, but I did need to be in the studio every day. I wanted a deeper sense of responsibility, and to create, nurture and support new work as much as I could.”

Boal’s career path involved mostly classical ballet. The 48-year-old was known as a technical and sensitive dancer, as well as a skilled teacher. Boal recalls, “One of my early breakthroughs was working with [Jerome] Robbins [at New York City Ballet] — learning to work with my brain and not just my body.” Then with a turn in France for six months, and longtime work as a teacher at the School of American Ballet, Boal began to understand how to “analyze technique, dynamics and timing” for himself as well as for others. An additional three years as head of his own group, Peter Boal and Company, gave him the experience to develop his confidence and clear sense of purpose as a director.

Boal and Molnar ask a lot of their dancers. Molnar believes in a collective sense of ownership. “I feel very strongly about giving artists the space in the room to freely express themselves as interpreters. It’s the sum of the parts: everyone individually is important, but it’s really what happens when you put it all together that counts.”

For Boal, Pacific Northwest Ballet dancers “are artists and athletes in the studio; some of the most spectacular performances are there, and it’s expected. Performance just becomes the icing on the cake.” He cautions that dancers need to “approach each step not as a corps member with a directive, but as a soloist, finding the musical phrasing to show sophistication, intelligence and taste.”

Molnar wants that, too: “We’re looking for soloists in an ensemble.” It’s also something the audience looks forward to. She wants audiences to be emotionally connected to dance, “so people feel we are asking them to question and be engaged in dialogue.”

The audience was a lot of what brought Boal to Seattle. “I knew the reputation of the company was stellar under Kent [Stowell] and Franca [Russell]. The ballet world is small, and I had worked with so many of the PNB dancers as their teacher. Seattle was considered one of the prime destinations for dance. I thought it was a long shot they would take me.”

Choreographers as well as dancers are thriving in these two west coast companies. Says Molnar, “Although we cannot offer the largest fees, we pride ourselves in being able to provide a committed and passionate group of dancers who know how to dive into the creative process.”

Molnar sees the company as providing an environment for choreographers to exercise their artistic voices. “My vision is that our collaborators are able to create a work with us as if it were their own company. Our dancers are highly trained and versatile, and this enables choreographers to work in the style they are used to.”

These two neighbouring dance companies continue to expand repertory, with both artistic directors working hard to develop the next generation of dance artists and audiences. Boal and Molnar are thriving along with their companies, and are looking forward to continued inventive, path-breaking work in which all dancers are engaged. ▼

# A Place for Abracadab

ICKamsterdam, a platform for  
contemporary dance

Streets and canals fan out from Amsterdam harbour toward the centre of the old city. Walk five minutes along the Nieuwezijds Voorburgwal, one of the busiest thoroughfares, and you reach the beating heart of another, albeit invisible, network: the creative structure called ICKamsterdam (International Choreographic Arts Centre Amsterdam). Here, in a white, light-filled basement, I met up with founders Emio Greco and Pieter C. Scholten.

The multi-faceted dance centre came into being in 2009, the result of a 13-year-long journey of discovery and experimentation by the Italian-born Greco and Scholten, a Dutchman. They began their artistic collaboration in 1996. Greco, a classically trained dancer, had been performing for several years with the company of Jan Fabre, a radical Flemish theatrical artist. He found himself drifting away from Fabre's conceptual ideas and starting a search for a more dance-related form of expression. Meeting up with Scholten, a theatre director with experience as a dramaturge, he perceived that he had found a kindred artistic spirit.

— Continued page 12

by Judith Delmé

Neda Hadij-Mirzaei in Greco  
and Scholten's *PARA | DISO*  
Photo: © Jean Pierre Maurin

ra



Christian Guerematchi in  
Greco and Scholten's *ROCCO*  
Photo: Laurent Ziegler



## The Boxer, the Dancer, the Body

Notes on *ROCCO*, a work by Emio  
Greco and Pieter C. Scholten

by Merel Heering

**A**t first sight, boxing and ballet may seem to have little in common, but nothing could be further from the truth. Indeed, boxer Muhammad Ali was sometimes compared to a dancer for the nimble, gracious and quick way he moved about in the ring. It is not for nothing that salsa music is played with every Cuban boxing training session. The music helps the boxer to maintain the rhythm in the co-ordination between the legs and the upper body, a fact that is also appreciated in dance. Extreme body control and an iron discipline are indispensable in both domains. *ROCCO* [which premiered at ImPulsTanz, Vienna, in 2011, and tours to Vancouver, British Columbia, and Portland, Oregon, in April 2014] illustrates how the sport inspires the dance.

### close combat

Close combat is a type of fighting in which the enemies are in short range of each other, for example in a hand-to-hand combat or a fight with hand weapons such as swords or knives.

As a boxer, you are constantly moving. You position yourself three times for three minutes relative to your opponent. During a fight you try to stay at arm's length from them. So you occupy your own personal space during the entire match, as well as the space of the other. This constant proximity makes the sport very intense.

In dance, too, the mutual distance between bodies plays an important role. The dancers are trained to share space and energy with each other and are always aware of where the other is and what the other does. Just like boxers in a ring. The space



Vincent Colomes, Emio Greco, Marta Lopes, Suzan Tunca, Sawami Fukuoka, Nico Monaco and Ty Boomershine in Greco and Scholten's *HELL*  
Photo: Laurent Ziegler



Pieter C. Scholten and Emio Greco  
Photo: Alwin Poiana

In a recent interview, he explained, “I sensed I needed words to express what it means to be a dancer and to critically appraise my choreographic motives. In Pieter I recognized [someone with] an aversion to artifice, to narrative, to the anecdotal.” Scholten, whose understanding of dance up until then had been restricted to tanztheater (an expressionist form of dance-theatre popular in Europe through Pina Bausch), was in turn struck by Greco’s organic manner of moving, which was free, expansive and expressive, but at the same time possessing a deep underlying control.

The pair came to the conclusion that they had much in common. And so, although Scholten’s medium was text-oriented and Greco’s movement-based, together their creative talents flowed seamlessly from one form to the other. In their search for a new creative path, they closeted themselves away one summer in an Amsterdam studio, determined to emerge with some kind of working proposal. Their efforts bore fruit; what they came up with was a manifesto composed of seven principles, which together form the base that they describe as “a new language of the flesh.” The first principle states: “I need to tell you that my body is curious about everything and I am my body.” Another is: “I can control my body and play with it at the same time.”

Their first combined choreographies started to take shape between 1996 and 2001 as they made forays into opera, music and film. Starting with a dance trilogy, *Fra Cervello e Movimento* (*Between Brain and Movement*), they then directed and choreographed two operas for the Edinburgh Festival and choreographed for a production by the leading Dutch company Toneelgroep (Theater Group) Amsterdam. Another

er dance-based trilogy, with operatic and theatrical elements, was inspired by Danté’s *Divine Comedy*. It was a reflection on society’s norms and aberrations, and garnered plaudits during the Holland Festival in 2008. In 2011, they mined it for “the best of the Dante Cycle” and called it *La Commedia*. (Though as Scholten playfully said, the phrase “the best of” could be interpreted in more than one way.)

Their own company, known as Emio Greco / PC, or EG / PC, was created during this period of intense activity and consisted initially of seven dancers. An enquiry as to their average age resulted in a smiling response from Greco: he created *HELL* — the first part of the Dante Cycle — on mature 30-year-olds; the dancers in the second part, *Purgatorio*, varied in age; and he chose to create the finale, *you PARA | DISO*, using much younger performers. Obviously I could draw my own conclusions as to his reasons for doing this; it certainly gave me insight into their unconventional creative choices.

The year 2009 was a watershed time for Greco and Scholten. With encouragement from the municipality of Amsterdam, they united all of their many projects under one roof. ICKamsterdam was the name they gave to this platform for contemporary dance, with its emphasis on three major areas: Greco and Scholten’s own company, a unique supportive program for young artists and various research projects carried out in a European context.

They subsequently turned the page (at least for the time being) on interdisciplinary productions to concentrate primarily on dance and dance-related subjects. In 2012, they mounted *Addio alla Fine* (*Farewell to End*), a production

intended as a summation of their work up until then. Taking as part inspiration Italian director Federico Fellini's 1983 film *E la nave va (And the Ship Sails On)*, and with visual and textual contributions from several well-known European artists, Greco and Scholten created their own Noah's Ark on location. The public was invited to accompany the seven dancers on a surreal journey, a sea voyage in search of an imaginary society that would encourage the values of individuality and spontaneity.

*Addio alla Fine* was also a platform from which to launch dance into the future. Their mantra, published in a 2008 brochure entitled *ICK and the other*, was: "We believe that dance today has a unique and special role. We contend that it is a catalyst between all the performing arts, all of the arts in general and that it can unite both art and science."

According to Scholten, their priorities at ICKamsterdam are to produce and develop choreography; to initiate research into new media and technology; to organize transference of knowledge (in the form of research and teaching); and to arrange discourse (connection) with other partners. As they see it, these projects are interdependent, intended to feed and nurture one another. Out of this exchange of ideas, choreographies — and choreographers — are born or developed, knowledge is pooled and new ideas generated.

They have titled the various arms of their organization in Italian, Greco's native tongue. *Altra Cosa* is the name of the interactive dialogue that takes place between ICKamsterdam and other artists and institutions. For instance, they have exchanged ideas with Wayne McGregor and with the Forsythe Company regarding technology and new media. Under the auspices of Troubleyn, the Flemish arts house directed by Jan Fabre, a network comprised of Wayne McGregor/Random Dance and Coventry University (England), BADco (Croatia) and ICKamsterdam is studying new approaches to dance methodologies. The initiative is called Labo21 (Laboratory for the 21st Century), and in this context, ICKamsterdam is primarily concerned with new approaches to dance notation, whereas McGregor's interest, for instance, lies in the usage of software tools. The plan is to share these discoveries and allow public access by means of performances, presentations and publications.

Most recently there has been collaborative work with several ballet companies. Working with Les Ballets de Monte-Carlo and Dutch National Ballet has brought Greco to some interesting conclusions. While classically trained dancers may not be used to engaging with the very abstract ideas underlying the philosophy of Greco and Scholten, Greco observed that dancers trained in a specific modern style are more inclined to bring along baggage than those who have a purely classical base. Working with classical dancers is for him like working with moldable clay, although obviously he has to allow time for the dancers to absorb and understand his motives.

Time was of concern during the recent remount of *The body of the national ballet* for Dutch National Ballet [reviewed by Judith Delmé in the Winter 2013 issue of

between two bodies onstage carries meaning; it comments on the way the dancers relate to one another.

In *ROCCO* we see two times two men locked in close combat. The relationship between the dancers is defined differently in each round. Perceptions of masculinity become fluid: from brothers to lovers, from friends to foes.

#### clinchng

Clinching is a rough form of grappling and occurs when the distance between both fighters has closed and straight punches cannot be employed.

A similar force field is shown in the film *Rocco e i suoi fratelli (Rocco and his Brothers, 1960)* by Luchino Visconti, from which *ROCCO* has drawn inspiration. The film tells a story about brotherly love, the struggle for a better existence and the search for identity.

Widow Rosario Parondi moves from Lucania to Milan with her five sons. One of her boys, boxer Simone, begins a tempestuous love affair with Nadia, a prostitute. Then his brother Rocco casts his eye on her, which stirs up a lot of ill feeling. The conflict between the two boys tears the family apart with all its consequences.

Besides a stormy love plot, the film shows five men who cling to each other in constantly changing ways. The Parondi brothers are not loath to use physical violence and keep pushing each other's boundaries, both inside and outside the boxing ring.

The fight among the brothers that Visconti portrays reaches further than just their physical scuffles. In *Rocco and his Brothers*, Visconti's characters throw their bodies into the struggle to survive. Whereas prostitute Nadia does so by selling her body, Simone Parondi does it by signing up as a professional boxer. In the end, it is brother Rocco who achieves fame as a match boxer and thereby raises his whole family's prestige. Visconti portrays boxing in his film as a sport of the lower classes that offers them a chance to move higher up the social scale.

Thus, Visconti's film also draws the spirit of the times in Italy during the 1960s. Several aspects of that period in which his melodrama unfolds appear to be surprisingly relevant to our time. The 1960s are years of great prosperity in the north of Italy. The rich city life presents itself and the world is found to be much wider than one's own village and region. Old standards and values no longer offer enough of a foothold in this new world. The question of how to live right is increasingly one that each individual needs to answer for himself. Here we see a parallel with today's society where globalization puts pressure on national and regional traditions and values.

#### the cover-up

Covering up is the last opportunity (other than rolling with a punch) to avoid an incoming strike to an unprotected face or body.

Like in *Rocco and his Brothers*, a real battle unfolds in *ROCCO* — we are witnesses of a series of rounds in which lightning fast footwork is paired with tough right hooks. But just like the men in Visconti's film are fighting for more than mere victory, the dancers' bodies never just adopt poses on the stage or in the ring.

*Dance International*]. What concerned the choreographers most was the shortage of rehearsal hours, an inevitable problem when dealing with large companies. Greco admitted that ideally they should have had a longer gestatory period with the youthful Dutch National corps de ballet to allow the unorthodox material to take root. The duo did, however, discover an instant rapport with the more mature dancers of the Monte Carlo troupe (on whom the work was originally created). Both men feel that dancers are freer to experiment when they have achieved a certain level of technical mastery — it allows them to set technique to one side and concentrate on artistic expression.

Another innovative process, *Double Points*, features research projects that are mostly undertaken with partners from differing fields of work. In an ICK brochure, Scholten described a *Double*



Jan Martens and Truus Bronckhorst in Martens' *BIS*  
Photo: Anna van Kooij

*Points* experiment as being similar to that of “an étude ... a dance/music piece composed with the intention of developing an artistic idea.” A case in point was their collaboration with Swiss composer Hanzpeter Kyburz, which saw them delve deeper into the connection between music and dance. Kyburz commenced the experiment by attaching sensors to Greco’s elbows and knees, and then recorded his movements. He transformed these into electrical impulses, from which he constructed a musical score. Greco subsequently used this score as a backing for choreography and in turn, as he explained, “with specific gestures ... directed the music.” The result was the creation of “islands of dancing backed by electronic musical echoes.”

The pair also attaches great importance to the encouragement of future talent, and Belgian-born

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Jan Martens is one of the young artists emerging from the ICKamsterdam stable. Greco and Scholten approached Martens after seeing some of his work, and subsequently offered him one of ICK's two-year support programs. What they are searching for is raw talent, people who already have a sense of their own inner voice. These youthful artists must have an unstoppable urge to create and be willing to surrender themselves entirely to the search for an artistic identity. The initial ideas must originate with the artists themselves, while the ICK team is on hand to give business support, and to help with future planning and the setting of career goals. According to Martens, this has afforded him not only breathing space to work, free from financial pressure, but also a clearer understanding of what he stands for artistically. He appreciates the very open policy of the house, which allowed him full leeway and yet offered judicious mentoring when necessary. The team was on hand to function as an "objective eye," one that helped to fine tune his work. Martens' *Sweat Baby Sweat* recently launched on a tour of national and international venues.

Scholten and Greco's advice to all their artists is to "dig deeper, look further and build more layers." Scholten adds: "We like to introduce friction into the working process." In whatever conjunction, be it their own projects, the various research programs or in mentoring, he and Greco veer from the conventional path. By deliberately seeking to provoke using devices such as unusual musical accents, bizarre décor elements or surprising lighting effects, they seek to avoid creative complacency; indeed this very friction often serves as a combusive agent for new creative energy.

To fully understand the ideas that inform the choreographic methodology not only of the productions of Greco and Scholten, but of the young artists they mentor, it's helpful to return to the very beginning. At the start of their collaboration, they were invited to Vienna, to give a choreographic workshop during the city's International Tanzwochen (Danceweeks). They took the opportunity to analyze their own creative motives and to put theory into practice. The result was a process they call Double Skin/Double Mind, which today reflects the foundation of their artistic work and forms the base of ICKamsterdam's coaching workshops. Using the basic elements of breathing, jumping, expanding, reducing and transfer, they work to coax the body to speak for itself. In their own words, "body and mind .... form and intention will merge together."

Their first manifesto still informs their work. Reaching out even further, they are, together with dance notator and researcher Bertha Bermúdez, in the process of outlining what they feel are seven of the most important pre-choreographic elements, one of which states, "Without fantasy there are no thoughts and without thoughts, there is no order." They call it "the perspective of Abacadabra," which seems to sum up the whole philosophy behind the work at ICKamsterdam very well. ▼

Each movement in this performance is the product of a choice; the dancer does not merely create a form, but marks a position at the same time. The dance is like a lively discussion where everyone defends his own point of view. The dancers take blows, parry, avoid and riposte. The body leads the way. The dancers are forced to relate to one another, thoughtfully and also on impulse. As a matter of fact, they relate not just to their opponent, but also to the audience, the spectators. In this way, *ROCCO*, like Visconti's film, deals with opinions about people, about bodies, about men in our society today.

#### slip

Slipping rotates the body slightly so that an incoming punch passes harmlessly next to the head. As the opponent's punch arrives, the boxer sharply rotates the hips and shoulders. This turns the chin sideways and allows the punch to "slip" by. Muhammad Ali was famous for extremely fast and close slips, as was an early Mike Tyson.

In *ROCCO*, no punches are dealt out to the audience; but pinpricks — surely yes. For in addition to male hitting power, the performance also reveals erotic seduction of and between male bodies. This is still a sensitive topic: how many people involved in men's sports like boxing and football are prepared to come out of the closet?

The erotic undercurrent does not only concern a gender issue. In a broader sense, *ROCCO* investigates how aggression and love, tension and attraction come together "in a slip." In this way, *ROCCO* is sometimes reminiscent of a courtship dance from which it is difficult to tell with certainty whether the protagonists are entangled in a fight, or love each other with an intensity that borders on aggression.

#### knock-out

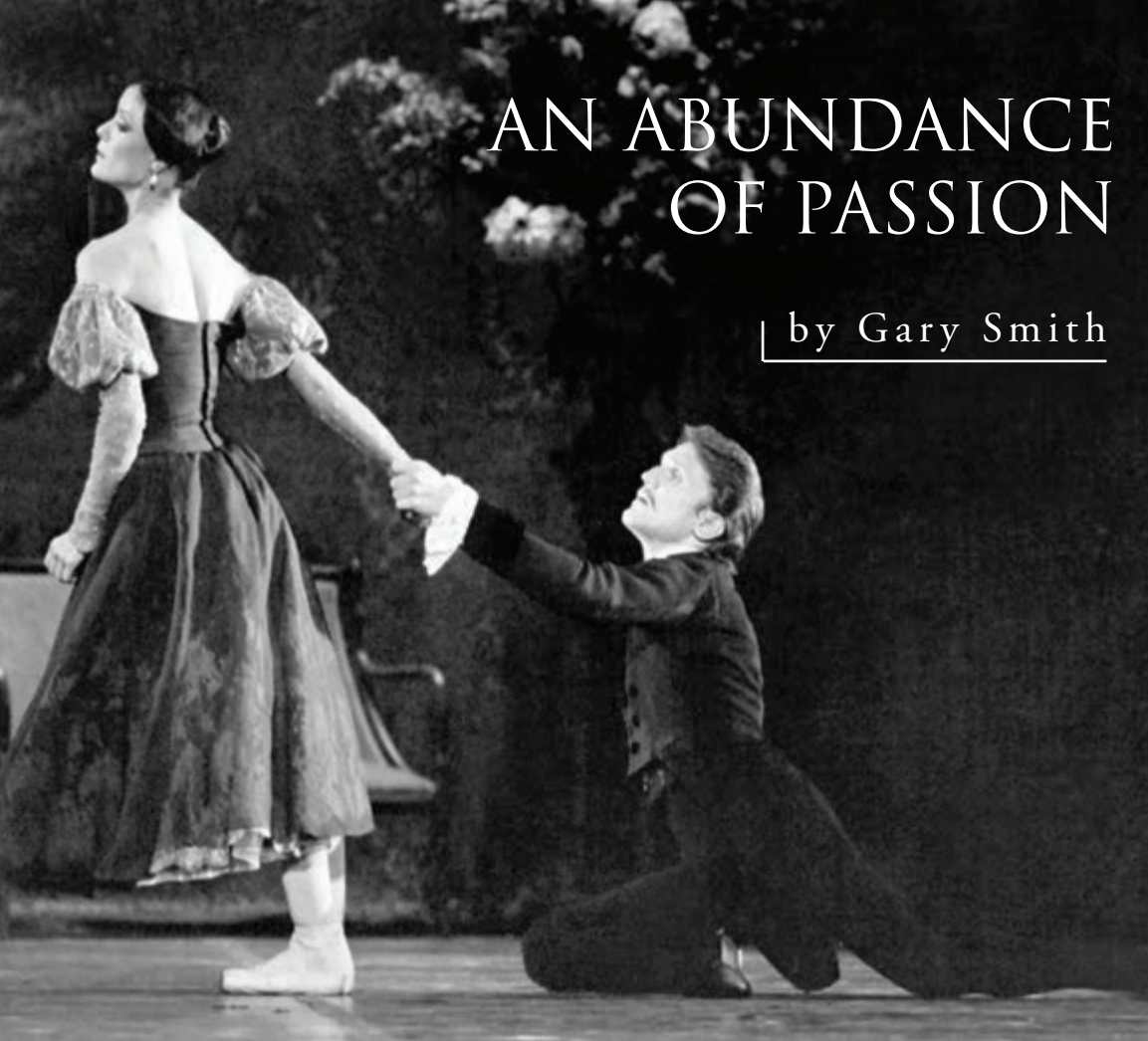
Knock-out (also K.O.) is one way in which a fighting match can end. A knock-out is normally awarded when a downed fighter is unable to get up and continue the fight within a given time span — usually due to fatigue, an injury, loss of balance or consciousness.

Ultimately, Visconti did not answer the question whether Rocco and his brothers made the right choices, or whether or not they fit the idealized image of 1960s Italy. In *ROCCO*, the choreographers leave it up to the audience to decide how to regard the choices of the dancers. After all, is that not the difference between sports and the art of dance? Whereas in the boxing ring the fight goes on until a winner emerges — preferably because one fighter knocks the other out — the dance is not expected to produce a winner. When one fighter is knocked out, all movement ceases.

The Boxer, the Dancer, the Body was originally published by ICKamsterdam in their Colophon series of booklets. It is reprinted here with the kind permission of Merel Heering and ICKamsterdam. This version has been slightly edited for Dance International. ▼

# AN ABUNDANCE OF PASSION

by Gary Smith



Across the ocean in Stuttgart, a large photo of the South African-born choreographer, who died in 1973, dominates a grey rehearsal studio where Anderson remembers the effect Cranko's *Onegin* had on him when he first saw it as a 19-year-old Canadian dancer who had just joined the Stuttgart company. "I desperately wanted to dance that ballet," he says.

A few weeks later, he did. Not the title role, but the part of Prince Gremin, the older man Tatiana settles for when she is rebuffed by the handsome and distant *Onegin*, who was her dream of a lover. "I was terrible," he shrugs. "Gremin is 60. I was a young boy. What did I know of life? I cried when it was over. I felt such a failure. I remember John put his hand on my shoulder. 'You will dance this ballet again. And you will be good,' he said."

## ONEGIN RETURNS TO THE NATIONAL BALLET OF CANADA

The roots of John Cranko's great story ballet, *Onegin*, lie in Germany, at Stuttgart Ballet, where it was created in 1965. But they reach out to Toronto and the National Ballet of Canada, a company that has had an ongoing love affair with Cranko's dramatic ballet since first dancing it in 1984.

When Stuttgart Ballet's artistic director Reid Anderson is in Toronto to oversee the Toronto company's remount of *Onegin* in March 2014, the visit will provide an exciting re-connection between Anderson and the National Ballet's artistic director Karen Kain. The two created magic when they danced opposite each other at that first Canadian production of *Onegin* three decades ago. They were not scheduled to appear together, but fate intervened when Kain's partner Luc Amyot was injured.

"It was an incredible partnership," recalls Kain about dancing with Anderson. "And Tatiana was the sort of role I lived for. There are few ballets as beautifully constructed as *Onegin*. You don't have to manufacture anything. You have everything you need to live the experience.

"When you dance *Onegin*, you give way to the steps and the story just unfolds. You must live the ballet from start to finish. It's a dramatic dance work that survives because it's so honest. You simply surrender to it. That's the genius of Cranko."

Anderson did dance Gremin again, for 15 years, opposite Marcia Haydée's Tatiana. "We just put on the costumes and danced," he says. "We didn't need to rehearse. It was all about living the roles."

With regard to dancing the lead, Anderson speaks about "emotional commitment" and his "intense, personal allegiance" both to the choreographer and the ballet. But he grounded his interpretation in the steps. "In John's ballets they tell the story, supply the emotion. When the choreography is right, the emotion comes without even thinking about it. In order for the audiences' hearts to soar, you must dance on the raw edge of passion. No matter how cool and aloof *Onegin* seems to be, you must make people believe there is something redeemable, something worth saving in him."

Georgette Tsinguirides, ballet mistress and coach in Stuttgart, is another living link to the ballet, and was very close with Cranko himself. The 86-year-old has devoted much of her life to preserving the integrity of his great works. "I don't know everything," she smiles, sitting in her tiny office at Stuttgart Ballet, surrounded by the memorabilia of a lifetime of ballet, "but I knew John Cranko and I know his work. He made a small regional company in Stuttgart into a ballet force. The dancers were his inspiration."



“There are few ballets as beautifully constructed as *Onegin*. You don’t have to manufacture anything. You have everything you need to live the experience.”

She praises *Onegin* for its “fascinating lifts and powerful moments of dance theatre.” During the rehearsals, she adds, “the atmosphere in the studio was so concentrated, so intense when John worked.”

Cranko had composer Kurt-Heinz Stolze arrange the Tchaikovsky score. Tsinguirides says, “The movement, of course, came out of the music. John would count, then change the counts. He also built the work on the dancers’ bodies, finding inspiration in their instincts.”

Tsinguirides admits the ballet wasn’t an immediate success. “But John didn’t give up. He made changes, tightened things. Even after the premiere we would work until two in the morning.”

Tsinguirides remembers the strength of the first *Onegin* cast. Ray Barra was a “wonderful” Onegin, but then he tore his meniscus and couldn’t dance. “John could not see anyone else in the role. He said, ‘That’s it. It’s over.’ Then we found Heinz Clauss in Hamburg.” As for Haydée as Tatiana, Tsinguirides says simply that she was “stunning.”

Kain, too, remembers Haydée, describing her as “devastating” in the role. “The thing is, each person who dances Tatiana does the very same steps, but you bring who you are to what you do. It’s not about the right arms or legs. It’s something deeper. It’s about what’s inside. If you are an actress, you can be wonderful in the role.”

Tsinguirides agrees. “John said, ‘You cannot pretend, you cannot be unreal. If you do, it will be false.’ A dancer is naked onstage. It’s about risking everything.”

Anderson sees *Onegin* that way, too. “It’s what you don’t do that matters. You walk onstage and you must become that man.”

Anderson has been coaching *Onegin* for more than 40 years. “What I try not to do is say what I did. The role must come out of the person playing the part. It must become personal, something more than words on a page, steps in a notebook, images on a screen. Young dancers finding the role of *Onegin* today are challenged to go far beyond technique to a private place where truth may be hiding,” he says. “Finding the essential soul of *Onegin* is like trying to open an emotional window. It’s like trying to discover the fire in your soul.”

Evan McKie, Canadian-born Stuttgart Ballet star, dances both *Onegin* and *Lensky*. “When I was a young boy I watched *The Sleeping Beauty* and thought ballet was all about flowers and tutus,” says McKie. “Then I saw [the National Ballet of Canada’s] *Onegin*. I think I was nine. Here was a role for a dance-actor. That made it special. Cranko’s choreography is so full of drama and passion.”

McKie had outstanding success in the role of *Onegin* in Moscow and in Paris. It’s not surprising Anderson considers him one of the greatest *Onegin*s he has seen, noting his elegance and dramatic integrity in the role.

“*Lensky* is so poetic and pure, very lyrical,” says McKie. “For me *Onegin* is prose, *Lensky* is poetry. That’s my point of departure.” Of the seven different *Tatianas* he’s partnered, McKie says, “Each one brought something personal. That’s the key. A different perspective can make the character and the ballet speak in very different ways.”

Before a performance McKie re-reads his Pushkin, on whose classic Russian verse-novel, *Eugene Onegin*, the ballet is based. “I go back to what is essential and to what my coaches have told me. Every step has a meaning and it’s important what each one says.”

McKie feels a kinship with the brooding Byronic *Onegin*. “Feeling disconnected from the group, feeling alone with my thoughts, these things are clear to me. Sometimes, like him, I’ve not said the right thing at the right time. *Onegin* doesn’t seem to have a caring relationship with himself and therefore doesn’t know how to behave with others,” he explains. “I’ve learned a lot about myself from roles like *Hamlet*, and *Iago*, too, but *Onegin* deals with issues that hit very close to home. I love the way Cranko’s ballet unlocks the spirit and opens the heart. That’s where genius comes in.”

The 30th-anniversary performances of Cranko’s *Onegin* in Toronto are an important connection between the life force that gave the ballet its birth in Germany almost 50 years ago and the loving spirit that is bringing it back to the stage with the National Ballet of Canada. ▼



# Navigational Skills

Dancer  
Stephanie Cumming

Contemporary dance fans in Vienna, Austria, know Stephanie Cumming as one of the city's best performers. As an original member of the local avant-garde troupe Liquid Loft, she's helped to put the small company on the international map over the past decade. Yet this former resident of the Alberta oil patch is virtually unknown in her native Canada. Only when Liquid Loft made its first cross-Canada tour in October 2013 did Cumming dance there professionally, in a full-length duet with Johnny Schoofs called *Running Sushi*.

Vienna was not on Cumming's mind while she was studying dance at the University of Calgary. Born in British Columbia, she moved at age 11 with her family to Fort McMurray, Alberta, where she studied ballet through high school. It was visiting teacher/choreographer Brian Webb who piqued her interest in contemporary dance. Aware that a classical dance career was not in her cards, she decided to enroll in the University of Calgary's newly created dance program.

"The first year or so, it was a big adjustment to modern dance technique," Cumming, 36, recalls during Liquid Loft's stop in Montreal. "But something switched in my mind and

I really delved into modern dance and thrived. I felt so much more free to express myself."

After she attended the 2000 Canada Dance Festival, Ottawa seemed to beckon.

"My dad had asked what I wanted for a graduation present and I said I'd like a plane ticket to the Canada Dance Festival. My mind was blown. I had no idea that this sort of dance or these companies existed in Canada."

It was not Ottawa but a point much further east that would change Cumming's course dramatically, however. In 2000, she was among the dance students her professor, Melissa Monteros, took to Gdansk, Poland, to perform one of her works. In Gdansk, Cumming met Johannes Randolph, who invited her to join his contemporary dance group in Linz, Austria. "I didn't really know where that was," laughs Cumming.

She arrived in Linz in mid-winter and "quickly saw how different things were. Linz is a pretty provincial place. My flat had no washing machine, TV or phone. I didn't realize that everyone had cell phones. At that time of year, it was pretty drab. I wondered, 'What have I done?'"

# Finds Liquid Loft in Vienna

by Victor Swoboda

Cumming, her two Polish flatmates and two Austrian dancers made up Randolph's troupe. They performed his new work three months later in Austria and Poland. "We were supposed to continue, but finances dried up and the project fell apart."

Despite this somewhat rough introduction to Europe, it never occurred to her to return to Canada. Cumming possessed a British passport — her father was born in England — which meant she could work in Europe legally, an advantage she came to appreciate as friends dealt with visa issues each year. Her first summer was spent in picturesque Salzburg, where, despite no experience, she taught English to international teenagers.

Still set on a dance career, Cumming "auditioned a lot" until a Viennese choreographer, Bert Gstettner, hired her for his company, Tanz\*Hotel. She supplemented her meagre dance salary by continuing to teach English.

Not speaking German, Cumming found socializing difficult. The Viennese, she found, were less open than Canadians. "You had to have the right entry point, and I hadn't found my place in the dance scene. My first few years, I didn't like Vienna at all."

During her year with Tanz\*Hotel, the group put on several shows, but Cumming did not enjoy working with the choreographer and left. She auditioned widely, travelling as far as Amsterdam, but for six months found nothing. "Then I auditioned for Chris Haring and got the job. His project fit so well. I found the place where I belonged. Performance-wise, it gave me so much opportunity to open up as a performer."

Cumming performed in Haring's quintet, *Fremdkörper* (Foreign Body). A solo made for her called *Legal Errors* followed, then a duet at ImPulsTanz, the Vienna International Dance Festival. "All of a sudden, people noticed me. I had arrived on the scene."

Haring, too, was making a name for himself. As a choreographer, he had a strong interest in redefining dance and in raising questions about social stereotypes that were being promoted by advertising and mass-market publications. Like many European avant-garde dancemakers, he enjoyed discussing theoretical notions about art.

"Sometimes discussions can go quite deep to a point where I kind of lose the thread and prefer to go at things from a practical, physical standpoint," says Cumming. "But I think it's very important to have those discussions, to look at a work from a more theoretical, conceptual point of view. In Europe, they're into the conceptual. It can go a bit far. There was a period in dance in Vienna when you felt that everyone was trying to become a conceptual artist."

Thanks to a bit of luck, perseverance and talent, Cumming has found a richly satisfying life in an unexpected place.

In 2004, Haring, Cumming and two other regular collaborators, composer Andreas Berger and dramaturge Thomas Jelinek, formed Liquid Loft. From the outset, says Cumming, each member had a clear role. Although ideas for works come from Haring, who has ultimate authority, the pieces emerge out of a collective effort. "I have some choreographic input and assist Chris, but my main role is as a performer. There's no friction that way."

Liquid Loft has toured many places in Europe and has gone as far afield as Shanghai, China, which led to a choreographic collaboration with Jin Xing Dance Theatre. While Haring was collaborating on the piece in Shanghai, Cumming remained in Vienna where she created her first solo for Liquid Loft, *Ab Poetry*. The solo was performed at the 2009 ImPulsTanz on a bill with Jin Xing Dance Theatre.

In Monaco, Cumming was Haring's assistant on a "really exciting and cool" project with the Ballet de Monte-Carlo. "It was a big thrill to work and take class with them. You saw immediately how different ballet dancers are from contemporary dancers. They work with a history, training and structure that are different from what we do."

Although the seven ballet dancers were "amazing, so open," they had limitations. "Chris asked them to improvise and they didn't know what that meant. They did choreography from pieces they knew. But they worked like hell. The cliché of a passion for dance is true! They always wanted to be perfect, always refining."

Cumming was fortunate to be in Vienna for two developments that boosted the local contemporary dance scene. In 2002, a new dance centre, Tanzquartier Wien, opened as a place to rehearse and create contemporary dance. “Before that, there was no real dance production house. It was all spread out,” says Cumming. “Tanzquartier brought prestige. What had been more underground was brought to the forefront. Tanzquartier has programs for emerging artists and a festival for young artists.” The other development was the rapid growth of ImpulsTanz, which exploded into what is possibly Europe’s largest contemporary dance festival.

Cumming sees Vienna as a burgeoning contemporary dance town. Whereas the city at first attracted Eastern European dancers after the collapse of the Eastern Bloc, more recently dancers from Western countries are seeing it as an attractive place to work as well. “There’s now a triangle of Berlin, Brussels and Vienna. Vienna is not oversaturated like the other two where there are so many choreographers and dancers. It’s not that big yet. People organize their own activity outside the big venues. There are plenty of spaces you can rent.” Nonetheless, Liquid Loft is only one of a few Austrian companies to have stable gov-

ernment funding. The company recently received a second four-year grant that enables it to have its own studios.

Lately Cumming has turned more attention to acting. She played the title role in the film *Shirley — Visions of Reality* by Austrian director Gustav Deutsch, which was shown in Montreal in October 2013 at the Festival du Nouveau Cinema. At the time, Cumming was preparing a dramatic solo for a Vienna theatre company with a premiere set in January.

While in Montreal, Cumming married Guy Cools, whom she’d met at the Banff Centre. A respected Belgian-born dramaturge who formerly lived in Montreal, Cools brings a clear aesthetic sense to dance and drama productions.

With her roots extending ever more deeply into Viennese soil, Cumming does not see herself returning soon to Canada. “I’m used to my European lifestyle. I don’t have a car, I live in the city centre, everything is nearby. I’m used to travelling easily and cheaply to different places.”

Thanks to a bit of luck, perseverance and talent, Cumming has found a richly satisfying life in an unexpected place. “A lot of people might want to travel or explore or try new things, but they’re afraid or don’t know how it’s possible. It’s not for everybody. It was the right thing for me.” ▼

The image features a male ballet dancer in a white leotard with an orange waistband, performing a high arabesque on a large, dark rock. His right leg is extended vertically, and his left leg is extended horizontally. The background shows a city skyline with several tall buildings, including the Vancouver Tower, and a body of water in the foreground.

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# Dancenotes



Photo: Body Narratives Collective

## REVEALED BY LIGHT

This long-exposure photograph reveals the patterns of movement by dancers Meghan Goodman and Chu-Lynne Ng over a few moments of time, traced by the lights attached to their costumes. The image — a tangible record of their ephemeral dance — is from *Dark Room: The realm of symbols, science and memories*, by Julia Carr and Goodman's Body Narratives Collective, presented in Vancouver in December.

Photo: Dmitry Lovetsky



Retired Canadian astronaut Colonel Chris Hadfield traded his space suit for a colourful ballet costume to join the National Ballet of Canada onstage to perform the role of a Cannon Doll in *The Nutcracker* on December 24. Celebrity walk-on roles are a tradition in this classic Christmas ballet. In the National Ballet's version, the Cannon Dolls guest roles are costumed Russian Petrouchka dolls who shoot a cannon into the audience to begin the battle scene in Act I.

## Astronaut Hadfield in *Nutcracker*



Photo: Bruce Zinger

## Mao's Last Dancer is Australian of the Year

Queensland Ballet's artistic director Li Cunxin has been announced as Queensland's Australian of the Year 2014.

Born in rural China, Cunxin was spotted by Madam Mao's Beijing Dance Academy at age 11 and eventually became one of China's foremost ballet dancers. He defected to the West in 1981 and went on to dance with the Houston Ballet for 16 years. In 1995, he moved to Australia to become principal artist with the Australian Ballet. His autobiography, *Mao's Last Dancer*, became a critically acclaimed film in 2009.



Photo: Steven Siewert

## LACHAMBRE'S MONTREAL DANCE PRIZE

Benoît Lachambre, artistic director of Par B.L.eux, as well as a performer, choreographer, researcher and educator, was awarded the 2013 Montreal Dance Prize for his fearless piece *Snakeskins*.

## Vancouver Mayor's Awards Jamieson and Martin



Karen Jamieson in *Collision*  
Photo: Chris Randle

Vancouver's creative talents were recognized for their achievements with the 2013 Mayor's Arts Awards. The dance award honouree was dancer, choreographer and educator Karen Jamieson, who has been at the forefront of developing interdisciplinary experimental dance, incorporating influences such as martial arts, First Nations culture and yoga with dance.

The Vancouver awards also recognized emerging artist Josh Martin. Originally from Alberta, Martin is a regular performer/collaborator for Wen Wei Dance, and is artistic co-director of 605 Collective.

## LÉVEILLÉ'S PRIX DU CALQ

Daniel Léveillé received the Prix du CALQ (Conseil des arts et des lettres Québec) for best choreography for his work *Solitudes Solo*. It was selected from a list of original works presented in Quebec between July 1, 2012 and June 30, 2013.

## inbrief

Bolshoi Ballet dancer Pavel Dmitrichenko, best known for his portrayal of villains in *Swan Lake* and *Ivan the Terrible*, was sentenced to six years in prison over his involvement in the acid attack on artistic director Sergei Filin.

In September, Cuban-born dancer José Manuel Carreño began a three-year term as artistic director of Ballet San Jose.

Dance education specialist Kate Cornell is the new executive director of the Canadian Dance Assembly.

Jeanne Brabants, founder of the Royal Ballet of Flanders, passed away on January 2, 2014, at the age of 93 in Antwerp.

Alberta Ballet's second Joni Mitchell-based ballet has been postponed on the request of the singer.

Farooq Chaudhry, co-founder and producer of Akram Khan Dance Company, has joined English National Ballet as producer.

## Thakkar's Lifetime Achievement

Menaka Thakkar was recently honoured with the 2013 Governor General's Performing Arts Award for Lifetime Artistic Achievement in Dance. This is the highest honour that Canada can offer a performing artist. This was also the first time it has been bestowed on a non-Western dance artist.

The award recognizes Thakkar's contributions as a performer, choreographer, teacher and institution builder since she immigrated to Canada from India. For some 40 years, she has been a leader in bringing the Indian dance forms of bharata natyam and Odissi to Canadians.



Photo: David Hou



# Global Tap

Snapshots of Ofer Ben and Avi Miller, Danny Nielsen and Leela Petronio

Tap dance has humble roots, beginning centuries ago when African-American slaves melded the rhythms of Africa with the percussive footwork of Irish step dancing and English clogging. Tap continued to develop in the United States alongside jazz music up until the 20th century, but when the invention of film brought tap to global audiences, it began to develop into a global art form.

In Israel, Ya'acov Kalusky based his dancing on the classic styles of film stars such as Fred Astaire and Gene Kelly. He was the first teacher of Avi Miller, who started tapping with Kalusky in Tel Aviv at age 12 in the early 1970s. Miller, in 1990, would in turn become the first teacher of Ofer Ben. The two men hit it off, starting a partnership that would become known as Miller & Ben — The Israeli Hoofers. In 1988, they began running the annual Israel Jazz Tap Festivals.

Initially, the duo's primary influence was Kalusky. But upon travelling to the U.S. at the turn of the millennium, they were introduced to the more contemporary style of rhythm tap, which is heavily influenced by jazz music, focused more on complex musical rhythms. In

by Gina McGalliard

New York — where they are now based — they produce the Big Apple Tap Festival, held biannually in November and May. The festival began as Tradition in Tap, when it was designed to honour the tap masters of an earlier generation whose numbers were dwindling.

"We came to the U.S. to study and capture as much material and as much style of the great masters as we could, because they were disappearing very quickly," says Miller. "Tap dancing was created by African-American slaves, and here we are two white kids from Israel [championing] this art form." Miller and Ben still perform together as the Israeli Hoofers, often incorporating Israeli dance moves into their work.

Calgary-born Danny Nielsen is a young up-and-comer who debuted his full-length show, *LOVE.BE.BEST.FREE.*, last fall in Vancouver where he was then based. It featured live piano music, as well as a singer/songwriter, and three other Canadian tappers: Shay Kuebler, also a contemporary dancer and choreographer; Ryan Foley, who directs his own tap company, the Next Step; and Johnathan Morin, a finalist in

*So You Think You Can Dance Canada*. By giving the audience a story to follow — one man's journey to find love — Nielsen hoped that *LOVE.BE.BEST.FREE.* would have a broad audience appeal.

"I feel like tap dancers are always watching other tap dancers," says Nielsen. "I'll watch it all day long, but I can't say the man on the street is going to enjoy or understand it ... I'm hoping to expose a new audience to tap dance."

As a teenager, Nielsen studied with masters such as Jimmy Slyde at the Vancouver Tap Festival. Sas Selfjord, executive director of the Vancouver Tap Dance Society, which produces the festival, describes Nielsen's style as featuring "fast intricate footwork," and notes his focus on both musicality and visual line. Nielsen is presently in Austin, Texas, working with Tapestry Dance Company, a troupe founded by rhythm tapper Acia Gray and ballet/jazz artist Deirdre Strand.

In Europe, Parisian Leela Petronio's Hip Tap Project was founded in 1999. However, two years later, Petronio joined the European cast of *Stomp*, a



British theatrical show that uses everyday objects to create percussion, which put her fledgling company on hold until 2006.

Tap has been slow to develop in France, says Petronio, because the French tend to associate tap dancing with the long-ago golden age of Hollywood and not be as aware of contemporary artists who have modernized the art form.

Petronio, by contrast, was very much influenced by the funky jazz and rhythm tap of artists such as Slyde, a close friend of her mother Sarah Petronio, a Mumbai-born tapper who was instrumental in bringing tap dance to her adopted country of France. As a teenager, Petronio studied with hoofers such as Cholly Atkins and Gregory Hines on trips to the U.S. with her mother, who often taught at American tap festivals during the tap renaissance of the 1980s.

“My path has been educational — bringing tap and rhythm [to schools], but also bringing tap to the stage as a valid art form,” says Petronio, whose Hip Tap Project ensemble blends tap with other movement forms such as hip hop and body percussion. Today, Petronio still sometimes appears with *Stomp*, and the Hip Tap Project regularly performs in France and other European countries.

Elsewhere in the world, tap featured in the opening ceremony of the 2000 Sydney Olympic Games in Australia. Led by the popular Australian tapper Adam Garcia, who was backed up by scores of other dancers, the industrial-themed performance was reminiscent of the blue-collar-flavoured hit show *Tap Dogs*, created by Australian choreographer Dein Perry for six male dancers in the mid-1990s, and still touring today.

The Cuban-based Rumba Tap melds Afro-Cuban rhythms and music with American tap dance and jazz music, while the Japanese company Tapage incorporates Asian influences. Spain's Tap Olé merges tap dancing with Spanish guitar. The future will likely continue to bring other innovations, as new inspirations further the art form. ▼

# INSIDED

## Dance in Schools: An Argument for More

by David Chorney

**A**cross North America, dance is represented in curricula for grades K-12 in all provinces in Canada and in most of the United States. Dance skills are usually taught by physical education teachers, who have great responsibility for how students perceive and participate in dance throughout their schooling. And beyond, because it is during those impressionable years that attitudes and aptitudes are established.

PE teachers tend to be extensively involved in sport and physical activity both casually at home and in more organized situations at schools and community centres. Their reasons for becoming a PE teacher vary, as I discovered when I asked undergraduate students at the University of Alberta, where I am an associate professor in the Department of Secondary Education, why they chose physical education as their teaching major. Responses ranged from a personal desire to remain physically active, to helping children become more active, to wanting to coach students in sports.

Sports are still the key focus in many PE programs. Teachers tend to teach similarly to the way they themselves were taught, and the traditional paradigm of PE as limited to health and fitness is the one they know. Yet dance has much more to offer, encouraging a creative mind/body relationship that improves natural control of the muscular system, reducing stress and providing more energy by enhancing the body's overall functioning.

When students from grade 5, and from grades 9 to 12, were given four different dance activities — ballroom, hip hop, Dance Dance Revolution (a video game focusing on dance moves) and Wii Fit — research suggests they were motivated to learn this material because they had freedom to choose which genre of dance to do, and personal interest and intrinsic enjoyment was a focus in their learning. Students initially thought they would prefer the video game, but, in fact, preferred the

“traditional” ballroom dances taught by their teacher.

Another motivator for dance is self-expression. Dance facilitates holistic development for students, providing a metaphorical lens for learning about and expressing themselves and their world. It allows students to experience the emotions involved in being active and physically moving. Engaging in dance expands movement repertoires, thought processes and attitudes in a different way than other physical activities can.

Since most students will dance in a social setting at some point in their lives, exposure to a variety of genres is important. Yet if a physical education program does have a dance component, it typically lacks depth and variety. There are several barriers to improving the situation. Due to its perceived lack of importance, physical education continues to face program cuts and insufficient scheduling. The onus is on individual teachers to promote the value of a dance program, but they, too, often underestimate the value of dance-related content.

Another barrier is that dance tends to be considered a female activity and, typically, society values activities considered masculine more highly. It is a challenge to fight such stereotypes, which contributes to the marginalized status of dance in the larger culture as well.

Educators need to become more aware of these barriers and challenge themselves to question their own values. Physical education programs that only include team and individual sports do not address the needs of all students. If dance is not taught within the school context, many students will never learn how to dance even as adults nor gain the appreciation of all that dance offers.

*Dr. David Chorney presented some of these ideas at the 2013 Canadian Society for the Study of Education Conference in Victoria, British Columbia. ▼*



# Vintage Isadora

BY PAUL-JAMES DWYER

## The story of a photograph

The discovery of an unknown photograph of Isadora Duncan (1877-1927), often called the mother of modern dance, is an exciting event, especially since she was a strict guardian of her own image. There are few photos in the public domain of her dancing, though she posed for studio shots while working with great photographers like Edward Steichen and Arnold Genthe.

Through a private art dealer, I recently came across a vintage sepia-toned photograph of a solo dancer surrounded by Greek Doric columns. Although “dancer, unknown” is written on the back, I immediately recognized her as Duncan and purchased the photo through my company, dance OREMUS danse, which is inspired by Duncan’s artistic legacy. We have been collecting Isadora Duncan memorabilia since 1973, some of which is now part of York University’s Scott Library in Toronto.

The freedom and articulation in the pose are typical Duncan style. She was

known for creating opposite gestures with each limb as per classical Greek sculptural ideals, as seen here. As well, her fingers “speak to the air,” and many writers of the time refer to her extremely expressive hands. The Dionysian thrust of the head is also typically Duncan. That it was taken at twilight, i.e., low light, conforms to her later-in-life insistence that she be seen in subdued light that did not give away her age. She would be about 40 years old in the photo, based on the fact that her hair is short — she cut it off in 1913 after her two children drowned in a tragic accident in the Seine — and, also, she is no longer slim.

The flora in the photo is from a semi-tropical climate, as in California, suggesting the photo was taken on her 1917 west coast tour, which included San Francisco, the city of her birth. Duncan had become world famous since she left the United States in the 1890s for Europe, and she was considered great copy by the media. Her

return was prompted by the First World War; her school near Paris was being used as a Red Cross hospital, and it was impossible to tour or perform.

On the back of the unrestored photo, which is very dark, is a signature in pencil by H. Edgerton McAllister. The photographer had signed his name in pencil on the back mount, which they usually do in the front right-hand corner (he couldn’t sign the front as the image lacks a border). Research on him has uncovered nothing to date, but McAllister is probably one of the numerous journalists Duncan met on her tour.

The photo had previously been donated to the National Ballet of Canada’s volunteer committee by the Toronto dance and rare book dealers, Friends of Terpsichore. They have a museum-quality collection of vintage dance photographs, covering the 20th century, from which they generously donated this work for fundraising purposes. On the back of the photo, \$200 is marked in pencil, which is probably the sum it fetched in the National Ballet’s fundraising auction.

While restoring the image, my colleague Peter Stadnyk took many shots of the photograph with intense flash, bombarding it with light. This allowed us a closer examination of the facial features — including the big smile and small upturned nose — which convinced me that it was indeed Duncan. The same head gesture and thrust of the neck is visible in photos taken of her at the Acropolis in Athens by Steichen in 1921.

The final step in the restoration was to take a photograph outdoors in full sunlight of the original, which was then lightened using Photoshop. No pixels were added or edited.

Unfortunately, the photo is printed on a textured, acid-free paper, which makes the restoration very difficult. If the paper had been glossy, it would have had much higher resolution after restoration.

Because Isadora Duncan has left us with mostly posed images of herself, the uniqueness of this photo is that she is caught in a candid moment of lyrical freedom and joy, truly representative of the style of dance for which she became world famous. ▼

# Michael Crabb's Notebook

**A**mong her many talents, Canadian-born, Spanish ballerina Tamara Rojo is a publicist's dream. Rojo, artistic director of English National Ballet since 2012, has an instinct for coining words in ways guaranteed to attract widespread media attention.

In a July interview with London's *Time Out*, Rojo commented on a subject that has generated lively discussion in dance circles for many years, namely the dearth of prominent female ballet choreographers. However, rather than bemoan the disparity as a breach of gender equality, Rojo approached the issue thoughtfully. It is not simply, she argued, that women choreographers are unfairly deprived of opportunities. It also deprives audiences of a valuable human perspective. And here's where Rojo dropped her bombshell.

"Very often we see relationships approached from a male perspective," Rojo told Lyndsey Winship. "Like in porn, it shapes the way you look at things."

It was only a short headline-writer's jump from this to "Ballet is like porn," and thanks to the internet Rojo's comments were soon cyber-vaulting their way around the globe. But Rojo was not grasping for headlines. She had an argument.

The choreographic process for men "tends to be a more physical approach," Rojo told Winship. "Men start with the steps. I find women start with the emotional landscape. They say, 'This is the situation; let's find the language for it.' With men it tends to be, 'This is the language,' and then you try to work out the situation through the steps."

Rojo's point has merit, particularly when applied to a newer generation of male choreographers who often do appear more driven by physical than emotional imperatives. As Rojo observes: "Female sensitivity is different ... there are issues that I want to see on stage approached by women."

Rojo has committed herself to presenting female choreographers and had already approached two unnamed pros-

pects as she planned her first English National Ballet season, but they were both pregnant. "They are there and willing, but at the moment I have to let them have children," Rojo told Winship. "That's one reason we don't see more female choreographers. Women take breaks to have children and then they don't have the support to get back into work. Another part is that we are not aggressive in self-promotion. I've received dozens of applications from choreographers and very few are women."

Surely, therein lies the rub. The active pool of female choreographers in ballet is small. If you asked the average North American fan to name today's hottest ballet choreographers, the likely list would be Alexei Ratmansky, Christopher Wheeldon and, perhaps, Wayne McGregor, although the latter is a crossover from contemporary dance. If you'd asked 20 years ago, Twyla Tharp might have been on the list, but she was a crossover, too, in her case from post-modern dance.

In December 2012, *Pointe* magazine's Margaret Fuhrer examined the issue in an interesting column titled "Seen, Not Heard." Fuhrer cited research conducted by American choreographer Amy Seiwert who had examined all the works programmed by a wide range of ballet companies for their coming seasons. Fewer than 10 percent were by women. Seiwert noted that the bigger the company, the smaller the proportion — as exemplified by Britain's Royal Ballet, which has not presented a work by a woman in its mainstage season in more than 13 years.

Many and various are the explanations offered for a circumstance that seems at odds with the achievements of female choreographers in dance forms other than ballet and, even within it, of a formidable line of ballet company founders such as Marie Rambert, Ninette de Valois and Celia Franca, who allowed her own budding choreographic career to languish as she focused her efforts on establishing the National Ballet of Canada. Then there are all the women who have or still head major in-



Tamara Rojo  
Photo: Johan Persson

ternational ballet companies, Rojo and Canada's Karen Kain being notable current examples.

Some have suggested that the culture of classical ballet, reinforced even today by a powerful patriarchal zeitgeist within the ballet world, tends to condition women to be interpreters rather than creators. On the basis of numbers alone, ballet is far more competitive for women than men. The exalted technical expectations placed on today's ballerinas leave little time for the kind of rumination that feeds choreographic curiosity.

As Barnard College dance professor Lynn Garafola has noted, it is in smaller or more experimentally oriented companies that female choreographers have tended to thrive. Canadian Aszure Barton is a case in point. Similarly, Vancouverite Crystal Pite, now much sought after, earned her international reputation working with Nederlands Dans Theater.

It was our own National Ballet of Canada that, in 2009, gave Pite her first opportunity to work with a large classical troupe, and not, Kain insists, because of affirmative action. "In the end, you commission choreographers because they're good," says Kain. Which still leaves the question of how to nurture more women. Not for the sake of it, but because women offer an importantly different view of the world we all share. ▼



Above: Misty Owens leads members of the Brooklyn Parkinson Group at the Mark Morris Dance Center  
Photo: Amber Star Merkens

Left: Members of the Brooklyn Parkinson Group at the Mark Morris Dance Center  
Photo: Amber Star Merkens

Background: Members of the Toronto-based Dancing with Parkinson's class  
Photo: Jessica Dargo Caplan

# THE PARKINSON'S CONNECTION

HOW MARK MORRIS DANCE GROUP MAKES A DIFFERENCE

BY PAULA CITRON

It is Toronto's Luminato Festival 2013. The big-ticket dance item is the Mark Morris Dance Group performing the master choreographer's iconic 1988 *L'Allegro, il Penseroso ed il Moderato*, considered by many to be one of the great classics of modern dance. The performance takes place at the cavernous Sony Centre.

Across town at the tiny Daniels Spectrum, the festival is also featuring *L'Allegro Movement Project*, which showcases excerpts from the full-length work. The dancers include 34 elementary schoolchildren and 14 people who have Parkinson's disease.

The seeds of *L'Allegro Movement Project* go back to 2008 when the Brooklyn-based Mark Morris Dance Group first appeared at Luminato. At that time, company dancers conducted two open workshops with Toronto Parkinson's patients. For this visit, those workshops have expanded into a full-fledged performance.

How the Mark Morris Dance Group became linked to Parkinson's disease is a matter of serendipity. In 2001, Olie Westheimer, founder and executive director of the Brooklyn Parkinson Group, approached the company about holding dance classes for her members. David Leventhal was a company dancer at the time who got tapped to teach the class.

"Olie was looking for something fun and social for her members to do," explains Leventhal. "She had a background in dance and had a hunch that dance and Parkinson's would be a good fit. We had no experience with special needs people, but, over time, we began to see that a professional dancer's training of mind and body suited the needs of Parkinson's patients, and we developed exercises that focused on elements such as balance and co-ordination."

Parkinson's is a progressive, degenera-

tive, neurological disorder that, through the loss of dopamine, affects parts of the brain controlling movement, particularly the basal ganglia. Dr. Michael Angel is a neurologist at Toronto Western Hospital and Brampton's William Osler Health System. "Parkinson's patients feel stiff and slow, and have difficulty initiating movement," he explains. "Dance gives them a kickstart through a sensory bypass of the damaged brain circuits. Movement can be facilitated by the rhythm of music. The why is unknown, but dance seems to be a therapeutic intervention."

Leventhal is currently program director and founding teacher of Dance for PD, an official arm of the Mark Morris Dance Group. Since 2003, the program has conducted classes for Parkinson's patients wherever the company tours, which includes teaching snippets of Morris' repertoire. Dance for PD is also considered a world expert in teacher instruction. The first teacher-training workshop was held in 2007. The latest Dance for PD innovation is certifying teachers who are trained to conduct PD dance classes.

Says Leventhal: "As recently as 20 years ago, physical activity for Parkinson's sufferers was discouraged. Now, because of research into physical modalities, exercise is seen as neuroproductive. Dance seems to have a beneficial effect on patients. While moving to music, their physicality becomes more fluid and covers a bigger range of motion. In the feedback, they tell us that they didn't know they could move so differently, that they could perform choreography while seated. Music and rhythm are key."

Among the participants of *L'Allegro Movement Project* were students of Sarah Robichaud's Dancing with Parkinson's class. Robichaud, a professional dancer and personal trainer who has written two books on fitness, was the first Canadian to undergo instructor training at the very

first Dance for PD teachers' workshop. She founded Toronto's Dancing with Parkinson's as a result of meeting Andy Barrie seven years ago. Barrie, the former host of CBC Toronto's *Metro Morning*, had just been diagnosed with Parkinson's and was looking for someone to help him exercise. In her research into Parkinson's, Robichaud came across the Dance for PD program.

Says Robichaud: "Parkinson's is a community that needs help in moving. Dance can improve control of rigidity, freezing, tremors, loss of co-ordination and loss of balance, while improving flexibility, muscle strength and range of movement. It is regenerative. In dance, movement happens through the back door. It tricks the body. People who shuffle into the room or use a walker are liberated through dance."

In choosing music, Robichaud stresses the importance of a strong beat. Her classes involve many styles of music, ranging from marches and Latin rhythms, to Broadway and hip hop, all designed to lengthen and strengthen muscles. Robichaud uses imagery visualization, for example, telling the students to follow a butterfly and catch it, which addresses suspension of the body. Doing mirror exercises, or following the movement of the teacher, improves the neuroplasticity of the brain.

She also introduces voice and projection because Parkinson's disease softens the vocal chords. In her classes, students are called upon to sing. The choreography that her students learn involves storytelling through movement, because it is easier to remember. The totality of the class structure is designed to initiate a neurological pathway and stimulate muscle movement. The main focus of the class, however, is to have fun. "Dance class should be a joyful experience," Robichaud declares.

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Barrie, who is chairman of the Dancing with Parkinson's board, gives an example of how rhythm helps movement become more natural. "If I sing *O Canada* to myself as I walk, I move in a straight line by keeping time to the marching rhythm. The minute I stop singing, my walking becomes erratic and irregular."

Every class has one main teacher, one assistant teacher and four other helpers, who rotate through the positions. This plethora of teachers is due to safety issues. "You need eyes everywhere," says Robichaud, who has trained seven instructors on a one-on-one basis. She also points out that a Parkinson's disease dance class involves more than just dance. "Parkinson's dance teachers must have patience, understanding and compassion to manage this special group of elderly people. We never treat them as babies or invalids. We work hard to restore their dignity. We never call them patients; rather, they are students."

Robichaud points out that loss of dopamine causes depression, and a dance class can counteract this mood disorder by being a positive experience. Also, a by-product of Parkinson's disease is isolation because many patients are housebound, some literally afraid to leave their homes, embarrassed by their physical condition. Dance class becomes an important social event in their lives, perhaps the only one they have.

Adds Robichaud: "Dance classes are important because they provide a safe environment. A nice side effect is that the students' personal caregivers get an hour off duty — a breather, as it were. They know their charges are well taken care of."

Robichaud now runs classes in four locations in Ontario, renting space in churches and senior centres. Her non-profit Dancing with Parkinson's charges \$5 to \$12 a class (depending on the size of the class), which is just enough money to cover the cost of the teachers, musician and room rental. While Robichaud applauds the funds that go to Parkinson's disease research, she wishes that some monies could be diverted to dance classes. "Funds should be set aside to make a difference to the people living with Parkinson's right now," she states.

Perhaps the best testament to the relationship between dance and Parkinson's is from Robichaud's students who took part in *L'Allegro Movement Project*. Graeme Hail is 82 and was diagnosed with Parkinson's six years ago; Horst Peter is 79 and was diagnosed 15 years ago; William Harker is 74 and was diagnosed three years ago.

To a person, they describe how Parkinson's limits their world, and the difficulties they have with sticking to an exercise program, as well as their lack of motivation. Dance class, however, puts them in touch with other patients like themselves, and is a fun place where they can do things they can't do on their own.

Says Hail: "In dance class, you drop your inhibitions when you move to music." And from Peter: "I know there is no cure for Parkinson's, but for one hour a week, life becomes easier and more pleasurable." And from Harker: "Dance addresses Parkinson's limitations with fun and a spirit of caring for each other."

"When you see the light in their eyes and the smiles on their faces," says Robichaud, "you know that dance class has given Parkinson's disease clients a great gift. We know we are making a difference." ▼

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# A HOT TOPIC IN NEUROSCIENCE — BY PAULA CITRON

The efficacy of dance classes on patients suffering from Parkinson's disease has become a hot topic in scientific research. Prestigious journals such as *Frontiers in Neurology* and *Arts & Health* have published significant research papers. For example, a joint study by University Hospital, Freiburg im Breisgau, Germany, and the University of Zurich researched the impact of dance on both functional mobility and quality of life. The dance department of London's University of Roehampton published a study on the impact of ballet classes on Parkinson's patients taught by members of the English National Ballet.

Canada is one of the leaders in researching dance and Parkinson's disease. Here are snapshots of two studies, as described by the scientists who are conducting the research.

DOUGLAS P. MUNOZ, CENTRE FOR NEUROSCIENCE STUDIES, QUEEN'S UNIVERSITY, KINGSTON, ONTARIO

In this study, Parkinson's patients are told to look at a flash of light. They are then asked to look in the opposite direction away from the same light source. The key here is measuring reaction time. When looking directly at the light, the Parkinson's patients' reaction time is the same as people without the disease. In the second instance, the conscious movement of looking away is difficult. As Munoz points out, the brain disorder caused by Parkinson's disease has lessened the ability of the basal ganglia to function properly.

As it relates to dance, what is going on in the brain is measured before and after a class through eye-tracking. After a dance class, patients show better control of their eye movement. They are faster in focusing their eyes away from the light source and make fewer mistakes. "Somehow," says Munoz, "the music and rhythm of a dance class help the Parkinson's patients to use parts of the brain that are broken. Dance becomes a shortcut. It acts like a lubricant to promote smoother eye movement. For an hour or so after dance class, the patient is better at tackling difficult tasks. The studies are indicating that dance can be a viable disease therapy."

JOSEPH DESOUSA, SYSTEMS NEUROSCIENCE, YORK UNIVERSITY, TORONTO

DeSouza is researching how the brain learns movement (conscious thought) and forms a habit (instinctive muscle memory). His tool is dance, specifically how dance is encoded in the brain, and how music is converted to movement. His subjects are the National Ballet of Canada apprentices who comprise the outreach company YOU Dance, under artistic director Lindsay Fischer, who perform concerts for schoolchildren.


The apprentices undergo MRIs before, during and after learning one minute of Fischer's choreography. For the first MRI, the subjects are asked to wiggle their toes, a conscious movement that activates the motor

cortex. They then visualize themselves dancing as they listen to the music for the first time — creating a freestyle dance in their heads. (The music in each MRI is repeated five times.) The next MRI occurs seven weeks into learning the dance. This time they visualize themselves performing the actual choreography. The last MRI visualization takes place after many performances. According to the data, as the body becomes more familiar with the choreography (or as a physical habit is formed), activity in the basal ganglia becomes more active.

"In the first MRI," says DeSouza, "the screen is virtually blank. Moving from the auditory, to imagining the physicality, stimulates the basal ganglia, the area of the brain disrupted by Parkinson's disease."

There is an interesting side effect to this study that Fischer has discovered. "Visualization makes dancers better at technique," he says. "If you visualize a perfect double

tour, it can help you to execute it in reality. Rather than a teacher saying 'Improve your turnout,' a student should be directed to 'Imagine the perfect turnout.' It's a different process. A grasp of detail is stronger than abstract imagery." ▼

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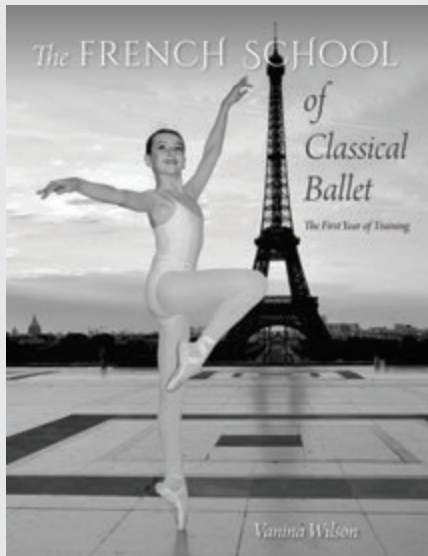
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# Mediawatch

## QUOTABLE



### Reasons for Révérence

“In this day and age, the whole concept of the *révérence* has become an anachronism in many ballet schools. Fortunately, it still prevails in others. The *révérence* shows consideration, deference, and respect for the teacher. Such respect is essential to the carrying out of the class and the progress of the students. There is a master and pupil relationship throughout the class that must be maintained up to the end of practice. The *révérence* is also an opportunity to review, in a quiet way, the basic alignment and bearing of the body, as it is done at the beginning of class, before going off to the outside world in which more natural and relaxed positions prevail. It can be more or less elaborate, but it should be included at the end of each class ... ”

#### Excerpt from *The French School of Classical Ballet: The First Year of Training*

by Vanina Wilson, University Press of Florida, 2013, 366 pages, \$39.95 US, [www.upf.com](http://www.upf.com)

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photos by David How of dancers, Julian Wilcock in August by Collin Connor



# Crystal Ballet

For Digital Viewing Only

Steven McRae and Sarah Lamb in Crystal Ballet's *Genesis*  
Photo: David West

Over the years, with his own splendid (and much missed) Arc Dance Company, Brandstrup has honed his talent for relating acting and dance, and it is evident in the performances here. There is special poignancy and tenderness in the Cojocarú-Kobborg interpretation of *Winter*.

Ernst Meisner, a Dutch National Ballet dancer and an international choreographer, deals with *Summer* (Daria Klimentova and Vadim Muntagirov) and *Autumn* (Erina Takahashi and Esteban Berlanga). He treats his seasons with less differentiation but with exhilarating dance virtuosity in both solos and duets — Muntagirov is provided with some particularly striking enchaînements.

The complete work is compulsive viewing for its high quality of performance, but it has to be admitted that too little choreographic theme development is apparent. No scenery is involved, costumes are neatly varied and the lighting design by Nicholas Holdridge, while initially effective, becomes rather too repetitive. Camera angles are generally well varied, and musical accompaniments were cleverly culled from three stylistically dissimilar composers, Bach, Mendelssohn and Rachmaninov.

— KATHRINE SORLEY WALKER

*Genesis* marks the launch of Britain's Crystal Ballet, the company set up to create dance for viewing on personal portable devices. The eight movements of the 28-minute piece can be downloaded in its entirety from [crystalballet.com](http://crystalballet.com) or it can be bought in installments from iTunes. Dance International's London correspondent watched the whole thing on her computer.

To perform in *Genesis*, the intriguing new digital dance work launched by Crystal Ballet, Henry St. Clair, artistic director, and Mark Handford, managing director, enlisted eight of the best principal dancers of the Royal Ballet and English National Ballet. All are a joy to watch for their impeccable line and control, their fine expressive ability and their deeply satisfying response to the music.

The concept of relating the seasonal cycle with the stages of human relationships is, of course, nothing new. This time *Spring* is seen as the initial reactions of young lovers, *Summer* as a honeymoon period, *Autumn* as a mellower association and *Winter*, inevitably, as a time of pain and separation.

The two choreographers involved have tackled their assignments differently. Kim Brandstrup (who also, with the Royal Ballet's Bennet Gartside, directs *Genesis*), choreographed *Spring* (Sarah Lamb and Steven McRae) and *Winter* (Alina Cojocarú and Johan Kobborg).

## **city.ballet.**

Pretty Matches Productions for AOL Originals, narrated by Sarah Jessica Parker, [on.aol.ca](http://on.aol.ca)

If you're a sucker for exciting TV dance shows (I know I have more time in my schedule without *So You Think You Can Dance* around!), check out the new docudrama, *city.ballet*. The 12-episode miniseries (each one is around four to seven minutes) takes us behind the scenes at New York City Ballet.

The series is a little too hyped up and glamorous to truly represent the life of a professional ballet dancer, though. Yes, there are certainly performances, costumes, tiaras, stress and intra-company drama, but in real life there are also blisters, swollen joints, massages, physiotherapy sessions and countless evenings at home rolling on massage balls. But watching someone roll around on balls doesn't make for exciting TV. Fast-paced athletic dancing, sweat and drama do. There is no shortage of any of these in *city.ballet*.

The episodes touch on various elements of company life, including the ranking system, relationships between dancers and working with artistic director Peter Martins, who comes across as a little overbearing. And it wouldn't be a discussion of ballet without some mention of sacrifice. Dancers talk about giving up a "normal" childhood and a social life in order to pursue their passion. However, none of them seems regretful, instead expressing deep appreciation for their lives. As principal dancer Ashley Bouder says, "We're actually doing exactly what we wanted to do."

Overall *city.ballet* is compulsively watchable. Camera angles are constantly changing and takes are short, making for a fast-paced barrage of images. The only problem is that it's not really telling us anything new, but instead exaggerating some of the stereotypes we already have of the ballet world.

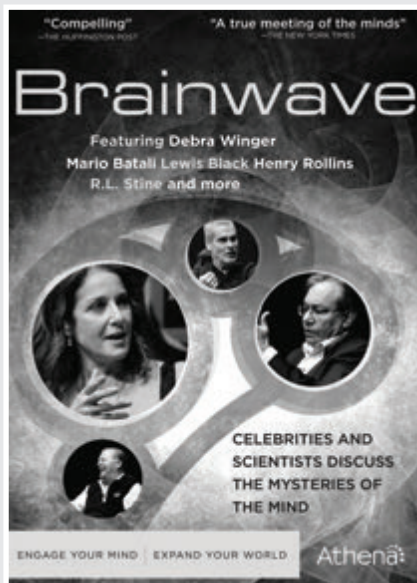
— KATE STASHKO



Ashley Bouder and Andrew Veyette rehearse Peter Martins' *Swan Lake* during filming of *city.ballet*.  
Photo: Paul Kolnik

# Mediawatch

The Rubin Museum of Art in New York City first presented *Brainwave*, a series of discussions exploring the connections between art and science, in 2008. In the 10 episodes collected here, celebrities such as actor Debra Winger, chef Mario Batali, comedian Lewis Black, author Amy Tan and choreographer Mark Morris are paired with leading neuroscientists and filmed in conversation about the way the human mind works.



**Brainwave**  
562 minutes, \$74.99 Cdn., \$59.99 US,  
Athena, [www.AcornOnline.com](http://www.AcornOnline.com)

In the discussion between Morris and neuroscientist Bevil Conway, Morris' humour is charming while the two question the mechanics of the creative process. Conway, who is a visual artist as well, exhibits deep understanding of the neurological processes that underpin brain activity. At one point, he expounds on the meaning of dance as a form of nonverbal communication within the context of neurological function and in light of a recent discovery of a particular type of neuron related to mimicry. Their shared insights are an inspiration.

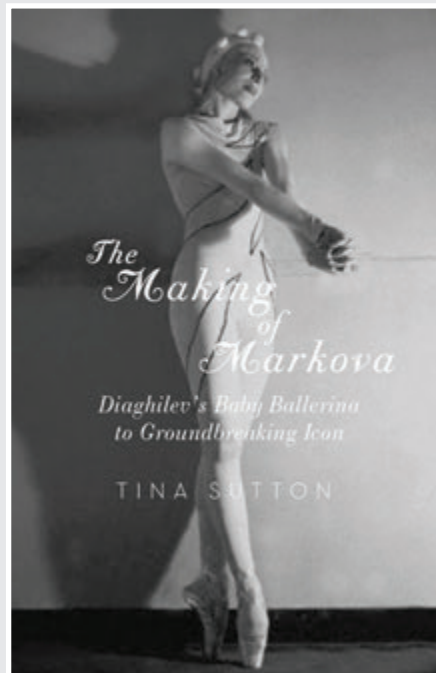
The often fascinating and revealing overlap between artistic and scientific disciplines is not consistently captured in the discussions. Poor audio-visual quality and a surplus of slow-moving passages don't help. The series is probably not meant for mass consumption, but rather for viewers keenly interested in the arts and sciences who are willing to wait for flashes of brilliance.

These discussions challenge the values handed down from Thomas Paine during the Age of Reason. They harken further back, to Leonardo da Vinci and to a time when art and science were not seen as polar opposites, but rather as parts of the same system. As such, the subject matter of *Brainwave* is refreshing.

— PETER DE VRIES

## Lost in Motion

National Ballet of Canada principal dancer Guillaume Côté and director Ben Shrinian have reunited for *Lost in Motion II*, a three-minute dance film. Choreographed by Côté and featuring principal dancer Heather Ogden, *Lost in Motion II* was screened at New York's Dance on Camera Festival in February 2014. The original *Lost in Motion*, featuring Côté, was an online viral success with more than 1.3 million views worldwide.



**The Making of Markova: Diaghilev's Baby Ballerina to Groundbreaking Icon**  
By Tina Sutton, Pegasus Books,  
2013, 670 pages, \$42 Cdn.

In an age of instant access to moving images of all kinds, it is both quaint and thrilling to have to rely on the power of the written word to conjure an artist from the past. Such is the case with Alicia Markova, in her day just about the most famous dancer on the planet, now little known beyond the rarefied world of ballet historians.

The tiny, technically prodigious ballerina comes roaring back to life in Tina Sutton's biography, which draws upon previously unavailable materials from Markova's own archives. Sutton, whose background is as a fashion, features and arts journalist for the *Boston Globe*, was called into service by the Howard Gotlieb Archival Research Center at Boston University, where the Markova collection came to reside.

Sutton knew nothing of Markova prior to taking on the assignment of cataloguing the collection, but found herself enraptured with the British lady with the Russian name responsible for the 137 boxes of diaries, correspondence, photos, clippings, radio and television interviews, manuscripts, musical scores, costumes and keepsakes.

The result is a biography that chronicles, with generosity and balance, an extraordinary life, as much a celebration of female gutsiness as ballet greatness. In spite of an autobiography, earlier biographies and revisionist history told in the biographies of others (especially Anton Dolin's), you get the sense that until now, we didn't really know the woman behind the rapturous reviews.

Born Alice Marks in 1910, she earned her living as a professional from the age of 10 as a child star on London's music hall stages. With her father's death (by pneumonia or more likely suicide) the shy, sad 14-year-old became the breadwinner for her mother and three sisters.

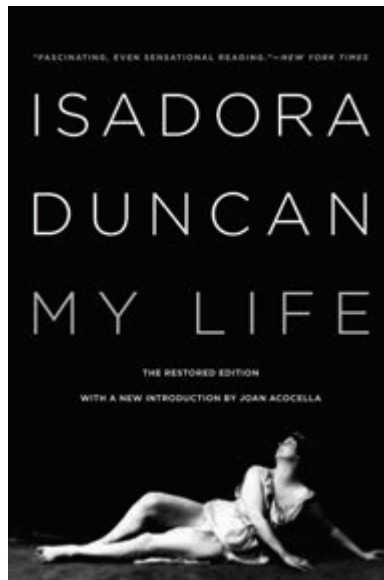
With her photographic memory and mind-blowing technique (acquired in the studio of the Russian émigré Seraphine Astafieva), she fit the bill when Serge Diaghilev came looking for a newcomer to star in Balanchine's *Le Chant du Rossignol*. She wowed Balanchine by doing double tours en l'air at the audition (he called her "the Swiss army knife of ballet"), was re-dubbed Alicia Markova, and smuggled underage across borders by Ninette de Valois to join Diaghilev's Ballets Russes in Monte Carlo in 1924.

From there she did not stop, dancing on multiple continents for more than 40 years in spite of never, from Diaghilev's death in 1929, having a home company. In this she was like the rootless, entrepreneurial Anna Pavlova (to whom she was continually compared). Markova was both a celebrated Giselle and a dogged champion of the fresh and daring, an astute businesswoman, and a loyal friend in the face of cutthroat competitors, agents and compatriots. She was Jewish in a time of unapologetic anti-Semitism, survived a gorgon of a governess, narcissistic partners, and illness, depression and loneliness. She was good with a screwdriver, plumbing and stage lighting. Thin as a wafer, she ate like a truck driver, including an addiction to Black Magic chocolates.

Thanks to Sutton, you can't help falling in love with her. She adored fashion, baseball, circuses, movies and slot machines, lived her whole life in two modest rented apartments in New York and London (the latter shared with her sisters) and while never considered pretty, was a purveyor of beauty.

Markova died the day after her 94th birthday, active to the end as a coach, teacher and stager of ballets. She had joked that she would never get a funeral at Westminster Abbey because she was Jewish, but she did; a memorial service was held on March 8, 2005, at which the English National Ballet performed. It was standing room only.

— DEBORAH MEYERS



### **My Life**

by Isadora Duncan, Introduction by Joan Acocella, Liveright Publishing Corporation, 2013, \$19 Cdn., \$17.95 US

*My Life* is the restored edition of the original manuscript written by Isadora Duncan, which was first published in 1927. The great dancer had died tragically in a car accident earlier that year, and the autobiography was released to an avid public. Over the course of the 20th century, *My Life* went into countless editions and translations. When it was noted that the text of the original German edition had many differences from the English version, questions about authenticity were raised.

In the 1990s, it was revealed that the original English edition had been edited by writer Mercedes de Costa, who is described in dance critic Joan Acocella's introduction to this edition as "a dashing member of the lesbian wing of Paris' expatriate commu-

nity ... rumoured to be a lover of Isadora's." De Costa was directed by the publisher to excise the many frank sexual descriptions.

The introduction by Acocella and the prefatory essay by Dorée Duncan, Isadora's great-niece, give opposite opinions on the artist, who was a close friend of Pavlova, as well as an innovator whom Fokine openly acknowledged as an influence. Acocella focuses too much on her warts whereas the preface reveals a real human being that leaps off the page. Isadora Duncan excited this variance of reaction all her life, as is well illustrated by quotes from George Balanchine and Frederick Ashton.

Acocella quotes Balanchine's description of Duncan, who he saw in Moscow dancing to Tchaikovsky's *Marche Slav*, as a "fat woman ... rolling around." Duncan's usage of the floor was revolutionary in Western dance history, but had obviously looked debased to young Balanchine. Ashton, who saw her several times in London in 1921, a year before Balanchine, said: "I got an impression of enormous grace, and enormous power in her dancing. She had a wonderful way of running, in which she what I call 'left herself behind,' and you felt the breeze running through her hair ... She wasn't really the old camp that everyone makes her out now, she was very serious, and held the audience and held them completely."

Sadly, this new unexpurgated version of the autobiography won't secure the future evaluation of Duncan as a great dancer and choreographer. In it, she presents herself as a woman 'afame,' a reputation that has eclipsed the fact she was a genius who developed a technique that is still transmitted internationally. *The Art of the Dance* (1929), a collection of essays by Duncan, helps to make her artistic ideas better understood but is out of print, though a bound photocopy of the original can be purchased at [isadoraduncan.org](http://isadoraduncan.org).

This new edition of *My Life* does reveal Duncan's brilliant candid nature, in which she discards mere fact in her search for capital "T" truth. A raconteur par excellence, whose motto was "sans limites," she believed in both love and dance as religion and life, and had a restless spirit that has left a legacy of great art and tragically flawed humanity.

— PAUL-JAMES DWYER

To see Isadora Duncan dancing at the Temple of Poseidon in Greece in a newly discovered 13-second film clip shot by Edward Steichen in 1921, go to <http://video.yandex.ru/users/idvm/view/42/>

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## Vancouver

by Kaija Pepper

In the pantheon of contemporary artists, Jorma Elo figures prominently as one of the masters of 21st-century choreography. So when Elo came to town to create a work for Ballet BC, I took an hour off to watch him in the studio one afternoon early on in the process. The Finnish choreographer seemed to be enjoying himself as he rushed around, paying attention to couples or small groups of dancers, talking little, moving a lot, kinetically transferring details of what he wanted. The dancers filled the studio with several streams and flurries of movement, with Elo bobbing happily among them.

During Ballet BC's October Artist Salon, a week before the opening, Elo explained the odd title, *I and I am You*, as an homage to his elderly parents, who rely on each other more and more as one of them loses sight, the other memory. At one point, Elo's youthful ambitions as a hockey goalie came up, which led to him dropping to the floor in the splits to show that the active, eager boy is still alive and well inside the distinguished 52-year-old choreographer.

Perhaps it's this excess of spirit and physical joie de vivre that makes Elo's choreography so lively. Yet there are subtle flavours within, as *I and I am You* proved at its Queen Elizabeth Theatre premiere. The work begins intimately, in

silence, with a bit of distant bird song, followed by the grand orchestral flourishes of Bach. Here, and throughout, the six men and four women dancers seem to contain within their bodies both the exotic charm of birds-of-paradise and the courtly formality of long ago, with the movement featuring quivering, bird-like alertness, as well as the ornate arms and hands of court ritual. Every now and then, the dancers simply fall into the music, heads back, chests arched, as if carried away by the magnificent sounds, just like the rest of us. The complex flow of formal and informal shapes was a joy to watch, with each body carrying a whole symphony in itself.

Once Emily Chessa ran out and stood downstage facing the audience — a small human exclamation point — *I and I am You* built to its explosive finale. The men join forces and stutter forward in a series of small jumps, their feet bound together in a tight fifth position, a sense of contained power building tension. The Bach pours forth triumphantly while the dancers form a circle, running and jumping, arms high. When the Bach ends, they continue for a few moments more, as if the music is in them, as if they are the music.

Ballet BC's artistic director, Emily Molnar, premiered her annual creation, *16 + a room*. There was an impressive

vigour and sweep to the choreography and to the performances, though the piece was a tad austere, with grey costumes and an ambient noise-scape by German composer Dirk P. Haubrich.

The evening was Makaila Wallace's farewell performance with Ballet BC. In Johan Inger's inventive *Walking Mad*, Wallace danced the final, touching duet, set to Arvo Pärt's *Für Alina*. Wallace, who danced it a year ago when the company first remounted Inger's 2001 piece, once more brought a subtle emotional interplay to her interaction with partner

Gilbert Small. It was a nuanced and dramatic end to the piece, to the evening and to Wallace's 11 years with the company.

Nederlands Dans Theater also visited Vancouver — not in person, but on film, impressively projected onto a large cinema screen. On a Sunday afternoon in November, people in all kinds of cities got to watch the company in Crystal Pite's *Parade* and *Frontier* as it had been performed at the Lucent Danstheater in the Netherlands in February 2013, filmed with seven cameras.

*Parade* is a new and complex work (the film is of its premiere), its whole structure as fragmented and broken as Pite's now famously restless, broken flows of movement. The beauty of the sad-eyed, softly decaying clowns, the grand uniformed marching band, the illuminated fish, and the tiny tent that disgorges a birthday cake and candles as well as five people and chairs, all combine to create a disturbing vision of magic and mayhem from a master artist.

*Frontier*, a 2008 work, opens with a solo. Or so it seems, until you notice the shadow figure — face and body fully covered in black — who is quietly manipulating the dancer's body.

Pite was in the audience in Vancouver, where she lives, and a short talk afterward added a satisfying sense of occasion to the sold-out screening. ▼

Peter Quanz's Q Dance — billed as a “creative dance laboratory” — presented its latest mixed bill November 13-16 at Winnipeg's intimate Gas Station Arts Centre.

The fifth anniversary program, included for the first time with the Royal Winnipeg Ballet's regular subscription series, sold out three months in advance, a testament to the company's popularity. The internationally known Quanz showed three of his eclectic works, including the premiere of the murder mystery ballet, *Murder Afoot*.

The decidedly tongue-in-cheek *Murder Afoot*, showcasing seven members of the Royal Winnipeg Ballet, parodies the real-life drama that often lurks below the surface of the ballet world. The 45-minute narrative ballet unfolds primarily as a series of flashbacks, told from the perspective of Sophia Lee's New Girl ballerina who is murdered by envious — and devious — company members.

Comedy is notoriously one of the hardest acts to pull off, and it's a credit to the strong ensemble that they step into their archetypal roles so convincingly — Amanda Green as the Prima Ballerina; Artjom Maksakov, the Director; Liang Xing, the Designer; Yosuke Mino, the Conductor; Vanessa Lawson, the Ballet Mistress; Tristan Dobrowney, the Principal Dancer; and Lee as the New Girl. Quanz's carefully chosen pastiche score, including Rossini's iconic *Guillaume Tell* overture and Ponchielli's *Dance of the Hours*, provides dramatic thrust, underscored by costume designer Anne Armit's subtly placed skulls on tutus and belt buckles. Lighting and projection designer Hugh Conacher adds further visual dimensions with a live video feed, particularly effective during Mino's clandestine solo performed in the theatre's lobby or during the cast's backstage shenanigans with the images projected onto a large upstage screen.

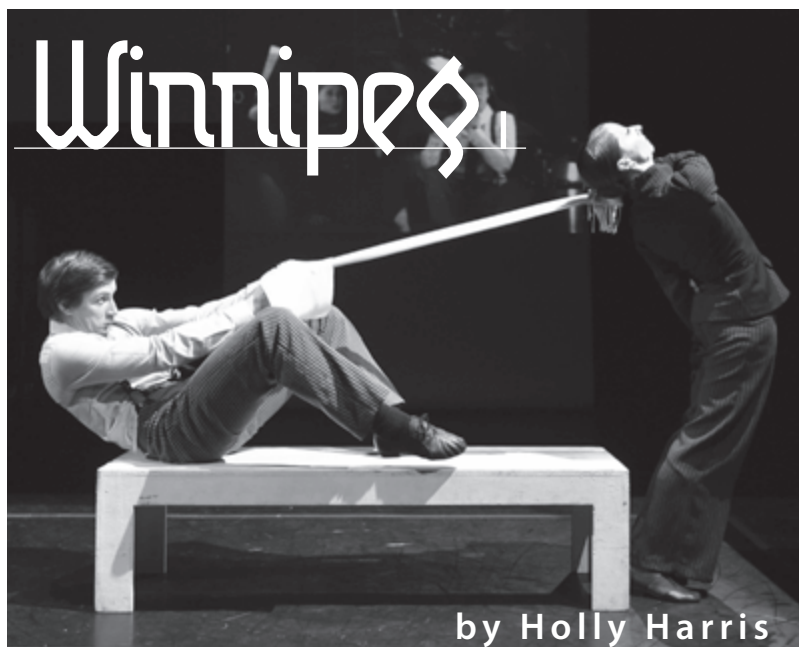
Where Quanz succeeds especially is his fleshing out of the characters' respective relationships with differentiated movement vocabulary. His well-crafted choreography, a unique blend of his own signature style, including flexed feet and body isolations with classical idiom, is cleverly laced with quotations from the standard repertoire. For example, in the ballet's darkest moments, Dubrowney's power-hungry principal, evoking a predatory Count Albrecht, performs short excerpts from *Giselle* while stalking Lee's increasingly frightened ingénue. Green's movement references *La Bayadère* with its cobra-related motifs until her character is ultimately killed by a poisonous snakebite. This historical layering pays

and Mino performing Quanz's effervescent *Double Bounce* that premiered during the company's inaugural show in May 2010. The kinetic pas de deux set to David Lang's *these broken wings, III* is filled with fleeting images of whimsy: Lee's splayed legs and flexed feet while held topsy-turvy by Mino, flirtatious shoulder shrugs and funky skips. However — as with most of Quanz's works — the six-minute piece also remains firmly grounded in intricate classical ballet vocabulary, such as dizzying fouettés and bounding leaps that the two dancers tossed off with ease. It's also impossible to imagine this work without Armit's charming, polka-dotted flat tutu with springy, flexible edges that becomes a plaything in Lee's hands as she pulls, tugs and bounces its hem into a myriad of shapes.

Audiences were also treated to an earlier signature work, *Quanz* by Quanz, choreographed when Quanz received the Clifford E. Lee Award in 2005, and reconceived in 2009 for the Royal Winnipeg Ballet. The neoclassical, three-movement ballet inspired by Johann Joachim Quantz's *Concerto for Flute in G Minor* teems with joyous energy as its 14 dancers form smaller ensembles around lead couple Lee and Xing in a kaleidoscopic array of fluid, propulsive movement.

Q Dance shows — usually performed at the Gas Station Arts Centre — allow viewers to see ballet up close and personal; this particular work proved a revelation, as the company, dressed in translucent white skirts and leotards, successfully navigated the small stage.

The Royal Winnipeg Ballet premiered Lila York's *The Handmaid's Tale* in October [see review on page 60]. Inspired by Margaret Atwood's chilling 1985 dystopian tale depicting a totalitarian regime, with women relegated to mere breeding machines, the 74-year-old troupe is to be commended for tackling gritty subject matter — including ostensibly state-sanctioned rape. ▼



homage to the art form's past, while the multimedia aspects point to new directions for the Baden, Ontario-born choreographer.

Some of the narrative becomes obscured toward the end. The switches between past and present are not overtly apparent and, at times, the choreography's sheer density didn't allow opportunity to fully digest the ballet's complicated storyline. Still, Quanz's razor sharp wit and keen comedic skills, including a brilliantly conceived climax that includes his own cameo appearance, made this a work that crackles with surprise and ingenuity.

The evening's first half featured Lee

**K**aren Kain's was among the most prominent international voices to protest Jennifer Homan's gloomy conclusions in her 2010 jeremiad, *Apollo's Angels: A History of Ballet*, most particularly the American critic's assertion that ballet has lost its choreographic lifeblood. Kain spoke with an authority based on personal experience. In her long career as the National Ballet's reigning prima, she created roles in a succession of commissioned works and, as artistic director since 2005, Kain has put creativity at the forefront.

Kain's biggest gamble was a 2009 mixed bill comprising three works commissioned from Canadians: Sabrina Matthews, Crystal Pite and Peter Quanz. It generated enormous audience excitement and did much to dispel any public misapprehension that the National Ballet is primarily concerned with classical warhorses. Kain must be feeling justly pleased that her second all-Canadian mixed bill, *Innovations*, presented in late November and comprising three commissions and a local premiere, has several potential keepers.

The most obvious came unsurprisingly from James Kudelka, the most experienced contributor, with *...black night's bright day...*, his first commission since stepping down as artistic director in 2005. Deploying Pergolesi's 1736 setting of the lachrymose *Stabat Mater*, Kudelka revisits the theme of death and grieving he famously explored in a 1983 early masterwork, *In Paradisum*. The music offers an emotional context rather than liturgical map. Kudelka presents us with an intimate community — 14 dancers — at whose centre is

a woman wracked with grief. Her passage, from gloom to light, is a commentary on the rituals surrounding death and its aftermath.

Kudelka's ballet is episodic, but not linear. The woman is haunted by the ghost of the man she has lost. She remembers a traumatic hospital scene. Another couple is given a tender pas de deux that ends with the woman falling back into the man's arms. Then there's a man who interrupts the solemnity with quirky, almost jaunty solos, apparently oblivious to the rituals of grief surrounding him — rather like a tail-wagging dog by an open grave. The folk-inflected movement is constantly surprising, inventive and shorn of embellishment. The ballet has an air of mystery, of things not quite making sense; like death itself, "the undiscover'd country."

*...black night's bright day...* was the program closer. It opened very differently with *Watershed*, an engaging but almost naïve foray into the tropes of classical ballet by Montrealer José Navas. Although Navas has previously choreographed for Vancouver's neoclassical Ballet BC, *Watershed* was his first chance to work with a large classical ballet company.

With a nod, intended or not, to the 100th anniversary of Benjamin Britten's birth, Navas sets his ballet to the *Four Sea Interludes* from the celebrated British composer's 1945 opera *Peter Grimes*. It's an unusual choice for dance, but Navas makes a convincing case for its suitability in an essentially abstract work of varied geometric patterning, recurrent turning motifs and fashionable gender bending with both men and women — 32 in total — appearing

variously with or without tutus. Fortunately, he reserved toe shoes for the women.

It opens in silence with the dancers in silhouette, as if to emphasize the exacting rigour of ballet's shapes and lines. There are faint resonances of the music's operatic source: the bustle of the second interlude, Sunday Morning, the overall sweep of tidal comings and goings, the grand finale of Storm with the cast resolving a fury of movement into an elegantly posed stasis. Mostly, however, *Watershed* is about dancing; not particularly innovative, but easy on the eye and exalting for the ear.

Principal dancer Guillaume Côté, one of two company choreographic associates, made *Being and Nothingness (Part 1)* as a pièce d'occasion for a Festival Ballet Providence gala in Rhode Island for fellow principal Greta Hodgkinson, setting it to the fourth *Metamorphosis* from Philip Glass' 1989 solo piano album.

Beneath a hanging lamp, Hodgkinson enacts a tightly constrained solo of fraught anxiety, constantly turning in on herself as if questioning her very existence. The movement is the taut, jagged antithesis of the classical elegance Hodgkinson is best known for; yet she takes to it with a strength and conviction that drew loud applause.

National Ballet School-trained Robert Binet, the other company choreographic associate, was at age 22 by far the youngest of the program's contributors and with the boldness of youth settled ambitiously on a big-theme ballet that, according to Binet's program note, explores the notion of inertia as it pertains to an advanced civilization.

What becomes apparent in Binet's *Unearth* is that his 14-dancer cast represents a fractured community in which the weight of authority is breeding dissent. Designer Hyemi Shin's brooding set — perhaps a calving iceberg or the White Cliffs of Dover — creates a sense of containment that is only dispelled near the end when the massif impressively parts, lifts and turns.

Binet was the only choreographer to use a commissioned score, an instrumentally lush, at times almost cinematic composition by Canadian Owen Pallett.

Binet's choreography displays technical assurance and a taste for pushing physical boundaries, especially in partnering work. *Unearth* is over-stuffed, however, both with movement and ideas; but rather than a vapid ballet that plays safe and lands flat as a pancake. ▼



by Michael Crabb

Heather Ogden in James Kudelka's  
*...black night's bright day...*  
Photo: Bruce Zinger



# Montreal

by Linde Howe Beck



I wish everyone could see *Prismes*, which Benoît Lachambre choreographed for Montréal Danse: it's a rare example of a work in which all ideas are developed and every loose end neatly tied. *Prismes* also ends when it needs to, instead of working overtime and dragging its audience into irritation — somewhat of a feat in my contemporary dance experience. This kaleidoscope's ever-changing vistas mesmerize from start to finish. It's colourful, funny, unsettling, erotic, amazing, challenging, manipulative and even entertaining, playing with sculpture and geometry, light, virtuosity, heroics and distortion. It finds beauty in everything, even in the grotesque, causing spectators to simultaneously rejoice at and doubt what they see.

Presented at the Agora de la danse, October 16-19, *Prismes'* all-star, multi-generational cast in yellow hard hats and slinky draperies posed sensuously against panels of contrasting psychedelic shades. Fabulous fashion show or visual art extravaganza? Lachambre, a multi-talented cutting-edge artist with a quality reputation among the avant-garde at home and abroad, has been breaking boundaries for decades and revealing new directions in dance. For *Prismes*, he tamed his wildness a bit. Supported by minimalis-

tic sets, bodies shed their togas to stretch into shapes silly and serious. One even morphed into a gargoyle.

If *Prismes* demanded active participation from spectators to sort out its constant changes of time, space and image, a new program by Compagnie Marie Chouinard at Théâtre Maisonneuve October 31 to November 2 gave the audience the status of co-partner. *Henri Michaux: Mouvements*, a new Chouinard piece inspired by drawings and poetry by the French writer, was a word-for-word interpretation of ink blot shapes published in book form. In stark black and white, huge blobs projected on the backdrop came to life onstage as dancers imitated the shapes and dynamics. The more spectators polished their ability to “read” the two with eyes constantly flicking back and forth and brains humming, the faster and more numerous the drawings and the more animated the dancers became until the entire proscenium space throbbled with squiggles. It might have ended there, but Chouinard committed to even more. A reverse white on black sequence complete with assault by strobe lights put me off the last moments of *Mouvements*.

Chouinard was on more familiar and sexy ground with *Gymnopédies* to Eric Satie's familiar piano score, which dancers took turns playing. It began in a

glamorous silvery set with heavy curtains, a shrouded grand piano and friendly-looking hoodoo-like shapes hiding nude dancers. Soon, Chouinard's trademark erotic couplings took over along with running jokes (Mutt and Jeff, clown noses, birdlike behaviour, etc.). It was the ecstatic celebration of life we've become accustomed to in Chouinard-land.

Montreal's endlessly fascinating Rubberbandance Group has been founder Victor Quijada's choreographic laboratory for the past decade. With his co-director, Anne Plamondon, he has worked ceaselessly to create a contemporary dance style by fusing opposing styles of urban street dance and ballet. Right from the start, the result was off the Canadian grid. And with each succeeding work building on the last, it got better and better.

*Quotient Empirique*, Quijada's latest tough-love adventure about relationships, premiered at Place des Arts' Cinquième Salle November 20 to December 7. Six dancers, with backgrounds ranging from ballet to contemporary dance and capoeira, and trained in Quijada's crossover method, moved as one. Quijada packs more movement into each second than anyone else I can think of, all with the humanity, intelligence and humour typical of Rubberbandance.

Dancers folded into each other,

# San Francisco

breaking into duos, solos and trios. They lunged, supported and depended upon each other in pain and need. Their drama expressed a range of emotions that resonated, even in abstraction. Quijada's duets were particularly poignant and nuanced: sometimes soft and secure, sometimes edgy, sensual and smooth. But always they were precise and clean, exposing new possibilities. Longtime collaborator Jasper Gahunia's music underlined the piece's universality with an operatic quality.

For 40 years, Margie Gillis has been a force of nature. From her earliest performances she stood apart from others with her stocky, athletic physique and dances that looked like ongoing personal therapies with gestures pulled from inner depths. On stage and off she was a crusader who spoke out for local, national and international issues.

Now 60, she performed in an intimate concert co-choreographed with friend and fellow dancer Tedd Robinson in *Cavatinas and Counterpoints* at Montreal Museum of Fine Arts' exquisite Salle Bourgie September 15. The show was presented by Arte Musica and the 11th annual Quartiers Danses, a 10-day dance extravaganza staged in Montreal neighbourhoods.

Gillis has retired the bone-crunching falls that marked her early career in favour of gentle swooping and swirling. Her dance now looks predictable and repetitive, but she maintains her formidable stage charisma and the swing of her trademark hip-length hair. She played the straight man to Robinson's imaginative and quizzical characters while Jeanie Chung played excerpts from Beethoven, Chopin, Scriabin and Debussy.

In their opener, the dancers kept their faces hidden — his by a hat and hers by her arms. Was this a reference to the province's proposed charter of Quebec values, a divisive Quebec government proposal that would deny the wearing of certain religious symbols (especially hijabs and niqabs) to public employees? If so, it was masterfully à propos. ▼



by Allan Ulrich

Change in artistic policy has been happening since the poet-philosophers of Ancient Greece realized they were mortal, and the dance events of last fall in the Bay Area stressed the kind of mutability that can both terrify and infuse an audience with unfettered joy.

Not so good was the second visit in two years of Nederlands Dans Theater. Back in 2011, the artistic director of the Hague-based institution was American Jim Vincent. At that time, the menu consisted of one dance by former artistic director Jiri Kylián and a second by the English-Spanish team of Paul Lightfoot and Sol León, waiting in the wings to take over the company. This past October, the troupe returned to Berkeley's Zellerbach Hall and the diet was all Lightfoot-León. The crowds cheered at the ferociously sinewy dancing by a 30-member team of athlete-poets, who have learned to fuse the balances and extensions of ballet training with the weight and groundedness of modernism. Amidst the ovations, a few of us in the press corps meekly grumbled, "Give me back my NDT."

That would mean restoring some of Kylián's more challenging works, which are now in limbo with this company. The new team has, at least for the moment, banished its predecessor's dances and what it has substituted looks like derivative Eurodance of limited choreographic interest. (I was painfully reminded of what was missing when, in the same month as the Nederlands Dans

Theater visit, modest Smuin Ballet incorporated Kylián's exquisite *Return to the Strange Land* into its repertoire.)

The Lightfoot-León style, which appeared to hold promise in 2011, values theatricality over coherence. In its west coast premiere, *Sehnsucht* (*Yearning*) appears typical of their dances seen by this reporter here and abroad. The duo seems fascinated by enclosing their dancers in claustrophobic environments. Here, Parvaneh Scharafali and Medhi Walerski squabble and make love in a small room that periodically rotates 180 degrees, a disorienting experience, which Fred Astaire made a lot more of in the movie *Royal Wedding*.

In front of this box, the magnificently muscled Silas Henriksen, to the sound of Beethoven piano concerto movements, gazes longingly and attempts to interrupt the couple, who aren't having an easy time of it on their own. At the end, Scharafali escapes from her mate by diving out a window. It is the middle section that sets us wondering. The final two movements of Beethoven's *Fifth Symphony*, accompanied by a phalanx of topleless dancers (both genders), launches a series of group unisons. They're impressive, but meaningless. What did Beethoven do to Lightfoot and León that he should merit such treatment? This is probably the most egregious use of classical music since the halcyon days of Maurice Béjart. And you wondered: Kylián made 75 works for Nederlands Dans Theater, could we not have had at least one?

An hour to the south of Berkeley, a new era began for Ballet San Jose on November 13 at the Center for the Performing Arts with a gala opening extravaganza welcoming former American Ballet Theatre principal José Manuel Carreño as artistic director. The performing guests, who came from American Ballet Theatre, New York City Ballet, San Francisco Ballet and Boston Ballet, rarely disappointed in their assorted circus acts, and the San Jose dancers looked spirited in a brief excerpt from a Jorma Elo work, which the company will reprise in the spring.

The gala concludes a stormy two years, which witnessed the sacking of Ballet San Jose's artistic director and co-founder Dennis Nahat. The reason for Nahat's dismissal was never revealed. But the decision to replace him with what from here looks like an American Ballet Theatre clone suggests that the board of trustees possesses more dollars than sense. However, the two

interregnum seasons with Wes Chapman in artistic control had their moments, and American Ballet Theatre's syllabus will be followed in the school. Carreño, at 45, has retired from dancing, but he was an impeccable stylist in the grand manner; how much of that wisdom he can impart to the company remains a mystery. We should know all after the three spring programs.

Finally, here's a strong argument for keeping things the way they are. San Francisco-based Lines Ballet has entered its fourth decade looking magnificent under its one and only artistic director Alonzo King, and the October season opening offered spiffy business, almost as usual. One is again amazed at the immense pliancy and emotional resonance of the dancing; two of Lines' former stellar soloists, Drew Jacoby and Brett Conway, were visible earlier on the Netherlands Dans Theater roster and they had looked right at home.

Yet, this time around, King's skewed

classical style took some fascinating turns. Premiered at the Monaco Dance Forum in 2010, the 40-minute *Writing Ground* came home in triumph. The 14-part suite arrives with a mixed, coherent score of religious music and texts from different cultures; the episodes unfurl like an ancient tapestry. We get playful moments, like the solo for Yujin Kim, and obsessive, sensual duets, like that for David Harvey and the unforgettable Meredith Webster. The cumulative effect bespeaks a control of forces that King has not consistently exhibited.

The genuine premiere, *Concerto for Two Violins*, deploys the same Bach score Balanchine used in 1941's *Concerto Barocco*. King acknowledges the original with copies of his predecessor's entries and enchainements. It was pristinely danced. This cheeky homage left the audience indifferent, but I thought it the most complete and serene of King's forays into 18th-century music. ▼

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# NEW YORK

by Robert Greskovic



For the first time in 37 years, American Ballet Theatre played a fall season at Lincoln Center's David H. Koch Theater. During the somewhat brief 12-performance run, the company presented a varied and mostly distinguished repertory of nine ballets. Two offerings were exceptions of the unfortunate sort. One, *Aftereffect*, by much-loved American Ballet Theatre principal dancer Marcelo Gomes, was given only on the season's opening night. This inconsequential pièce d'occasion for the first movement of Tchaikovsky's *Souvenir de Florence* featured unbecoming costume designs by Reid Barthelme and Harriet Jung for nine of the company's men, bare-chested. The other was *Clear*, created especially for American Ballet Theatre in 2001 by Stanton Welch, which amounts to a slick and similarly foolish romp for seven men, also bare-chested, and one essentially ignored woman, all to selections of Bach.

Otherwise there was the world premiere of *The Tempest*, Alexei Ratmansky's one-act, narrative-based reverie on Shakespeare's famous play and set to *The Tempest* (Incidental Music) by Jean Sibelius, as originally written for a production of the play in Copenhagen. The approximately 45-minute ballet — which Ratmansky's program note describes as a "fragmented narrative" and "meditation" — features 11 characters, and has mostly effective minimal designs by Santo Loquasto. The palette is somewhat on the grey side, with splashes of colour, most dramatically for Ariel as a fiery-winged hallucinatory harpy who acts to quell some of the bickering among the men quarrelling on the island on which they have been shipwrecked.

While many of the play's characters, from the pivotal Prospero (the dethroned Duke of Milan), to the clownish Trinculo and Stephano, are included in the ballet, they're often set as pantomime roles, which need repeated viewings to take into full account.

The characters showcased most through dance are Miranda, the Duke's daughter, and Ferdinand, son of the Duke's usurper brother, Alonso. Their delicately free-flown choreography establishes them as innocents amid a world of decadent, and worse, fellows. In these casts, confident and accomplished Sarah Lane alongside fine and expert Joseph Gorak gave the often dark happenings a luminous centre, creating a delicate flower of movement amid a shadowy world of intrigue.

Ratmansky is known to revisit his ballets and may well adjust this one as it gets performed. For now, it's more an intriguing than illuminated affair.

A splendid revival of Twyla Tharp's 1983 *Bach Partita* also distinguished this season. Two strong casts, each numbering 38 all told, including three central couples, one subsidiary one and a late arriving, delicately dervish group of 16 women, made for an impressive showing of American Ballet Theatre dancing. Tharp herself was on hand to oversee the revival, scrupulously staged by ballet mistress Susan Jones. With Jennifer Tipton's exquisite, velvety grey lighting and Loquasto's neutral toned, smartly tailored, matte fabric costuming, which artfully bared the main dancers' legs, this classical ballet — with plenty of twists and tweaks as only the ever-sly and often wry Tharp could devise — showed the company off as one of crisp schooling and playful daring.

The revival of *Les Sylphides*, Michel Fokine's once ubiquitous but lately little seen moonlit reverie to orchestrated Chopin pieces, was also staged by Jones. While it mostly exuded its expected, rarefied lyricism, it also seemed to have some choreographic oddities, especially for the lone male lead. In that role, Gorak shone with typical lustre and finesse, while an even more impressive Cory Stearns rendered some key moments as highlights of breathtaking beauty in stillness. The use of the recently identified orchestration of these Chopin pieces by Benjamin Britten helped make the revival extra noteworthy, though the dim lighting, still credited to the long late Nananne Porcher, bathed the stage in a somewhat dull atmosphere, perhaps having been adjusted to minimize the faded surface of the old backdrop and side pieces by Alexandre Benois.

A scrupulous revival of Mark Morris' *Gong*, a South Seas' flavoured (thanks to Isaac Mizrahi's costuming in tropical hues and Michael Chybowski's complementary lighting) and playful excursion to Colin McPhee's gamelan-like *Tabuh-Tabuhan* score, also distinguished the run. So did performances of Ratmansky's *Piano Concerto #1*, the climax of his *Shostakovich Trilogy*, new this past spring. The challenging central roles of this concerto-inspired ballet were made especially vivid and noteworthy by Calvin Royal, Skylar Brandt, Gabe Stone Shayer and Gillian Murphy.

Also fresh from its initial outings at American Ballet Theatre last spring, Frederick Ashton's marvellous, 1976 ballet telling of Turgenev's play, *A Month in the Country*, looked rich and alive on the Koch Theater's stage. As the central character, Julie Kent gave a nuanced portrayal of a world-weary woman both mercurial and impassioned. Alternating as Beliaev, the tutor whose freshness, innocence and magnetism draws to him the attentions of all the women in the household, as well as of his young charge, Kolia, both Guillaume Côté (guesting from the National Ballet of Canada) and Stearns made fine showings. The former was more worldly, almost vernacular in his rendering of this character, detailing all of the finesse of Ashton's gesture-tinged classical choreography with an earthy dimension. Stearns lightened the drama and deepened the artfulness of the choreographic intricacies. Both these young men would doubtless deepen and refine their performances if given the chance. One hopes such chances will come again and again. ▼

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# London

by Kathrine Sorley Walker

Haines, yet another British talent exploited elsewhere, with clear-cut settings by Eno Henze and simple costumes by Yumiko Takeshima, Dawson has deployed a perfectionist cast of four couples in choreography of fluency, musicality and refreshing variety. What failed to emerge, however, was enough dramatic relationship between the dance action and the Keats poem, which provided the ballet's title and was cited as launching inspiration.

*The Human Seasons* was prefaced by *Chroma*, one of Wayne McGregor's best works, and followed by Kenneth MacMillan's familiar *The Rite of Spring* — the score's anniversary has resulted in an indigestible glut of new and old versions of the ballet. At its inception, this version was an unforgettable experience, largely because of the amazingly conceived sets and costumes by the great Australian artist Sidney Nolan, inspired by aboriginal art and using strong colour combinations of ochre, black and white. The dancers were magnificently rehearsed in their mass movement, but the piece no longer seems to achieve the hypnotic emotional depth given it originally in Monica Mason's creation of the Chosen One.

Birmingham Royal Ballet, visiting Sadler's Wells in October, relied on revivals. David Bintley's effective Einstein equation-inspired  $E=mc^2$  has a fine score by Matthew Hudson, and the piece was given an excellent performance by the company, led by Elisha Willis and Joseph Caley. A revival of Bintley's romantic and delicate, Ashton-inspired, 1993 *Tombeaux*, to music by Walton, was pleasingly performed by Momoko Hirata and Caley, while Nao Sakuma and Chi Cao danced the leading roles in Sir Peter Wright's satisfying 1984 production of *The Sleeping Beauty*.

Rambert Dance Company's latest evening at the Wells contained a lengthy mélange of movement and speech in *The Castaways*, by American-Israeli choreographer Barak Marshall. It was accompanied by *Subterrain*, a new and darkly sombre work from Ashley Page, and a revival of Mark Baldwin's agreeable Darwin tribute, *The Comedy of Change*, which deals amusingly with evolution and the behaviour of birds.

At the Barbican in November, Richard Alston Dance Company celebrated Benjamin Britten in a fine program that included two new works, *Phaedra* and *Illuminations*, which brilliantly wove together singers, dancers and the musicians of the Britten Sinfonia. ▼

**T**he 2013-2014 Royal Ballet season at Covent Garden opened in late September with *Don Quixote*, Carlos Acosta's first production for the company. Since its creation by Petipa in 1871 in St. Petersburg, this work has had countless revisions worldwide, and the Royal Ballet has already twice tackled — and discarded — it.

In 1993, it acquired the shortened version that Baryshnikov had put on for American Ballet Theatre, and in 2002 it based a new version on Nureyev's admirable staging for the Australian Ballet, in which Acosta danced Basilio. In the new Royal Ballet program, Gerard Davis records how Acosta has collaborated with conductor Martin Yates over the Minkus score to achieve their current recension.

The result is vigorous, if not particularly inventive, in the ensembles for peasants, townsfolk, toreadors and gypsies, but it lacks what the Nureyev Australian Ballet production (which can be seen on film) had in the way of clear and excellent characterization of all the key roles. Neither did it have the perfectly timed wit (as in the com-

ic duel between Don Quixote and Gamache or the pretended suicide of Basilio) nor the tender poetry of the Dryad scene.

Designs by Tim Hatley, better known for his work in opera and drama, were overburdened by heavy and mobile scenery, and an excess of mixed colours in the costumes. The dancing went excellently, both in the partnership of Marianela Núñez and Acosta himself at the gala premiere, and that of Steven McRae with guest artist Iana Salenko from Berlin Opera Ballet on the general press night.

The company's first triple bill of the season came in November and included the premiere of *The Human Seasons* by David Dawson — a notable Royal Ballet School graduate who, having failed to be encouraged at Covent Garden, has since 1997 established his choreographic career internationally. Britain has really seen nothing of his work apart from an English National Ballet staging of *A Million Kisses to my Skin* in 2007, so it was an excellent decision by the Royal Ballet's present director, Kevin O'Hare, to commission something from him.

To an elusive and sensitive score by Greg

At age 22, Amandine Albisson, recently promoted to première danseuse at the yearly concours, christened her *Sleeping Beauty* shoes at the Bastille with technical prowess and stellar aura. Not many can pull off that three-act ballet, especially Nureyev's version brimming with sadistic steps. And though I did not catch all the numerous casts, I heard that some did not negotiate the thorny Rose Adagio with ease. Albisson breezed through it all with delicious confidence — the way she gets out of her steely balances smoothly is enchanting — and her beauty shone throughout.

Albisson was also awarded the AROP prize in December (AROP is an association promoting the Paris Opera at home and abroad). Her virtues have not escaped the attention of artistic director Brigitte Lefèvre, who has been casting Albisson in lead roles over the past few years, and the hat trick would have been that she be named an étoile following her remarkable performance in *Sleeping Beauty*. Criminally, this did not come to pass. Instead, Lefèvre chose to name 33-year-old Alice Renavand an étoile after her performance in Angelin Preljocaj's *Le Parc*, which was playing simultaneously at the Garnier. Half Asian, Renavand is decidedly a dancer with character and a unique artistic sensibility, mostly in the more contemporary repertoire, although she did deliver the balletic goods as Kitri in *Don Q* last season and was well above average dramatically. Renavand may be the last étoile to be announced under Lefèvre's 20-year reign as queen assoluta of the Paris Opera before Benjamin Millepied officially steps in.

Florian Magnenet, also a premier danseur, was Albisson's Prince Désirée. The tall Magnenet is the epitome of the danseur noble with long legs, and tame but good looks. He was princely but a little ponderous and fluffed his tours en l'air at the end. Albisson needed a more vigorous partner to match her majestic grace.

First created in 1989, Nureyev's *Beauty* is a luxurious affair steeped in regal grandeur, so it does take a dancer of Albisson's calibre to make it really exciting. Another sensational dancer featured in it was freshly promoted premier danseur François Alu as the Bluebird who, at

only 19, can spice up any role he takes on thanks to his formidable energy and technical prowess. No wonder his role model is Carlos Acosta. Alu is certainly not as tall, but exudes the same kind of virile vitality apt to jerk one out of one's torpor while watching Nureyev's *Beauty*.

Elsewhere, the princes of French "non-dance" — Boris Charmatz and Jérôme Bel — chose (deliberately or not) to indulge in paradox. Charmatz, a tall, athletic lad still looking youthful at 40, presented a duet to Bach, *Partita 2*, at Théâtre de la Ville with Belgian star Anne Teresa de Keersmaecker, in which he aimed, it seems, to remind us that he was first and foremost a dancer.

*Partita 2* is a pretentious ego trip masquerading as a casual romp. Both de Keersmaecker and Charmatz repeat the same simple patterns, akin to skating on ice or playing hopscotch, to the sublime and sacred score. It is pretentious in the very premise that we should be interested in watching this simplicity. But then, depending on one's mood, those repetitive routines may generate a flavour of pleasant familiarity and grow on you. They somehow did on me.

A little later, Bel, at Les Abbesses (a subsidiary of Théâtre de la Ville), presented his latest offering, *Disabled*

*Theater*, with a cast of mentally handicapped actors from the Swiss company Theater HORA. Bel himself confesses that it includes more actual dancing than any of his other pieces (some of which contain next to none).

Since *Véronique Doisneau* at the Paris Opera, Bel has hit upon a new concept that is very much in the zeitgeist. What with the development of social networking, everyone can and will tell their more or less romanticized life story to the world. Bel first had Doisneau, followed by a series of other dancers, do just that in front of a live audience. In fact, he does not even have to select the performers himself: he apparently gets loads of requests. For his *Disabled Theater*, the request came from Theater HORA. Bel turned it down at first, probably fearing that staging mentally handicapped actors would be one provocation too many. He finally accepted on the grounds that this group of people deserve visibility, too. Indeed the show has been panned as voyeuristic. But to give Bel his due, the man does have a tender touch. It turned his other "biographies" into successes, and here he again succeeds in making each performer very special and dear to the audiences watching. ▼



# ITALY

by Silvia Poletti



In this chaotic country, artistic life is tragically suffering. The abysmal debt at the opera houses is so immense that it is incredible no one has intervened in the last few years to prevent the present state of ruin. And dance is always the first sacrificial victim. Considered uneconomical by artistic management and boards — with higher costs than profits — the ballet companies are scarcely tolerated by the other components of the opera (orchestra and choir). What managers and ministerial staff seem unwilling to bear anymore is the unions' obstinacy in defending old guarantees — such as extra fees for dancers required to wear shoes with heels or for the choir when they are required to contribute movement to a piece — that the current economic and social situation cannot afford anymore.

Last August, the current Minister of Culture Massimo Bray defined a decree to supply money to those opera houses that will reduce their debt through a reorganization of staff: that means personnel cuts. The decree started fights inside the opera houses. At Rome Opera (which is around 28 million euros in deficit), the orchestra, supported by unions, refused to play at the premiere of *Swan Lake* in protest against the min-

istry's decree. The show went on, but with taped music.

At Florence Opera House (35 million euros in deficit), the remains of MaggioDanza company include only 17 dancers with permanent contracts. (Last June, director Francesco Ventriglia resigned and more than 20 dancers did not get their contracts renewed.) They are still waiting for their final destiny to be decided by the government commissioner. The breaking news is that, in order to save the dancers' employment, the commissioner is talking with an independent dance company that could take them on. The opera house would guarantee the dancers 30 performances for the year and would pay their fees. The new company would be able to use MaggioDanza's repertoire, scenery and costumes. Immediately, the unions and the national dance community rose to criticize the solution. We will see what happens.

Last but not least, the unions also distinguished themselves at La Scala. On the eve of Alexei Ratmansky's triple bill with a new creation, *Opera*, for the Milan dancers, the dancers' union published a letter in the newspapers that declared that since the choreography was not yet complete, it would not be their

fault if the performances were not at top level. It was a gratuitous action and a symptom of an inadequate sense of professionalism.

Luckily, all the uncertainty disappeared at the debut of the Ratmansky evening, which opened La Scala Ballet's new season. Under former Mariinsky Ballet director Makhar Vaziev's directorship, the company has been improving more and more; now we see well-trained dancers with a communicative joy of dancing. They dance with great, clear footwork and bold assurance, all qualities necessary for Ratmansky's steps, particularly for the men, who need speed and witty spirit.

The La Scala dancers were truly sparkling in *Concerto DSCH* and *Russian Seasons*, with their never-ending stream of choreographic inventiveness, based upon a clever use of balletic idiom, but with a folkloric nuance that made me think of some of Jerome Robbins' classics. But, unlike the great American, Ratmansky does not shake the audience, but lightly caresses, getting our attention with his quick enchainements and tough vivaciousness. How nice to see young Milan dancers accomplish this virtuosic challenge, among them Carlo di Lanno, Svetlana Zakharova's



sure partner in *Concerto*, and the dazzling couple Federico Fresi and Antonino Sutura as the jumping couple in the same exhilarating ballet.

As for the premiere, *Opera*, it was a tribute to the glorious tradition of Italian melodrama, and showed Ratmansky's talent for contemporary dramatic ballet. From the 18th-century melodrama as revolutionized by Pietro Metastasio, Ratmansky takes typical topics: the depiction of warriors and amazons, love, war and pride. Metastasio's text is interlaced in Leonid Desyatnikov's original score and sung by a tenor, a mezzo and a soprano. Ratmansky is clever in the way he highlights the theatrical fiction of that period and the expressiveness of the idealized characters, while at the same time holding off with his light sense of humour, so that even Roberto Bolle, the Apollonian ballet celebrity, danced with some self-mockery. This clever piece for La Scala by one of the most acclaimed classic choreographers of our day shows that, even in these problematic times for Italian dance, against all odds, we can do it. ▼



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# DENMARK

by Anne-Marie Elmby



Artistic director Nikolaj Hübbe loves Frank Sinatra and wanted to share this passion with his Royal Danish Ballet audience by presenting Twyla Tharp's tribute to Sinatra, *Come Fly Away*. Even the extra performances for the October and November shows at Copenhagen's Royal Theatre were sold out in no time. Parts of *Come Fly Away*, set to Sinatra's greatest hits, are not new, and have been performed before at home in the United States under slightly different titles, but the Danish premiere was the first time a classical

ballet company took up the challenge of the Broadway-style work.

The two acts of 28 songs and four instrumental pieces were led by Danish-Vietnamese bassist Chris Minh Doky. Sinatra's recorded voice was controlled by Doky via a foot pedal, and the 14 musicians, seated on a platform behind the dancers, followed the singer's distinctive phrasing.

Two Tharp dancers, Stacy Caddell and John Selya, who both performed in previous versions, staged the entertaining ballet. They cast the dancers according to personality and clearly en-

couraged them to find their own quality within the individual characters, revealing hitherto unseen aspects of their talents.

The ballet is set in an exclusive nightclub illuminated by Donald Holder's atmospheric lighting. This is not the place for a ballerina's pointe shoes, but the women had no problem embracing the demanding choreography on high heels. Through the ballet, one could follow the relationship stories of four couples and their ups and downs heightened by Sinatra's expressive voice. Tharp has called her ballet "an examination of love," and the couples pass through emotional roller coasters of passion, flirting, disappointment and jealousy, but also of first, young love. Backing them up were three ensemble couples, who at times interfered in the various liaisons.

Fashion designer Norma Kamali has created three sets of costumes for the ladies that corresponded with their diverse types: innocent white; sophisticated skin colour with sequins; and seductive red and sexy black with gold patterns accentuating certain places on the body. As the evening passed and the choreography grew more suggestive, their clothing became scantier; the men took off the jackets and vests of their white, black and silvery suits. With the last songs, the dancers reappeared in metallic, gold and black party attire, and as *New York, New York* sounded through the theatre, a starry sky appeared on the backdrop with Sinatra's profile in glitter.

In November, the exceptional character dancers of the Royal Danish Ballet had their own gem of a performance, *242 Years in Tricot*; the title refers to the fabric from which dancers' tights and leotards are made and to the number of years that have collectively passed since they started at the Royal Danish Ballet School. *Petit Voyage*, a solo created by Anne Marie Vessel Schlüter for former principal Lis Jeppesen, portrays a woman's life from birth to death. It was magic to witness how Jeppesen's body transformed from a small child discovering the world to a school girl distracted by first love. Marriage and motherhood, with movement quotations from childhood, were followed by a desperate reaching toward the departing man. Gradually Jeppesen's body seemed to age before one's eyes, moving with

difficulty and counting with crooked fingers for the imaginary grandchildren, before she lay down and her body returned to its primal fetal position — the life circle closed. Pianist Kim Helweg had composed five movements inspired by motifs from Schubert's string quartet *Death and the Maiden*. Helweg played live, and Andreas Wetterberg electronically enhanced the piano to give the performance a spacious sound dimension.

The second piece on the program was *re-collect*, which suggests both "to remember" and "to unite." Staffan Valdemar Holm, who has directed operas and plays but never a dance performance, spent a long time talking with dancers Mette Bødtcher, Eva Kloborg, Mogens Boesen and Poul-Erik Hesselkilde about their life and dreams.

Onstage, the bust of August Bournonville watched from the side and was devotedly greeted by the four dancers, who wrote "We are still here!" on the wall. The daily routines of taking class, performing and fatigue were

illustrated with accelerating speed and amusing effect, while mutual trust and respect pervaded the atmosphere. Photos from the dancers' careers, projected onto the wall, took us down memory lane. The splendid-looking Boesen danced the Black Swan pas de deux from *Swan Lake* — without the swan! It was hilarious to watch his perfect partner work as he supported the invisible swan princess in pirouettes and lifts. Bødtcher had chosen the first minutes of Bédart's *Bolero*, one of her dream roles in which she was surrounded by 32 bare-chested men. Hesselkilde was a moving Petroushka, hammering his mittens against the wall and reaching longingly toward a picture of the Royal Theatre's auditorium that hung on the wall. Kloborg contributed a graceful solo focusing on hand movements from her many roles.

The evening's five dancers were in fine shape and, with the oldest having turned 65, they proved that age is no limitation for brilliant artistry. ▼

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ALEXSANDRA POINTE So Dances So Gaynor Menden

She has been in the director's chair for more than a year, but audiences have just recently had their first look at Ingrid Lorentzen's choice of repertoire for the Norwegian National Ballet. Lorentzen presented her first evening at the Oslo Opera House with a bang in September, featuring five new ballets under the title I Fokines verden (In the World of Fokine).

It opened with the young Norwegian choreographer Alan Lucien Øyen's *Petrushka*. He still uses the music of Stravinsky and has not ignored the original concept too much. The five huge towers that make up the scenery are moved around constantly, and steal considerable space and focus. Daniel Proietto as Petrushka was emotional and vulnerable, but it was the dancing of a company newcomer, Cuban Osiel Gouneo as the Moor, which stole one's breath away. He has jumps that never touch down and his spins are endless. This version of *Petrushka* is absolutely worth seeing, and I believe it will stay in the repertoire for a while.

Camilla Spidsøe did a strong version of *Cygne* (*The Swan*), dancing with great empathy. It was inspired by Pavlova's version, but with new choreography by Proietto and new music by Olga Wojciechowska.

Ingun Bjørnsgaard took on *Daphnis et Chloé*, while Ina Christel Johannessen's *Schéhérazade* was done as a pas de deux. Danced by Spidsøe and Ole Willy Falkhaugen, the struggle was between the intellect and brutal force.

The end of the evening was given to Liam Scarlett's *The Firebird*. Jon Bausor's extravagant, expensive-looking costumes, as well as his scenography, were fantastic, with a huge tree transforming in shape and size in the final minutes. Yolanda Correa was strong and fascinating as the Firebird, with Arne Ruutu matching in strength as Koschei.

The company presented another grand performance in November with Barokk Mesteraften (A Baroque Evening with the Masters), which began in the foyer half an hour before the scheduled time with *Intimate Distance*. Patrick King was responsible for the artistic installations and the choreography, with the dancers following the audience all the way to their seats.

The piece ended just seconds before the curtain rose for George Balanchine's *Concerto Barocco*. This ballet, as all Balanchine works, needs ease, speed and a surplus of energy. Most of this was lacking. It is hard to understand why, since the dancers should have all the skills required to do Balanchine's works well.

There was no lack of such skills in the next piece, William Forsythe's *Steptext*, which was danced with sharp precision by Correa, Paulo Arrais, Philip Curell and Ruutu.

The evening ended with a new piece by Scarlett called *Vespertine*. His choreography is sensual and tight in shape and form, as

is the music. However, the best part of the evening was seeing Jiri Kylián's *Wings of Wax* again. A piece for four couples, the theme of Icarus is strongly apparent throughout.

CODA, Oslo International Dance Festival, took place in October at Dansens Hus, opening with Sasha Waltz's *Gefaltet* (*Pleated*), with music by Mark Andre. She calls the work a choreographic concert, and rightly so. Waltz takes it so far out that in the end there is no dancing anymore, only the musicians are active. It was strange to open a dance festival with a piece where the choreographer more or less admits that the music wins.

Also in the CODA program was a new piece by Johannessen titled *Again*. The whole atmosphere was strict, with a classical touch, and the set by Kristin Torp was fascinating. The wall running around the stage was made by flexible, pleated cardboard that moved like waves. Apparently it was found in Canada and was shipped over the Atlantic Ocean. Dancer Line Tørmoen had the function of a conductor, trying to keep control over the progress of the whole piece, which was structured with a cyclical process of repetitions. Tørmoen and Spidsøe together were fascinating for their high technical skill.

It was interesting to see two foreign companies perform works choreographed by Norwegians. Polish Dance Theatre came with *Czterdziestci* (*Forty*) by Jo Strömngren, who just this autumn premiered *The Kitchen* and *The Painter*. *Czterdziestci* is a humorous journey through Polish life over 40 years. As well, French company CCN-Ballet de Lorraine danced *Hedda* by Bjørnsgaard, based on the play by Henrik Ibsen, our greatest author.

Carte Blanche also participated in CODA, taking the trip over the mountains from Bergen with the piece *Not here/ not ever*, by Chinese choreographer Sang Jijia. He is currently house choreographer with BeijingDance/LDTX and Guangdong Modern Dance Company, and has a past with Forsythe, whom he danced for and was mentored by as a choreographer. That may be the reason that his piece left one with the feeling that it could have been created anywhere, lacking any seasoning from the Chinese culture. So why invite a choreographer from so far away when his language has no personal characteristics?

The company is celebrating its 25th anniversary, which started with a tour of Norway at the beginning of January. ▼

# Norway

by Fredrik Rütter



Camilla Spidsøe in Daniel Proietto's *Cygne*  
Photo: Erik Berg

Yolanda Correa and Yoel Carreño in Liam Scarlett's *The Firebird*  
Photo: Erik Berg

It may be troubled times for the Bolshoi Ballet and — considering the startling developments in leadership at St. Petersburg’s Vaganova Academy — for Russian ballet in general, but there is no denying that the Muscovite company resolutely and quite successfully continues to do what it does best. And that is dancing.

A three-week Bolshoi tour to London last August met with a massive box-office success not seen in a long time, as well as rave reviews and rapturous public acclaim. The latest Bolshoi premiere this past November in Moscow provided further indications that this company is, in spite of it all, in splendid form and in high spirits. *Marco Spada*, revived by the French choreographer Pierre Lacotte, is a sparkling and colourful evening-length dance divertissement, a jolly romp casually tied to its historic Paris Opera origins, but fitting the Bolshoi like a glove.

*Marco Spada*, or *The Bandit’s Daughter*, was originally a three-act ballet-pantomime created at the Paris Opera in 1857 with choreography from Joseph Mazilier, who had just completed his *Le Corsaire*. The music was adapted from Daniel-François-Esprit Auber’s comic opera of the same name. Although successful at the premiere, *Marco Spada* was soon forgotten and since nothing of the original production was preserved (aside from a few sketches and reviews), the ballet we see today is entirely Lacotte’s work.

He first recreated it for the Rome Opera in 1981, with none other than Rudolf Nureyev in the title role, soon to be followed by the Paris Opera and some lesser theatres, before his version disappeared as well. Now, at the invitation of Bolshoi Ballet director Sergei Filin, Lacotte returned to Moscow, some 13 years after mounting his *Pharaoh’s Daughter* there.

The plot of *Marco Spada*, penned by Eugène Scribe, about an 18th-century Italian bandit posing as an aristocrat — a romantic, Byronic hero par excellence — is deliciously complicated and in Lacotte’s rewrite totally secondary to the dance and the purely spectacular. Lacotte doesn’t even make much of an attempt to tell the story clearly or to define the main characters in great detail.

In his usual fashion, he treats us to a relentless cascade of virtuoso steps and stamina-testing combinations in the style of 19th-century Romantic ballet, blend-

ed with some basic mime and a modern-day presentation. While Mazilier’s ballet was apparently rather gloomy, Lacotte’s version is definitively upbeat, involving mistaken identities, romantic confusions and abductions, resembling *commedia dell’arte* — even if the main hero dies at the end. The background changes from a village square (with the obligatory peasant wedding), to the bandit’s posh hideout, followed by the ball at the governor’s Roman palazzo, and the final climactic forest-with-cavern scene.

The Bolshoi production is similar to the 1981 Roman version, although Lacotte added some lesser characters and variations to elaborate the central *pas de deux* in the second act. While not without its bits of monotony in the choreography, the three-hour ballet offers some ravishing ensemble pieces, especially during the ball scene in the second act, and Lacotte skillfully characterizes each act with differently styled dances.

The Bolshoi’s *Marco Spada* recaptures some of its Paris Opera grandeur in sets and costumes, all designed by Lacotte, and looking splendid on the stage of the historic Bolshoi Theatre. Yet it takes a company like the Bolshoi to impersonate brigands, peasants, nymphs, dragoons, lords and ladies with such conviction and make dramatic sense of it all. Moreover, as was already obvious in *Pharaoh’s Daughter*, the company seems to have absorbed Lacotte’s style “à l’ancienne,” quite different from today’s Russian schooling, remarkably well. Rehearsals for *Marco Spada* were conducted by Lacotte himself, as well as his assistants Anne Salmon and Gil Isoart.



# RUSSIA

by Marc Haegeman

The brilliant premiere cast was a testament to Filin’s inspired directorship, since all four principals featured were brought to the Bolshoi by him in recent years. The two leading ballerinas, Evgenia Obraztsova, as the bandit’s innocent daughter, Angela, and Olga Smirnova, as the graceful Marchesa Sampietri, both Vaganova-trained, possessed all the effortless skills and emotional allure to make their roles properly fascinating. American star David Hallberg effectively shed his Prince Charming appearance to cut a credible *Marco Spada*, while Semyon Chudin as Prince Frederici was impeccable in character as in dancing. The up-and-coming soloist Igor Tsvirko in the role of Count Pepinelli, the captain of the dragoons, showed a new talent for comedy.

The strength of the company was further demonstrated by the ability to field several different casts. On the second night, for example, Artem Ovcharenko was also a remarkable *Marco Spada*, with his natural blend of virile elegance and impishness, while Kristina Kretova — another Filin discovery — peppered her Angela with irresistible feminine spirit as well as dazzling assurance. This second cast also allowed us to see the promising young soloist Artemy Belyakov as the Prince.

In effect, it’s nothing short of revelatory to see how alive and strong the Bolshoi Ballet appears. But, then again, as Bolshoi ballerina Svetlana Zakharova reminded us in an interview with the Russian newspaper *Izvestia*: “Nothing can stop the work going on ... whatever happens outside the theatre, inside there is always the work, there are always people who live only for the art, and they’re successful at it.” ▼

by Deborah Jones

It comes down to connections. John Cranko's *Onegin* has been known to Australian audiences since 1976, when it entered the repertoire of Australian Ballet. The company's artistic director was British-born Anne Woolliams, who had come from Stuttgart Ballet where she rose to be Cranko's assistant artistic director. After the choreographer's death in 1973, Woolliams co-directed Stuttgart with Dieter Graefe, Cranko's heir. She took up her post with the Australian Ballet in September 1976, and *Onegin* swiftly followed, premiering on December 1 of that year.

Until recently, Perth-based West Australian Ballet was too small to stage *Onegin*, but under former artistic director Ivan Cavallari (2007-2012) it doubled in size and now has 32 dancers and four young artists. Before he left to become artistic director of Ballet de l'Opéra National du Rhin in Strasbourg, France, Cavallari — formerly a principal dancer with Stuttgart Ballet — programmed *Onegin* for West Australian Ballet's 2013 season. Cavallari returned to Perth to polish the performances and Cranko's original Lensky, Egon Madsen, spent time with the company as guest teacher and coach. Connections.

In a further close link with Stuttgart, on opening night the ballet's title role was danced by Jiri Jelínek, newly arrived in Perth to take up a contract with West Australian Ballet. Jelínek is a former principal dancer with Stuttgart Ballet and the National Ballet of Canada (he is currently a guest principal with the Canadian company).

West Australian Ballet fielded two casts, neither without blemishes, but each with much to offer. There are many moments in Cranko's choreography that could be called repetitive and unobtrusive; whether they strike the viewer as so during the heat of performance depends on the conviction of the principal players. Jelínek and West Australian Ballet's prima ballerina Jayne Smeulders set the bar high. Jelínek wore *Onegin*'s superiority like a second skin and was coolly elegant in the unfolding elongations, deep lunges, sweeping legs and swift, crystalline turns that establish the character's thoroughbred credentials. Smeulders was a bluestocking Tatiana, an intelligent and slightly severe young woman who would fall hard. Her letter of declaration to *Onegin* was done feverishly — a matter of great urgency rather than a girlish error of judgment. Against that, there was less of a gulf between Tatiana as a girl and the third-act chatelaine of a grand household.

The second cast of Fiona Evans and Matthew Lehmann raised the emotional stakes in what turned out to be an inspired pairing. In his debut appearance, Lehmann had a scratchy start in the exposing — and important — Act I solo but clearly took a deep breath during the interval and the performance took off. Evans had already shown a quite different Tatiana, a fresh, impressionable girl smitten by the saturnine man in black. Her transformation into Prince Gremin's loving but sorely tempted wife was transfixing. Lehmann is a strong partner and the set-piece pas de deux were taken daringly, particularly the

Act III renunciation scene. It crackled with passion. (Lehmann was rewarded shortly after by being promoted to principal artist by current West Australian Ballet artistic director Aurelien Scannella.)

Dane Holland's Lensky had the musicality and control that sometimes eluded Daniel Roberts in the second cast. Holland's Act II solo showed him to be an expressive dancer of promise whereas Roberts seemed to be spooked by Tchaikovsky's lovely, difficult aria of regret and longing, chopping up the dance phrases. As Lensky's wayward love Olga, Sarah Sutcliffe (second cast) edged out Melissa Boniface in conveying the careless high spirits that set tragedy in train. Christian Luck and David Mack both impressed in the small but crucial role of Prince Gremin.

The rest of the company was relegated to friends, country folk and ball attendees. While they were perfectly fine (apart from too much irritating old-folk shtick), they would have been seen to better advantage had the sets, borrowed from Prague, fitted properly into the too-small His Majesty's Theatre. Scenic elements were ruthlessly cut down and shoehorned in — an unfortunate necessity in what was an important production for West Australian Ballet.

On the other side of the country in Sydney, Bangarra Dance Theatre ended its year with a studio showing of four new works (including a film) choreographed by company dancers. The clarity and resonance of the image-making was striking in each case although there was a slight over-reliance on familiar Bangarra shapes. The work was best when the choreographers invested more fully in an individual interpretation of the house style.

Tara Gower's *Nala* opened with delightful hijinks at an outdoor cinema that turned into a kind of clog dance. Jasmin Sheppard's *Macq* powerfully and movingly set colonial might against indigenous resistance and included a slow-moving cluster of hanging men, all the more unsettling for the beauty of its composition. In Deborah Brown's excellent film *Dive*, bulbous, old-fashioned diving helmets were the entrée into a world of underwater magic, and Yolande Brown's *Imprint* ended with a woman's body being tenderly painted with the colours of the earth.

It was a remarkably rich evening, superbly danced. The Bangarra company is looking mighty fine. ▼

**O**n November 19, 1963, flamenco dancer Carmen Amaya died in Bagur, Spain. That was just over 50 years ago, but the memory of this diminutive woman continues to fuel imaginations. Her artistic legacy not only continues to be current, but to a great extent has actually come to define the genre itself.

Amaya's birth is traditionally cited as 1913 and, throughout 2013, flamenco followers the world over celebrated her centennial with numerous tributes and shows, several books and documentaries, festivals in her honour and specialized periodicals that published elaborate spreads. Many of Spain's top dance stars — Antonio Canales, Juana Amaya, Juan Andrés Maya and José Antonio (former director of the Spanish National Ballet), among others — presented shows that alluded to the woman who transformed flamenco dance.

This extreme enthusiasm indicates the admiration felt for Amaya, though her actual date of birth was, according to recent investigation, far more likely 1917 or 1918. The reason given for the 1913 date is that, from early on, Amaya was supporting her desperately poor extended family with her dancing, and it became important to conceal the fact that she was underage.

Although Amaya was the first internationally known flamenco performer, few people outside the elite circle of flamenco followers know much about her.

What did this gypsy girl do that so dramatically affected the development of the art form? Quite simply, she put the “fire” into flamenco. The emerging flamenco of the world she was born into was inspired by the bolero school of dance in which female dancers were terminally sweet and coquettish, smiling

and flirting as they pranced gaily across the stage in frilly attire. Audiences applauded, but deep down inside many harboured a romantic concept of gypsiness they wanted to associate with Spanish dance: an image of dark intensity, strength and brashness with a hint of danger. It's known that Carmencita was already making the rounds of waterfront dives with her father accompanying her on guitar when she was only four years

described her as “demonic and explosive,” “threatening,” “compelling,” “sinewy and intense,” “barbaric,” “primitive, lashing and seething.” Never before had such dramatic language been applied to a flamenco dancer. When she toured the United States in the 1940s and 1950s, producer Sol Hurok routinely billed her as “a human Vesuvius,” and posters announcing Amaya's appearances often featured the image of an erupting volcano just in case anyone missed the point.

It was an image Hollywood was quick to capitalize on, and five of Amaya's numerous film appearances were made during her stay in that cinema capital of the world. In the later part of her life, back in Spain, she not only danced, but also assumed the central role in the film *Los Tarantos*, a flamenco adaptation of *Romeo and Juliet*. Completed in 1963 and nominated for the Oscar for Best Foreign Film, it was shot while Amaya was gravely ill; she did not live to see it released.

Amaya was the first dancer to use castanets for the more serious forms of flamenco. Before her, these hand-held percussive instruments were only considered appropriate for the more folkloric or classical forms, but her innate flamenco sensibility and whip-crack rhythm made it work. It was also Amaya who popularized the use of trousers by female flamenco dancers. Other innovations include the im-

portant addition to the repertoire of a flamenco form called taranto, which had previously only been sung.

Carmen Amaya fled Spain when the civil war of 1936 broke out, and returned after 11 years touring North and South America, not only a living legend, but a symbol of the very essence of flamenco.

*Estela Zatanía is the editor of the online magazine Defflamenco. ▼*

## The Year of Amaya



by Estela Zatanía

old. From there it's an easy leap to imagine her learning early on that sailors tossed more coins the faster and more energetically she danced. And that orientation toward intensity and speed is what she brought to flamenco dance, handily filling the vacuum.

Skimming her reviews over the years, we see her described as “a bucking bronco,” “a force of nature,” “a panther on the prowl.” Reviewers cited her “machine-gun feet” and “piercing gaze” and

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with “Did you poop your diapers?” and continues relentlessly to expose the daily grind of marriage: babies, teenager problems, cheating spouses and funerals.

Menghan Lou and Jianhui Wang mirrored the story in a supple duet, surrounded by three couples seated silently face to face. *Definitely Two*, an ironic comment on love, is not Ekman at his best, but even a lesser Ekman is pretty damn brilliant.

Working for the first time with Nederlands Dans Theater, Gabriela Carrizo (co-director of Brussels-based performance company Peeping Tom) offered up a terrific challenge to the dancers with *The missing door*. The piece, which evokes film noir, begins in a claustrophobic grey room, with a blood-bespattered man slumped in a chair. In the murky twilight between life and death, he glimpses the characters involved in his murder and in his existence: a vampish woman who taunts him, the servant who hauls away his lifeless body, a man with a maniacal laugh and one who shakes non-stop at the sound of an ominous knocking. People appear at the window or through one of the several doors only to vanish as a blinding moving spot sheds huge shadows on the cavernous space outside. The movement is minimal, the impact explosive and the dancers superb.

The highlight of the program was Crystal Pite's *Solo Echoes*. What makes this Canadian's work so riveting is how effortlessly she distills emotions — she has the talent to mix abstraction with reality. *Solo Echoes*, inspired by Mark Strand's poem *Lines for Winter*, is set to two of Brahms' most evocative sonatas for cello and piano. Against a background of gently falling snow, seven dancers appear one by one striding in slow motion through the darkness; they are hesitant, eyes fixed on some distant point ahead. Linked together in pairs, hands clutch or arms encircle waists. Their movement is fluid and boneless yet also swift and intense. There is an ebb and flow as sculptured formations build up and dissolve, the accent always on individuals in the group who collapse and are supported, lifted and held aloft. The movement shifts in horizontal lines over the stage, a clever contrast to the vertical drift of the snow; now and then dancers form lines and face out to the auditorium, eyes searching, mouths open in silent anguished cries before sinking down like melting dominos. Pite's *Solo Echoes* is darkly beautiful, shot through with both love and pain.



# Nederlands Dans Theater

## Carrizo, Ekman, Pite, Léon & Lightfoot / Mixed Bill

According to Paul Lightfoot, artistic director of Nederlands Dans Theater, it was totally by chance that the four ballets that made up the company's December bill at Lucent Danstheater in the Hague share a common basis: they all investigate facets of the human condition. Was it also by chance that three of the five choreographers on this stunning bill were women? In any case, the two most outstanding pieces were by Gabriela Carrizo and Crystal Pite.

First up was *Definitely Two*, Alexander Ekman's sequel to his paean to love, *Maybe Two*. The 28-year-old Swede again uses a

winning formula of humour, quirky musicality and a talent for massing the stage with knockout movement. *Definitely Two* opens with another Ekman trademark — a stage covered with mini-platforms.

There was a feel-good atmosphere as the entire company strolled on, all smiling à la Doris Day and dressed in pastel trouser suits. Then Marne Van Opstal stepped onto a platform and started tapping to Molly Drake's nostalgic *Do You Ever Remember*. It didn't take long for the rest to join him, building to a crescendo of taps, ball-changes and spring-shuffles.

This euphoric opening ends as abruptly as it begins, interrupted by a dropped front curtain on which is projected a furious bride belaboring her spouse. From here on, Ekman takes the reality road to the background of a querulous voice that starts



Sol Léon and Paul Lightfoot's *Skipping over Damaged Area* is a moving portrait of the effects of aging. An older man (Medhi Walerski) desperately tries to come to terms with his deteriorating mind. As he spews forth disjointed ideas and heartfelt cries — "This is not what I wanted to say!" — his memories appear and fade in the dance itself. A beautiful woman walks dream-like through his thoughts: "Do you think she still loves me?" he asks. His younger self is pictured in the virtuosic dance of two young men (here Brett Conway constantly drew the eye) and in the plasticity of the duet between Prince Credell and dainty Meng-Ke Wu. The delusory images are intensified by the lighting: blocks of grey that morph into darker and lighter forms, and a sky projected on the floor, as well as the brooding soundscape of John Adams' score, *The Chairman Dances*. At times the movement vocabulary borders on the repetitive, but the work bears the hallmarks of Léon & Lightfoot's fine theatrical intelligence.

— JUDITH DELMÉ

## Lucy Guerin / *Weather*

White plastic bags are the key scenographic element of Australian Lucy Guerin's *Weather*, which premiered at the Melbourne Festival in 2012 and was performed in Ottawa at the National Arts Centre in November. The small Studio Theatre was made all the more intimate by the thousands of plastic bags hung above the stage, framing the scene.

Other than that, the stage was left black and bare as, to open, a solo dancer began moving to the sounds of a howling wind. As the darkness dissipates, we can see that he is being blown about by that increasingly violent wind, arms flailing, body tossed. It also gradually becomes apparent that the sound is coming from him.

The dancer is joined by two, and then three more upright bodies, all stepping in rigid patterns around each other, enveloping him. Their feet create a steady rhythmic beat on the floor, a sound that slowly becomes overtaken by throbbing, ominous music, part of the electro-acoustic score by composer Oren Ambarchi. Something vaguely military gets installed, missile- or turbine-like, with the dancers mutating and vacillating between the



controlled and the bodies-in-the-wind movements. Very often one dancer erratically travels apart from the group, as if lost at sea, offering a counterpoint to the order of the other five.

Suddenly, the bags fall from the ceiling, and a small delighted scream is heard from the audience. Their descent appears to crush five of the dancers to the ground, buried under white billowy mounds. A sixth dancer, who has been left standing, slowly brings the others to life with her breath. It's as if she is a god controlling her subjects from her place in the clouds.

In the program notes, Guerin makes the link between her work and her concerns for the effects of climatic change clear. "Weather is the part of the natural world that we are still connected to and are reacting to," she states. This theme comes through clearly in the work. The movement fluctuates between what Guerin offers as two extremes, the tightly choreographed and the improvised sequences, intentionally contrasted to convey the way weather develops into formations and then disperses and becomes something else. By creating on this theme, Guerin demonstrates equally her respect for the beauty of nature, as well as her apprehension over how it can, at extreme moments, impact human life.

The bags offer the dual connotation of garbage strangling the planet and an object that makes wind visible and shows the potential of air. The first is expressed literally in a duet involving a dancer taking one of the littered translucent bags and covering the head of another with it,

pulling it down so that we see his silent scream for an uncomfortably long time. The second is suggested when a dancer lifts a larger bag into the air so that it parachutes slowly down, to be repeatedly thrown skywards again.

The work at times is perhaps too transparently exposed as a series of choreographic exercises around the theme of weather, rather than a unified whole. Some of the theatrical devices come across as clever, rather than sincere. Other images are more poignant. The formal sections, reminiscent of early art films that set changing abstract patterns to minimalist avant-garde music, showcase the dancers' obvious technical training.

There's one image in *Weather* that resonates with me still, the final one. A central figure is caught in a circle of the others, their hands linked. She tries to fling herself out of the circle, but is trapped. She drops to the floor and as the other dancers execute rapid movement in unison, she traces their frantic synchronized gestures with her hands, and then just her fingers, in diminishing effort, as the lights slowly fade. Her bowed head conveys resignation, while her hands convey control. The scene, and *Weather* as a whole, left me thinking about how humanity is causing increasingly erratic weather patterns that continue to awe, surprise and batter us. Though we didn't know it at the time, opening night came as what has been touted as the world's strongest storm was approaching the Philippines.

— LYS STEVENS

## Mohapatra, Kumar and Natarajan / Mixed Bill

There was an auspicious feeling in the theatre when renowned Odissi soloist Sujata Mohapatra, the granddaughter-in-law and disciple of the famous teacher Guru Kelucharan Mohapatra, appeared as part of the **Gait to the Spirit Festival** at Scotiabank Dance Centre in Vancouver. Cyclone Phailin had slammed into eastern India, primarily Orissa, Sujata Mohapatra's home state, in the days leading up to this October performance, making travel out of the region challenging.

Mohapatra made it safely, and performed a full evening of five works, all choreographed by her guru except the traditional opening, created by her husband, Ratikant Mohapatra.

She entered with a slow walk to centre stage, cupping white flower petals in her outstretched palms. Mohapatra was traditionally costumed in gold and red silks, the bodice fitted, the pants accented with magnificent pleating, as well as a jewelled belt, arm bracelets, ankle bells and necklaces of pearly white.

In *Mangalacharan*, the opening prayer to Lord Vishnu, spellbinding music evoked the image of snake charmers, appropriate since program notes describe Vishnu reclining on a massive serpent. Wave-like motions flowed through Mohapatra's body, her expression a luscious secret she was not quite ready to disclose. *Hamsadhawani Pallavi*, the only work not based on narrative, revealed the isolated play of rhythms in the dancer's neck, head, torso and pelvis. Mohapatra danced as though there are tiny serpents in all her joints. She stamped out rhythms in call and response with the singer (all the music was recorded), and closed in a glorious arabesque-style pose. In *Ashtapadi*, she conveyed a multitude of subtle emotions as lovesick Radha, the consort of Krishna. Each second, her refined control of mood expanded the musical dimensions: the tabla beats, the clink of ankle bells, the singer's voice.

After intermission, Mohapatra returned dressed in deep rose silks to perform an excerpt from the dance-drama, *Ramayana*, acting all the characters: goddess Sita, Rama and Lakshmana. This work offered gorgeous warrior poses and challenging deep pliés on demi-pointe, interwoven by the pattern of drum rhythms.

The concluding work, *Moksha*, meaning liberation from the illusion of separateness, is an ecstatic dance proving Mohapatra's true power as a dancer. The undulations pulsed from her body; weighted, wide stances and the foot stomping of rhythms sped up, followed suddenly by stillness. Accompanied by the chanting of Om, Mohapatra transformed into a goddess at centre stage, the fingers of one hand slicing downward to the earth in her final pose.

On the previous evening, soloists

Bhavajan Kumar (Canadian-born, based in India) and Navia Natarajan (Indian-born, based in the United States), shared the evening program of bhārata natyam. Kumar was perfect as Krishna, playful but god-like in white silk pants and bare torso. In the lyrical work, *Bhavajan*, Kumar's curious forward-leaning movements aroused a feeling of sweetness. In *Ashtapadi*, his emotional pleading for Radha's forgiveness exemplified the path of devotional love in Hindu spirituality. The final work, *Thillana*, showed off Kumar's fast, rhythmic technique — big *sissonne* jumps, strong heel stomps and pirouette-like turns.

Natarajan, a remarkable young performer, created her own choreography, the only dancer to do so either evening. Her strong, grounded presence was constant throughout the phrases of driving rhythm and in her portrayal of emotions.

In *Varnum*, Natarajan danced the experience of a young girl's maturing spiritual devotion; when she folded into a seated pose on the floor, her eyes and face communicated a depth of longing to know firsthand the grace of Shiva, or absolute reality. Natarajan transmitted longing from all the cells of her body. Her core radiated to the heart centre, connectivity flowing down her arms, to hand and finger gestures, or sacred mudras, which are so integral to bhārata natyam. Dressed in deep red silk with forest green borders, Natarajan's commitment to her art form brought the energy of the divine feminine into the theatre.

The myths and narratives underlying Indian classical dance, with the choreography often miming the story, can feel long. Nonetheless, the sense of goodness and reverence for life that suffused this program was palpable. The transmission of spiritual states to the audience, one of the purposes of this dance form, is not merely symbolic — it is a real phenomenon, every bit as real as our physical world, cyclones and all.

— MARY THERESA KELLY

## Gait to the Spirit



# Pennsylvania Ballet



## George Balanchine / *Jewels*

In his near 20 years as Pennsylvania Ballet artistic director, Roy Kaiser has always wanted to stage George Balanchine's *Jewels* and the fall launch of the company's 50th anniversary season seemed the perfect occasion. Kaiser also wanted to honour the company's founder, Barbara Weisberger, a protégé of Balanchine's. The master Russian choreographer had championed Weisberger's gifts as a teacher and artistic director, and was generous in giving her ballets and providing dancers to the fledgling company.

Kaiser took somewhat of a risk programming *Jewels*, usually staged on companies with many more dancers than Pennsylvania Ballet's roster of 40, though last season the corps de ballet seemed particularly solid and in prime shape for anything. One quality of this ensemble is that Kaiser routinely casts corps members in larger parts and this less static casting hierarchy often results in overall strength.

The three-part *Jewels*, with those dynamic Karinska costumes, turned out to be framed very well in the 19th-century grandeur of Philadelphia's Academy of Music where the show took place. As much innovation as *Jewels* may have conveyed in 1967 at its premiere, there are sections that look dusty today, but without doubt real choreographic gems were mixed in with rather tarnished baubles.

Emeralds tends to play as rather hot-house flowery, with its ethereal score by Gabriel Fauré and salon costumes, the women in chartreuse tulle and the men in dark green velvet vests. In the opening duet, Lauren Fadeley and Ian Hussey projected fine line phrasing with stock

Balanchine configurations. In the trio dances, Andrew Daly, Holly Lynn Fusco and Elizabeth Mateer brought airy élan to those courtly trio dances. Lillian Di Piazza and Lorin Mathis had more choreographic French fire to work with and they made the most of it, Di Piazza with gorgeously lithe port de bras and Mathis conveying an air of princely attendance.

Rubies drew startled applause for those deep vermilion costumes. It is largely assumed that Rubies reflects an Americanized aesthetic, but Balanchine corrects that notion in his *Complete Stories of the Great Ballets* book. "It is simply Stravinsky's music," he writes, "which I have always liked ..." Often referred to as jazzy, it is very reflective of Stravinsky's jagged fanfares and driving piano (played with spiked drama by Martha Koeneman, a Russian music specialist).

In the lead duet, Amy Aldridge throws in the occasional mug to partner Alexander Peters, after some dizzying mach-speed steps that reverse on a dime, interspersed with them running around or tugging at each other's limbs for maximum limb extensions. This is an atypical romp from the choreographer that still looks fresh and ripe for interpretation. Aldridge, a consummate technician, is taller than Peters when on pointe, and the pair played to their difference in height for even more comic effect.

Carolyn Curcio, stepping in as the soloist at the last minute, seemed too demure in the opening scene, but by the second solo her performance arc became vibrant. It culminated in the arabesque "facet" of this jewel, when she was surrounded by the men, who manipulated her into a backbend torso torque that drew gasps from the audience. The corps dancers were strongly supporting, with

razor sharp attack during Balanchine's ensemble scrambles.

Diamonds already looks decoratively static in the opening tableau, and as danced on opening night the ensemble women cast unfocused energy and pacing. Completely recalibrating the performance was the entrance of Julie Diana and Zachary Hench for the central pas de deux. Diana's pacing with the orchestral thrust of the Tchaikovsky music was instructive and luminous.

Hench and Diana, locked on each other's eyes, conveyed a furtive story: Hench tried to make advances, and Diana pulled her hand away. Diana's adagio pointe work was simply magical; Hench's unstrained jetés and grand pirouettes were centered. The female corps had gotten themselves together by the time they were back onstage, the men joining them. The full-company Polonaise with streams of circling looked like mere pageantry, but the company showed both unity in detail and breadth.

Conductor Beatrice Jona Affron and the Pennsylvania Ballet Orchestra gave each *Jewels* score vivid character and a palpable sense of dancer-musician dynamics.

Days later, the free performance sampler program, A Gift to the City, that had every theatre seat filled, was recorded by PBS, slated for broadcast in May 2014. The program included Diamonds and two contemporary ballets, Christopher Wheeldon's *After the Rain* and Margo Sappington's *Under the Sun*. Weisberger was onstage at the performance, radiant at 87 in a sequined gold ensemble, with roses sailing over the stage at her feet from the throng of her former dancers and the audience lustily applauding.

— LEWIS WHITTINGTON

## Lila York / *The Handmaid's Tale*

The Royal Winnipeg Ballet's *The Handmaid's Tale*, which premiered in October at the Centennial Concert Hall in Winnipeg, is certainly ambitious. The gritty plot of Margaret Atwood's celebrated 1985 dystopian tale should have inspired New York-based choreographer Lila York to craft a ballet equally on the edge, but the choreography, while attractive, does not transplant the dark heart of the novel to the stage.

York does have credentials. For 12 years, she was a lead muse with the Paul

fraught with tension and conflict, but York's ballet version lacks the drama and passion of the original, seeming to skim the surface.

In terms of plot, the United States is now called the Republic of Gilead, and is run by a military theocracy. The handmaid in question is Offred (Amanda Green), who, because she is fertile, is the concubine of the Commander (Alexander Gamayunov). Her main objective is to provide the Commander and his wife Serena Joy (Serena Sandford) with a child. The couple is barren, because in Atwood's near future, radiation poisoning has compromised conception.

Unfortunately, the characters come

York has structured her work around 16 short scenes that capture incidents in the novel. The Red Centre, for example, shows Aunt Lydia disciplining the handmaids. Jezebel's takes place in the brothel where the prostitutes are the playthings of high-ranking officers. In short, York does cover the waterfront in terms of Atwood's storyline, but the silent blackouts following each scene are deadly.

There is nothing original about York's dance vocabulary — established ballet steps strung together for her movement patterns, and too pretty to capture Atwood's nightmare scenario. Her movement for the Eyes, the state police, looks like an exercise for young ballet students. They convey neither terror nor menace. She does, however, give the resistance fighters a bit more vinegar. York's best ensemble moments are her rigid, staccato handmaids' dances, and the vulgar sexuality for the Jezebels that is flashy bump and grind Broadway.

The highlight of the piece is Ceremony, a trio for the Commander, Serena Joy and Offred, where the wife watches the husband couple with the handmaid. York has given them a stately pattern of circles within circles, of bodies entwining together with constant shifts of control.

What really works well are the production values. Liz Vandal's wonderful costumes capture Gilead to perfection. The stylish red tunics for the handmaids are a strong visual contrast to the 1950s' shirtwaists of the wives.

Clifton Taylor's set evokes the starkness of Gilead society with its towering steel gallery and staircase. The use of projections is also effective. When the audience enters, two screens are showing newsclips from Gilead, which includes propaganda depicting skirmishes between the victorious military and the hapless resistance. On the romantic side, Offred's memories of her husband are rendered in film as a lyrical pas de deux in a dappled, sunlit parkland.

The score, played live by the Winnipeg Symphony Orchestra conducted by Tadeusz Biernacki, is a pastiche of edgy modernist European composers, including Alfred Schnittke, Arvo Pärt and James MacMillan. Though it sets an appropriately jarring atmosphere, an original composition by an edgy modernist Canadian composer would have been



Taylor Dance Company. Since 1990, she has choreographed works for 22 American companies, both ballet and contemporary, while adding new repertoire to the likes of Birmingham Royal Ballet, Royal Danish Ballet, Scottish Ballet and Norwegian National Ballet. Apparently, she had wanted to make a work based on this novel by one of Canada's literary giants for nearly a decade.

To her credit, York has created juicy roles for the Royal Winnipeg Ballet dancers, who look terrific. Sadly, what she hasn't given them is deep character studies. Atwood's prophetic novel is

across as one-dimensional. Green is elegant and soulful, but her choreography says little about her character's inner turmoil. Sophia Lee, the runaway handmaid Moira who ends up as a prostitute, is feisty, but never much beyond that. A duet performed by the two women at the handmaids' compound is a lyrical mirror exercise rather than a display of personality. The Commander is dignified, the rebel leader (Yosuke Mino) is energetic. Nick (Dmitri Dovgoselets), who is the Commander's chauffeur and Offred's lover, and Luke (Jaime Vargas), who is Offred's husband, are merely dance partners.

more suitable. Found music is never the same as a score that is production specific, one that helps define the ballet. In fact, composed music could have helped in characterization more than a generic soundtrack.

Because *The Handmaid's Tale* is eminently watchable, the work will doubtless find a home in the Royal Winnipeg Ballet repertoire. The sad part is conjuring up what could and should have been created in the hands of a stronger dancer-smith.

— PAULA CITRON

## Xin Lili / *The Butterfly Lovers*

The brief opening scene of Shanghai Ballet's *The Butterfly Lovers* gives clear notice of how this 2001 dance adaptation, by no means the first, of a classic Chinese legend will unfold. It's a tableau vivant that presents the tale's three protagonists as symbolic types — the innocent heroine, her noble lover and the bad guy. They could have stepped right out of traditional Chinese opera.

Indeed, as the ballet plays out, the highly stylized influence of Chinese opera on choreographer Xin Lili, a former company principal who became Shanghai Ballet's artistic director 12 years ago, becomes increasingly apparent, particularly in the mimed sequences. So are several other influences. As with many Chinese story ballets, Xin's *The Butterfly Lovers* is a sometimes disconcerting blend of traditional Chinese performing arts, Russian classicism and more recent Western influences.

The men are always strong and athletic. If they tossed off the odd backflip, it would come as no surprise. The women are soft and willowy as they impersonate butterflies in Petipa-like ensembles. Partnered work includes various show-off lifts, but also more expressive intertwining of arms and arching of backs.

The four-act production, complete with lavish but uncredited sets and costumes and a recorded orchestral score — soundtrack might be a more accurate description — by Xu Jianqiang, finally had its Canadian premiere when, as a prelude to a coast-to-coast United States tour, Shanghai Ballet landed north of the border in October. The com-



# Shanghai Ballet

pany performed at Mississauga's Living Arts Centre, a mere 30 kilometres from downtown Toronto's Sony Centre, where in 1989, in its previous Canadian appearance, Shanghai Ballet performed the ideologically rigorous *White-haired Girl*.

*The Butterfly Lovers*, made of gentler stuff, is often described as a Chinese *Romeo and Juliet*. Yet, although its young lovers are decidedly "star cross'd," the story has fantastical elements that conjure *Giselle*, and its apotheosis echoes *Swan Lake* — both works that in standard versions are part of the troupe's repertoire, as is Derek Deane's *Romeo and Juliet*.

With ancient roots in China's Tang dynasty, the oft-retold *Butterfly Lovers* legend has inspired plays, operas, films and musical interpretations. Its essentials are as follows.

In an age when a formal education was considered unsuitable for girls, Zhu Yingtai, strong-willed daughter of a wealthy family, defies convention and disguises herself as a boy in order to attend school. Zhu falls for classmate Liang Shanbo. Despite her displays of affection, Liang treats the relationship as no more than a bromance until the end of Act II when Zhu, now summoned home, reveals her identity.

Liang's affection graduates to blazing passion, but his hope of marrying Zhu is thwarted by her father, who has arranged to wed his daughter to the son of a rich magistrate. In Luo Huaizhen's ballet libretto, this character is the bad

guy, Ma Wencai. Zhu protests, but after Ma's father has lethally set his thugs on Liang, she no longer has the will to resist. On her wedding day the heartbroken Zhu visits Liang's grave. As the tale takes off into fairy-tale supernaturalism, the tomb splits open and the lovers are transformed into butterflies and eternally united.

Fan Xiaofeng and Wu Husheng did their best to bring texture and depth to the respective roles of Zhu and Liang, but the choreography proved a constant restraint. It was only in their Act III pas de deux, when Liang makes his final bid for Zhu's hand, that the full force of a passionate romance was present. Their concluding pas de deux, as butterflies, was choreographically bland and anticlimactic.

The Shanghai Ballet, which evolved from an earlier troupe into its current form in 1979, is a well-trained company that dances with clean precision and engaging energy. These qualities are sadly not enough to lift *The Butterfly Lovers* beyond the level of a danced cartoon. Matters are not improved by a confusing libretto that throws in unexplained dream sequences and leaves us wondering whether an attractive couple in white costumes, given a lively pas de deux in Act II, are just there as a choreographic diversion or represent the young lovers in an idealized state. The program notes and cast list offer scant guidance.

— MICHAEL CRABB

# Rodin and Claudel #1

Louise Lemieux Bérubé



cotton, linen and dyes, 244 x 412 cm

Peter Quanz's *Rodin/Claudel*, created for Les Grands Ballets Canadiens de Montréal, was my inspiration for a series of textile art. The ballet's subject — French sculptors Auguste Rodin and Camille Claudel — was especially interesting to me. My process began with 600 photographs shot during a dress rehearsal at Place des Arts in spring 2012. I shot some using a slow lens to get the blurred image I was after, and some with a faster lens to get sharp images. At the premiere, I photographed the large portraits of Rodin and Claudel that were projected on the curtain. I then designed a lively composition featuring motion blur around a clearly defined central character to create my own point of view of the dance.

— LOUISE LEMIEUX BÉRUBÉ

Louise Lemieux Bérubé co-founded the Montreal Centre for Contemporary Textiles in 1989, which she directed until retirement in 2012. She is the author of *Le Tissage créateur*, a textbook on weaving, and co-author with Carole Greene of *Louise Lemieux Bérubé, Unwinding the Threads* (2012). Visit [www.lemieuxberube.com](http://www.lemieuxberube.com).

In March, Les Grands Ballets Canadiens will remount Peter Quanz's *Rodin/Claudel* at the Manitoba Centennial Concert Hall Theatre in Winnipeg, at Place des Arts in Montreal and at the National Arts Centre in Ottawa.

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