

# dance

INTERNATIONAL

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## *Romeo and Juliet* In London

**Karen Kain &  
Frank Augustyn**  
40 Years Later

**Costume Designer  
Richard Hudson**

**Alberta Ballet's  
*Ballettuhjah!***

**Misty Copeland**  
ABT's *Firebird*



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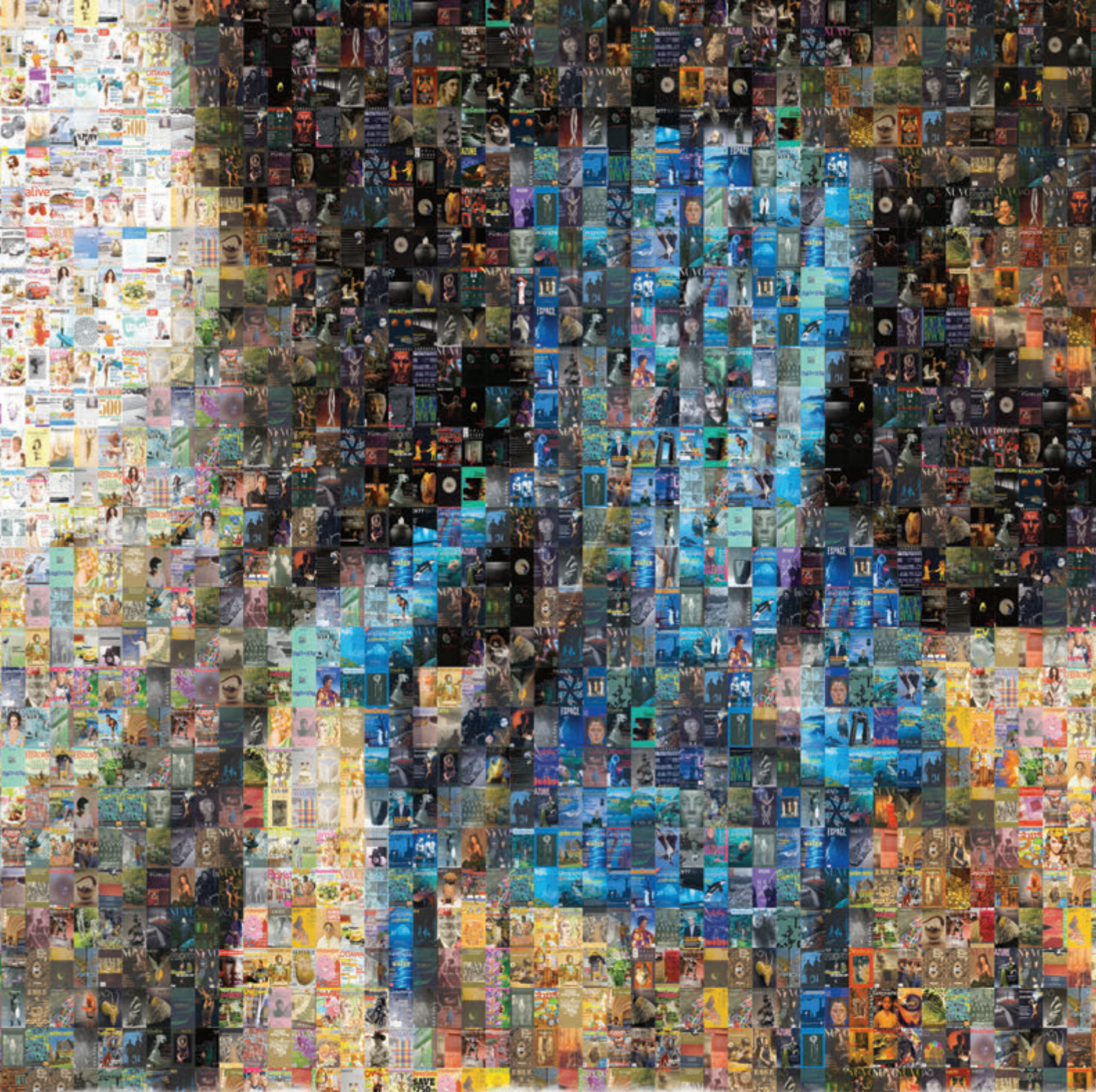


  
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Heather Ogden and Guillaume Côté in  
National Ballet of Canada's *Romeo and Juliet*  
Photo: Johan Persson



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# *Romeo and Juliet*

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I N L O N D O N





The National Ballet of Canada performs a new *Romeo and Juliet*  
choreographed by Alexei Ratmansky

by Michael Crabb



Guillaume Côté and Heather Ogden in *Romeo and Juliet*  
Photo: Johan Persson





Heather Ogden and  
Guillaume Côté in the  
National Ballet of Canada's  
*Romeo and Juliet*  
Photo: Johan Persson

From the moment she became the National Ballet of Canada's artistic director in 2005 Karen Kain made a return to international touring a priority. The 2012-2013 season, which concludes with an unprecedented mid-July visit to Saratoga Springs, for years the summer home of New York City Ballet, has seen the fulfillment of that ambition.

Visits to Los Angeles and Washington DC with Christopher Wheeldon's *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland* were only the prelude to the truly big event, a return in mid-April after more than a quarter century to one of the world's truly great ballet capitals, London.

"My dancers want to perform abroad as well as at home, just as I did in my day," says Kain. "Dancing in a major capital like London is important for them as artists and for the cultural prestige of the company and Canada."

Kain also knows that a company's foreign touring record is something ambitious dancers, the clock ever ticking, scrutinize. Touring is important for talent recruitment and retention.

International touring is, however, a much more challenging proposition than it was in Kain's dancing heyday. Impresarios such as the legendary Sol Hurok and overseas presenters with deep pockets are a thing of the past. The sizeable govern-

ment grants that helped large Canadian troupes to tour abroad have been gutted. Nowadays companies must bear an intimidating share of touring costs.

The trigger for the National Ballet's London visit, its first since 1987, was Kain's decision to replace John Cranko's long-serving production of Prokofiev's *Romeo and Juliet* with one commissioned from New York-based former Bolshoi Ballet Artistic Director Alexei Ratmansky, nowadays widely considered to be classical ballet's brightest hope.

Kain surely understood that after such a long absence from the international circuit the National Ballet of Canada could no longer rely on brand recognition. It needed



enticing repertoire to stimulate interest and a Ratmansky *Romeo and Juliet*, apart from serving Kain's own artistic objective to have a version more suited to a 21st-century ballet company, seemed just the ticket.

And so it was. Alistair Spalding, chief executive of Sadler's Wells, justifiably self-titled "London's Dance House," agreed to invite the National Ballet to his hallowed theatre, original home of today's Royal Ballet, even before Ratmansky's production received its November 2011 Toronto world première, timed to mark the company's 60th anniversary. Such an early commitment meant that designer Richard Hudson could be forewarned that his new *Romeo and Juliet* sets would have to fit Sadler's Wells' comparatively cramped stage. As it was, a catwalk running across a gallery in the ballroom scene and a staircase that descends into the crypt could not be accommodated.

The National Ballet is an exceedingly well-oiled machine. Even so, planning for the London visit tested its mettle. With so many different dancer nationalities, visa applications required headache-generating attention. Then there was the sheer physical challenge of getting the production to London within a tight time frame. A Toronto run of *Romeo and Juliet* ended less than a month before the work's trans-Atlantic première. It required six sea containers and 10 air-freighted road crates to transport all the sets, props and costumes to London.

Everything arrived on schedule but with only limited time for load-in and set-up there were some anxious moments. With large parts of Hudson's Verona temporarily propped up on the Rosebery Avenue sidewalk, there was a general prayer for dry weather. The dancers only had a full dress rehearsal the afternoon of the April 17 opening, hardly time to adapt to a stage a third smaller than the one they're used to in Toronto.

London is very particular about *Romeo and Juliet*. Two of their most revered, now deceased, choreographers, Frederick Ashton and Kenneth MacMillan, both made admired versions. The latter's is still a Royal Ballet staple. Comparisons were inevitable and, as the reviews piled up, were not always flattering.

To read a "London Applauds *Romeo and Juliet*" release issued by the National Ballet's PR department mid-way through the London engagement, complete with encouraging media quotes, you could be forgiven for concluding that audiences and critics had embraced both the company and its Ratmansky-made calling card enthusiastically.

So far as audiences were concerned, they did indeed applaud. That's what audiences

are expected to do. As for the critics, they were a very different cup of tea. Some had positive things to say — although none unreservedly — but many did not. Some in fact, even by waspish London standards, were poisonous. To say the critics were deeply divided would be to understate the case.

Leading the positive charge with four out of five stars, *The Guardian's* Judith Mackrell praised the Russian Ratmansky's subtle reading of Prokofiev's very Russian score. "He uses its muscular drive to imagine a turbulent pair of lovers, high on teenage hormones."

Mackrell continues: "What Ratmansky also hears in Prokofiev is a very Russian, buffooning energy, which he uses to brilliant effect for Mercutio (Piotr Stanczyk) — a pitch-perfect fusion of camp, comedy and technical dazzle that during the ballroom scene causes even the enemy Capulets to burst into involuntary applause."

Mackrell had positive words for opening night's husband-and-wife title leads, Guillaume Côté and Heather Ogden, dancing these roles together for the first time in Ratmansky's production as a result of the choreographer's late decision to flip his original Juliet casting. (Until London, first-cast Juliet had always been Elena Lobsanova. Ogden, partnered by McGee Maddox, had been second cast.)

"Juliet (a light, bright Heather Ogden) is all recklessly fast footwork and wheeling jumps, running her nurse ragged, giddy in love," writes Mackrell. "Romeo (faultlessly danced by Guillaume Côté) has a poet's sensibility that registers in the airy drift of his arms and upper body. But he's also a puppyish, bounding boy, and it takes sex and the threat of death to shock him into the grown-up, gut-wrenched vocabulary of the final act."

Luke Jennings in *The Observer* was similarly impressed: "Ratmansky likes to create an interplay between formality and spontaneity, and Côté, with his elegant line, expansive arms and sensuous épaulement, embodies this approach perfectly. He and Ogden are in constant motion, and where his dancing is deep and grounded, she is all nervy verticality, her staccato phrasing echoing the flutter of Juliet's heart, and her flying temps levés and scissoring jetés expressive of her desperate adolescent yearning."

In a three-star review for *The Independent* Zoë Anderson was generally impressed with the company. "The National Ballet of Canada move with bright footwork and easy upper bodies: this is a lively, confident company."

Anderson also sees virtue in Ratmansky's "streamlined *Romeo*." She writes: "Ratmansky's production moves swiftly, with lots of

dancing. The steps are fluent, with some touching drama." Yet, in a theme echoed by many of the critics, Anderson felt Ratmansky had missed the overall dramatic mark. "Ratmansky can't decide how tightly to focus on his star-crossed lovers."

In *The Evening Standard* Lyndsey Winship's three-star review cut to the chase by asking: "Do we need another *Romeo and Juliet*?" In answer he declared that Ratmansky's version "pales in comparison" with MacMillan's and is too rushed. "Choreographically, it's all go," wrote Winship.

This was mild stuff compared with that meted out by Isemene Brown, formerly of *The Telegraph*, now writing for the respected online *Arts Desk*. Her two-star review was tough on Ratmansky and dismissive of "the modest and modestly skilled Canadian company."

Veteran 81-year-old critic Clement Crisp of *The Financial Times* was appalled. "This interminable event, with its puny crowd scenes, its dire predictabilities of characterisation, its swishing acreage of risible outfits and, alas, less-than-persuasive interpretations — Juliet as head girl; Romeo and his laddish chums roaring over the stage but with dramatic cogency notably absent — is the least appealing of visiting cards ... I know that the National Ballet of Canada is tremendously better than this posturing charade."

But Crisp's was not the last word. *The New York Times'* Alastair Macaulay was in London for his first look at Ratmansky's *Romeo and Juliet* and after watching two different casts filed a long, insightful and generally very positive review. "Of the six versions I have seen by choreographers alive today," wrote Macaulay, "this is much the best. And it's a good calling-card for the company."

Nowadays — if it ever did — what critics say has little impact on attendance. London ballet fans came in droves, filling Alistair Spalding's 1,500-seat theatre to an average 90 per cent of capacity during the six-performance run.

No doubt the National Ballet, particularly its younger members, smarted at the critical vitriol — more than they were soothed by the more encouraging reviews. Kain, however, now a veteran of five National Ballet London visits, the first in 1972, must have foreseen the risk of bringing a new *Romeo and Juliet* to London, but in terms of repertoire her options were limited and the need to be seen imperative. As Kain candidly told an opening night reception, the company can't just stay at home where it's "well loved and where people like everything we do." The National Ballet needs to play in the major league where the going is tough but the rewards potentially greater. ▼





Alexei Ratmansky's *Romeo and Juliet* for the National Ballet of Canada is an updated version of the company's steadfast work by John Cranko. The new ballet premiered in Toronto in November 2011. This past February, the company took *Romeo and Juliet* to Canada's capital city, Ottawa. In May, it was across the pond to London, England, which happens to be the home of this production's costume and set designer, Richard Hudson.

William Shakespeare's play, *Romeo and Juliet*, is set in Verona, Italy. For the ballet, Hudson designed hundreds of period costumes, based on the Early Italian Renaissance of the 15th century. Costumes in the production are all individual, without identical group ensembles, making each completely unique. The

designer took cues from studying Italian paintings and frescoes from the era. The final twist — the costumes also had to also be danceable!

The Renaissance fashionable were lucky to live in the Venetian Republic, now northern Italy. Known as a world centre of exceptional fabric production, it was also the place for imports from the east. Silks, satins, velvets and brocades were all of the highest quality and often woven with silver or gold threads. Those involved in the industry became very rich.

History records women dressed by first putting on a simple chemise, followed by a long, tight tunic dress. A garment called a houppelande, a loose robe made with lots of fabric and wide



# HUDSON

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## ITALIAN RENAISSANCE



sleeves, was placed over top, revealing the dress underneath. The houppelande was also worn by men. In this production it is worn by the most senior and distinguished characters. The young men wear doublets of various lengths, while many of the girls wear shorter dresses.

The ball is Hudson's most glamorous costume scene. Wealthy guests enter the Capulet home in dazzling ensembles. Jewel tones of blue, green and burgundy reign supreme, with rich ornamentation heavy in gold. A style known as particoloured was all the rage. The idea involved using multiple kinds of fabrics in a single garment. Hudson uses this technique with great success.

The hats are stunning. A popular style during the Early

BY KAREN BARR

Italian Renaissance was the balzo. It is completely round like a ball and made of rich textiles. Long veils that almost reach the floor compliment the hats of some of the women. Once worn only by brides and married women, by the late 1400s they adorned woman of all ages and marital status, as fashion. Another popular style, known as a chaperon, was similar to the balzo, but with a flattened top, like a turban. One glorious hat that appears on stage defies classification. It is gold and shaped like the wings of a bird, with feathers distinct, about to take flight. The hats for the ballet were constructed of light weight foam with nylon boning.

Lady Capulet is, as the party's host, one of the best dressed. For the ball, Lady Capulet's gown is red and metallic gold brocade. The matching wide hanging sleeves, known as à gozzo or à gomito, add dramatic flair. They tie to the dress and balloon outward, covered by gold tassels. The inner sleeves are embroidered with a diamond pattern and are made of poly dupioni.

Lord Capulet matches his lady, draped in red velvet. A flat chaperon hat, also in red, is swooped with a red scarf. Around his neck, he wears a necklace of multiple gold medallions.

Lord and Lady Capulet show off their daughter to their guests. Juliet's ball gown is distinctive for its soft light shades. The costume is Wedgewood blue silk, with a bodice and sleeves of light blue and silvery gold brocade. Hand-pleated blue ribbon outlines the neckline, edged with a demure white cotton lace. Her blouse underneath is cream silk. The skirt changes colour as the blue fades out to white, closer to the hemline. It is scattered with Swarovski crystals, which sparkle while she dances. She does not wear a hat, but beads in her hair, which resemble pearls. During the time, pearls were the most sought-after jewelry, both rare and expensive.

Romeo and his friends, Mercutio and Benvolio, stealthily make their entrance. The young Romeo wears a short pepulum doublet in light beige brocade, with a square neckline. It is trimmed in sky blue. Long slashes in the sleeves reveal white taffeta. The soufflé sleeve is bound in the centre with ribbon and snugly fitted from forearm to wrist. Tights are light beige. Tan boots rising to mid-calf are placed on top.

Mercutio is comedic with choreography to reflect this. He wears a short black doublet, which looks like leather onstage. It is trimmed with beige. Short cutouts disclose the white shirt under it. He wears matching white tights and black boots.

Benvolio wears a beige brocade doublet, with the highly popular particoloured tights. One leg is black, while the other is cream.

At first Juliet dances with Paris. The fine gentleman is dressed resplendently. The body of his tunic is white and rich metallic gold, with piping in brown and gold brocade. Pleated hanging sleeves, in a beige gold brocade, have an under layer of off-white silk. His pleated skirt falls to mid-thigh and is made from off-white brocade. Long before washing machines or dry-cleaning, white was worn only by the excessively wealthy. Who else could afford to maintain such standards of cleanliness? By dressing Paris in this way, Hudson clearly reveals the character.

Romeo meets Juliet and their love begins. Not interested in food, they only see each other, and in this moment of privacy they dance. Hearts are entwined. Fates are sealed. Shakespeare writes, "For never was a story of more woe ..." Ah Juliet, why not Paris? Why Romeo? ▼



# Kain and Augustyn

by Gary Smith



*A look back at the famous duo 40 years after their win at the International Ballet Competition in Moscow*

**T**hey called them the Gold-Dust Twins. They made ballet a household word. They took over front pages. Their names were as famous as rock stars and hockey heroes. Karen Kain and Frank Augustyn invaded the Canadian psyche in a way no other indigenous ballet stars had done before — or since.

Winners of a special medal for the Best Pas de Deux at the 1973 International Ballet Competition in Moscow, the young dancers were fêted by Prime Minister Pierre Trudeau, celebrated worldwide and offered the love and respect of ordinary Canadian citizens. They were on their way to a dazzling dance partner-

ship that would take them to New York, London and ballet stages across Canada.

Forty years later, Kain and Augustyn talk about their Moscow days and nights. They try to explain what made their partnership special. They also speak of the aftermath of their dance careers and how they have used their passion and skill to continue to influence ballet today.

Thinking back to 1973, Frank Augustyn sums up the reason the young dancers clicked. “I think we just moved the same way,” he says. “We had such understanding of each other. We could anticipate each other’s moves. That made disasters less likely,” he laughs.

“It was a symbiotic relationship. We

could trust each other. Being so close to each other offstage didn’t really have an impact on our work. There are two different worlds, the personal one and the working one. Nothing got in the way when we danced. We were just dedicated to our passion.”

Kain doesn’t choose to talk about the personal side of the equation, but she made it clear in her autobiography that there was more than just dance steps involved in Kain and Augustyn.

“We were temperamentally suited to each other,” she says. “We heard the music the same way. One cannot underestimate the importance of having a shared musicality in order to communicate



without speaking while dancing,” Kain says.

“Both of us were born long and lanky. Even though I may have been a little tall for Frank, his extraordinary co-ordination, musicality and strength allowed him to partner me beautifully.”

Together, Kain and Augustyn fueled fantasies in the public’s imagination that went far beyond their ability to communicate onstage. He was the Prince. She was Aurora, the *Sleeping Beauty*. People expected them to wake up in each other’s arms. The fantasy wasn’t permanent. Each moved on.

Kain says she was first made aware of Frank Augustyn by Betty Oliphant, artistic director of the National Ballet School. “She said she thought he could be the next Erik Bruhn. All I saw was a gangly, pimply young man with big glasses. I didn’t see the charm, but I was quite wrong.”

Augustyn’s first look at Kain garnered a similar reaction. “I thought she was an odd-looking thing. She had large features and small ears. I think I was 12 and she might have been 14. We didn’t really say much to each other. I thought all the ballet girls looked a little frumpy in their ox-fords and school uniforms.”

When Kain and Augustyn were chosen to go to Moscow for the big competition, Celia Franca, artistic director of the National Ballet said, “Don’t expect to win.”

Augustyn, young and blunt, said, “Why go then?”

Go they did though and it was part of Franca’s grand plan to make young stars of the pair for her needy Canadian company.

“She knew exactly what she was doing,” Augustyn says. “She knew the value of good press. We were essentially her creation. The talent might have been ours, but the build-up was hers.”

It wasn’t all roses and champagne in Moscow, however.

“There was jet lag, the raked stage [at the Bolshoi] and tremendous stress,” Kain remembers. “Because there were performances going on during the day, the competitors were made to rehearse overnight. One of our rehearsals was at 2 a.m. Both of us suffered from being unable to find anything to eat, even after standing in long lines. We existed almost entirely on cookies and ice cream. We both lost a lot of weight,” Kain says.

“It was all sausages, smoked fish and caviar. And I remember I had soup with feathers in it,” Augustyn laughs.

In the 1970s, Moscow was considered the centre of the dance world and two Canadian dancers winning a major award there was extraordinary. As well as the

Best Pas de Deux prize, Kain won the Silver Medal for female soloist.

“Did it all mean that much? Was it worth it?” Augustyn says. “It certainly helped our careers. The thing was we were competing against all those dancers from Soviet satellite countries. They were all about winning. It was such a different game for us. It wasn’t to do with ballet as art. It was everything to do with making sure you won.”

“We were completely surprised at the effect our win had in Canada,” Augustyn adds. “I remember when we were flying home Trudeau called the plane and asked us to come to dinner that night. We were in casual clothes and not dressed for a party. We got off in Ottawa with no luggage and were taken to the Château Laurier where there were a few shops and told to select something to wear. I bought a beige shirt and sweater and some beige slacks. I felt like a mushroom in them.”

“Karen found a dress, but it was way too big, so they pinned it everywhere. We were so jet-lagged I don’t even remember the dinner party,” Augustyn says.

“When I think back, I am left with extraordinary memories of the beginning of a very special dance partnership and personal relationship that began in Moscow being paired in that competition,” Kain says. “I can’t speak to what other people saw in our partnership, but I know that while it lasted it was an extraordinary special one.”

“I remember being completely surprised and overwhelmed by how it affected people and how they took us into their hearts,” Kain adds.

Remembering their partnership dancing so many great roles in ballets from *La Fille Mal Gardée* to *Swan Lake*, Kain says, “It was a special time and too short a time once Frank started having trouble with major injuries. The Moscow competition affected my life and career profoundly as it launched both of us as artists in the dance world.”

Augustyn says, “I think we must have been special to those who watched us.



We seemed to represent something uniquely Canadian, yet part of an international art form. We were trained to be artists and I think people believed in us as something that represented Canada on the edge of new and exciting happenings.”

Today, as Artistic Director of the National Ballet of Canada, Kain has enormous influence on dance in this country. She leads an august institution into new arenas of expression and worldwide exposure.

As dance department chair of Adelphi University in New York, Augustyn exerts enormous influence on young dancers eager to take their place in the performance arena. He has built the dance department there into a world-class training ground and conservatory for serious students. He also continues to teach master classes in important dance centres. His video series *Footnotes* remains an important resource guide for dancers, dance historians and critics alike.

“Our careers together and separately were satisfying,” Augustyn says. “People said we had charisma. Well, who can define what that is or why it happens.”

“I know we were cute,” Kain once said about those days. “I’ve seen the pictures.”

What made them exquisite to watch doesn’t matter. The truth is there has never been another dance partnership in this country that captured the imagination of the public quite like Kain and Augustyn. ▼



# Alberta Ballet's

# Ballet



by Tim Christison

In response to being inducted into Canada's Music Hall of Fame, k.d. lang expressed her gratitude for Canada by saying, "I think the fact that I'm standing here receiving this award says more about Canada than it does about me ... only in Canada could there be people like Stompin' Tom Connors and Rita MacNeil [as national icons] ... Embrace the 'quirkmeister' that is inside all of us."

Why a group of expert collaborators, from dancers to designers, could focus on the essence of her for two years to create Alberta Ballet's *Ballelujah!* is a story worth telling.

The initiator of the ballet, choreographer and artistic director of Alberta Ballet Jean Grand-Maitre brought together a group of creative talents, who have amplified his vision with their own take on lang, and on the other pop culture icons portrayed in his other recent contemporary ballets, from Joni Mitchell to Elton John to Sarah McLachlan.

Grand-Maitre heard lang in Ottawa in the early stages of her career and was entranced by her robust, evocative voice and energy. When they met again at the 2010 Olympic ceremonies, which Grand-Maitre choreographed, he was again impressed by her voice.

k.d. lang performed *Hallelujah* at the Olympics without attending rehearsal, but she sang pitch perfect while unable to hear the orchestra (a factor that deters many singers from performing in a large arena).

Though she rarely speaks publicly of her eight-year dedication to Nyingma Buddhist practice, lang talks about the connection between her singing and Buddhist beliefs to *Shambhala Sun's* series on Art and Buddhism, "I would like to think I've always been Buddhist; it just took me a while to find my teacher."

She adds, "The effect on my voice is immeasurable ... My relationship to the control and fear of singing is gone. I don't mean breath control. I mean con-



## Embracing the “quirkmeister” that is k.d. lang

# etlujah!

trol as in forcing myself into the music and feeling that I’m controlling the music, rather than feeling like a vessel or a vehicle. I trust that I can do the work and simply be a vessel for something larger.

“Just to know that there’s a greater purpose to my music, a real purpose, has taken all the work out of it. That’s emancipating, because I don’t get stressed singing anymore.”

About the influence of her home province, Alberta, she says, “To me, space is everything. Space is the opposite truth to sound, so it is as important as sound. As a producer, I’m always looking for space and I’m always looking to create that pocket, especially for the voice.”

When Grand-Maitre met lang at her home in Los Angeles to start work on the ballet, she had been meditating all night honouring the Buddhist New Year. He recalls she was in casual attire, but with a special aura. “She talked about growing up on the Prairies so we decided to let the Prairies be the spark that launches the story. She gives the impression she is singing for someone far away.”

From her thoughtful answers coupled with the presence of many love songs she has written and/or recorded, Grand-Maitre sensed a very pure love story between two women on the Prairies was essential to his libretto/score/script from which all of the designers could work.

“These ballets are not about revealing things, but a portrait of their musical worlds not their private lives,” Grand-Maitre reminds us. “In our portrait of k.d. lang, it is connecting the dots of k.d. lang to the place where she was born. We explore how love and art and landscapes come together for her in her religion.”

These ballets have accelerated Grand-Maitre’s evolution, as each musician has unique demands on his choreography. He offers one example, “k.d. has notes that are sustained and I have to find

movement to go with that. Something about these singers [Mitchell, John, McLachlan and lang] has made me work more with jazz and forced me to evolve. They have been a wonderful influence in my life.

“I understood quickly that fusing aesthetics and the arts is the future. You still must perform the *Swan Lakes* and masterpieces, and cutting-edge choreography that is pure dance. But you also have to think about the new aesthetics. Working at the Olympics showed me how the arts are coming together and projection technology applications are advancing.”

A master of that technology is Virginia-based Adam Larsen, whose projection designs have been part of four previous Alberta Ballet pop ballets. Using his degree in film making, his love of live performance and his yearning to be in nature, he has captured the seasons on the land in his ode to the Prairies. His shooting and editing script is Grand-Maitre’s narrative, which was developed after a brainstorming meeting about two years ago with all the designers. After hearing and digesting the interviews with lang, ideas were explored as a group, sparking each other’s imaginations with suggestions of new technology to be implemented.

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Larsen and his colleagues appreciated being involved early in the process, which allowed them to produce seamless integration. He says, "Projections are meant to be supportive of what Jean comes up with onstage and not be overwhelming, which is difficult when we have 44-foot wide by 25-foot tall projections, a massive space for projection."

After that original meeting, Grand-Maitre and soundscape designer Claude Lemelin, who has worked with him on a number of projects since 1997, selected the songs and from that emerged the script.

Lemelin then immersed himself in the wide spectrum of Lang's songs, which cross genres. By listening to her music two or three times a week while working on other projects, he absorbed every element including instrumentation. His task was to create a soundtrack so that the music never stops. He started with an overture with wind sounds and electric guitar that conjures up the Prairies. Lemelin doesn't play an instrument nor is he a composer in the usual sense, but uses software on existing music to transform it as needed.

In the meantime, dancers were dancing to the selected songs, while Grand-Maitre edited the choreography. Then Lemelin created transitions, the length of which are to accommodate scene or costume changes or other production demands.

After months of leisurely designing and exchanges among the designers,

at the tense technical rehearsal, Lemelin had to alter some transitions for a variety of reasons. But this didn't faze him. "I'm fast to make changes after seeing rehearsal. Today, it is very simple to have all the equipment you need and use it on the kitchen table," he says with a chuckle.

Larsen's projection designs are permeated by impressions from his road trip to the Prairies where he captured hyper-real aspects to imprint on the audiences as their first impression of the landscape. He highlights the environment that influenced Lang whom he sees as a "fierce Buddhist, incredibly classy, incredibly poised with jazz in her spirit. You feel that serenity in the wind."

In tandem with Larsen's filming is Montreal-based Guillaume Lord's set design. He has worked with Grand-Maitre since 1997. From the script plus sketches he made in his little black book at the design meeting, he went with his intuition augmented by hundreds of pictures from the artistic director and his own sojourns on the Prairies to devise a first design.

His idea of the artistic vision — the magic part — is altered by the engineered phase, the accommodation to the needs of the other designers. In an attempt to create the impossible — openness on the stage — Lord chose flesh colour for the set so it could easily be mixed with the lighting colours and the projections' palette to create a landscape while still framing the dancers and their costumes.

Another long-time associate of Alberta Ballet is Montrealer Pierre Lavoie, a lighting designer who treats his work as another narrative. He began after attending the rough run-through in February, the division of where lights and moods should change with the costume changes and the projections. He integrated his requirements so nothing clashes and everything fits together like a puzzle.

When the artistic director wanted green grass for the dancing surface, Lavoie knew the dancers would also turn an unflattering green so he suggested a complimentary gold like the Prairies. The video helps the easily manipulated lighting in conveying the many colours of the region.

"Lighting is the impulse that makes my story line happen and the audience feel. My own story line mustn't interfere with other story lines. My story line is heavily influenced by the video, but also the choreography, the music and lyrics."

Lavoie knits the stories together with his lighting. "I also put my own imprint on the design. Just as one recognizes a writer by the structure of a sentence, my style is recognized by the angle of lighting and even more rhythm of the cue changes."

Like her colleagues, Lemelin-Lord and Lavoie, Quebec costume designer Anne Séguin-Poirier has experience with Cirque de Soleil, but she is new working with Alberta Ballet.

To her the emptiness of the Prairies and the fluidity of the wind demanded



Jean Grand-Maitre and k.d. Lang in rehearsal for Alberta Ballet's *Balletujab!* Alberta Ballet Company Artists Mariko Kondo & Elier Bourzac with Alberta Ballet's Ballet Master Alexandrous Ballard  
Photo: Paul McGrath



Alberta Ballet Company  
Artist Nicole Caron  
Photo: Paul McGrath



a fluid fabric printed in Prairie colours, which meant fabric creation. Séguin-Poirier's work was challenged by long-distance collaborating without the short-hand or trust the others shared. What she did share was the artistic challenge to merely hint at lang's life story.

Séguin-Poirier muses, "My challenge for this project was also to keep the essence of the body moving in clothes that work with the concept, keep the spirit but give the impression of a second skin that fits like a glove to the artist. We created costumes to induce the beauty of an evocative life and strong story of a wonderful artist. At the same time, costumes contributed to the emotions and another perception of this world.

"Sometimes you imagine a costume, but after rehearsal with the artist and the context you realize you need less. This is part of the creation."

Grand-Maître sums up the collaborations by saying, "We work hard with the designers to capture a truth, sometimes a provocative truth. We push the aesthetics and we work hard to design the ballets. Choreographically, for people who know dance, if you look closely you will see that it is a very challenging work for these dancers, not just musically and technically, but artistically, interpretively. There is a lot that goes into our contemporary productions." ▼

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# Misty Copeland

by Karen Barr

American Ballet Theatre's first African-American soloist in more than 20 years

In the poster for Alexei Ratmansky's *Firebird*, American Ballet Theatre soloist Misty Copeland, as the Firebird, wears a body-hugging red unitard resplendent with feathers, her body encapsulated in racing flames. It's not your typical ballet poster. Copeland is not your typical ballet dancer.

Born in Kansas City, Missouri, and raised in San Pedro, California, Copeland did not start taking ballet classes until she was 13. Within three months she was en pointe. Quickly she made a decision: she wanted to be a professional ballerina. And Copeland only ever dreamed of dancing for one company — American Ballet Theatre.

In 2000, she joined American Ballet Theatre's Studio Company and shortly after American Ballet Theatre, in 2001, as a member of the corps de ballet. She made news in 2007, when she was promoted to soloist. Fans were elated, but it may have escaped the eyes of the general public, if she hadn't reached a historical turning point in the company's history. Copeland became the first African-American soloist at American Ballet Theatre, in more than 20 years. Then there was the icing on the cake. In 2008, she was awarded the Leonore Annenberg Arts Fellowship, which recognizes extraordinary, talented young artists.

In the Spring of 2012, she found herself working with the Russian-born choreographer Ratmansky for *Firebird*. Of Ratmansky, Copeland states, "I've never really experienced someone like him, so direct in a really special quiet way. He's able to get something from the dancer. He's positive, motivational and powerful. He convinced us we could do more than we thought we could."

The importance of this role was presented to her after class one day, when she looked up at the Metropolitan Opera House. Although she had seen the mockup poster of herself in *Firebird*, no one had prepared her for the billboard.

What was her reaction? "I cried. Seeing a bigger than life size image brought tears of joy," remembers Copeland. "It represented so many things. It was an honour."

There she was an African-American



"I felt such a strong connection to the character." About the costumes she says, "They are pretty amazing. It's set in India so everything is so rich — the costumes, the headpieces. I wear a gold tutu. It's very royal and regal."

Copeland has recently tried her own hand at design, with a new line of sportswear called M by Misty — the M standing for MUSE. "It's something I've wanted to do since I turned professional. I felt out of place for a while because I have a different body type than a typical dancer." Copeland plans to market her dance wear for real women, with a focus on support. There are seven different leotards, four styles of tops, some skirts and stylish sheer overwraps. "They are durable and well made, in line with Lululemon," she states referring to the Canadian athletic wear company. M by Misty is slated to launch in the near future.

One wonders where Copeland manages to find the time for design, with her busy dance career. She also teaches master classes,

works with the Boys and Girls Club of America, in which her childhood association inspired her love of ballet, and other charity work. She has just launched her 2013 ballet calendar, with photographs by Gregg Delman. And, on a typical day she attends the one-and-a-half hour company dance class, Tuesday through Saturday, starting at 10:15 a.m. Rehearsals run from 12 to 7 p.m. Then there are performances, scheduled media appearance and interviews. She reveals she often sleeps all day on Sunday.

When asked which roles she would like to dance on her way to becoming a principal dancer, she doesn't hesitate. Still enamoured by *La Bayadère*, she selects the principal role of Nikiya. Next she names *Giselle*, every ballerina's dream and, of course, the romance of Shakespeare's lovers as Juliet in *Romeo and Juliet*. For the challenge of it, she also chooses the dual role of Odette/Odile in *Swan Lake*. If there is one thing for certain, it's that Misty Copeland enjoys a challenge. ▼

And then there was the full circle moment of returning home to California and the Segerstrom Center for the Arts to dance *Firebird*, where the production held its world premiere. Family, friends, dance patrons from her former dance school and a loyal fan base packed the theatre. "The moment I stepped on-stage, it was so quiet."

Afterward, pop star Prince threw an intimate dinner party for 20 of her close friends and family. He kindly stayed away letting her enjoy the spotlight. When speaking about her dance career, she looks back fondly on her first principal role in *Gong*. "It showed my versatility outside the classical realm." Copeland has never lost focus, however, of her original goals as a classical dancer.

In May 2012, she played Gamzatti to Alina Cojocaru's Nikiya in *La Bayadère*.



# STAR STORYTELLER



Christian Spuck starts a new chapter at Zürich Ballet

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BY JEANNETTE ANDERSEN



**A**s newly appointed director of Zurich Ballet, Christian Spuck opened his first season with a new production of *Romeo and Juliet* in October 2012. It was an instant success and within a few days of the premiere, all performances were sold out for the rest of the season.

Spuck, a latecomer to dance, started his training at 20 when he enrolled in the John Cranko School in Stuttgart in 1989. Upon graduation in 1992, he had a stint with Jan Lauwers' Needcompany and Anne Teresa De Keersmaeker's ROSAS, before joining Stuttgart Ballet in 1995. A year later he choreographed his first ballet and, in 2001, Reid Anderson appointed him choreographer-in-residence. Since then he has created almost 40 pieces.

In an interview shortly after the *Romeo and Juliet* premiere, Spuck spoke about his artistic credo, his hopes for the future and his new job as artistic director in Zurich.

**JA:** You have been called a great storyteller and are one of the few contemporary choreographers who is creating full-length story ballets. Why have you picked up this genre?

**CS:** Because I am interested in telling stories, I think that the big time of the abstract ballet was in the 1980s and 1990s and now the tendency is slowly going back to storytelling. In 2003, I did my first full-length story ballet, *Lulu. Eine Monstretrogödie*. It was an experiment but it worked, and since then companies have asked me to do new storytelling productions.

**JA:** You have said it is important to you that the audience understand the story without having to read the programme. Is that an antithesis to the abstract or story-less ballet?

**CS:** No, because mostly the abstract ballets do not want to tell a story. They talk about architecture, structure, a special kind of musicality. But you can also use dance to tell a story, and if you decide to do so it is very important that the story makes itself clear onstage.

**JA:** You have stated that you do not want to revolutionize ballet, but you want to create a new theatre language. Does ballet need that?

**CS:** I think ballet needs this at the moment. I do not think I want to create a new theatre language. I am looking for different ways of telling stories. I think that most story ballet productions are a little bit dusty and old-fashioned. But most of the music and the stories are still quite exciting. So why do we not try to bring them into the 21st century?

**JA:** Has it been difficult to take over Zurich Ballet after Heinz Spoerli?

**CS:** I think this question is asked a little bit too early. So far we are working very hard. We are preparing our next production. The company is in a very positive



Photo: die arge lola

mood. We are all excited about this big success. It is much more work than I expected, but the opera house is supporting us very strongly and we have already found an audience. It is difficult, but it is also fun.

**JA:** What is the difference between being a choreographer-in-residence and a ballet director?

**CS:** It is two completely different jobs. Choreographing I have learned during the past 16 years. I know how to create pieces; some are good, others are better and some are not that strong. Now, as a director, it is about planning, making sure your dancers are all right; your stuff is OK and so forth. I am responsible for the house being full, that the programme is working, that we get the right choreographers in. I have to keep the audience excited about what they are going to see, and I have to look at money. Unfortunately, there is no school or educational programme for ballet directors. You just have to do it. But, of course, I am not doing it alone. I have a staff of five people behind me. They are very supportive. We are a good team.

**JA:** You have said that the classical ballet company has a structure from the 19th century and that you would prefer to collaborate with the dancers more as a working team.

**CS:** Yes, I am trying to do something, which is normal in other companies: to give the dancers a platform in which to create and present their own choreography, compose music, make sets, costumes, anything they would like to do. But, in general, I am also trying to talk to the company

a lot. I want to involve them in the working process. I want to tell them what it is about, to tell them about my struggles and ideas. I want them to get an idea about the artistic process.

Doing *Romeo and Juliet* I had blackouts. There were a couple of scenes that did not work, and I told the dancers that I had a problem with them. So they did it themselves. They came up with ideas, they sorted it out. I like it when dancers take responsibility, and they really know what they are doing. They are smart, hardworking people, and they have more to give than just their bodies and steps.

**JA:** What are your plans for Zurich Ballet?

**CS:** I want a ballet company that is based in the 21st century, and I want to present choreographers and pieces that are very important to this century. I want to keep the classics alive, and I want to try to work a little bit on story ballets to make them a bit more up to date, so that we go away from this ballet cliché, which is still existing, that everything is just beautiful and pretty, but also slightly dusty.

Mr. Spoerli already did quite a lot of his own work, a lot of contemporary and neo-classical work. But I would like to push it a little bit further. It would be a big honour if Zurich one day is a place where lots of choreographers are really interested to come and work, because of what we are standing for artistically, but also because of the dancers, because they are open and free and want to try out lots of things.

**JA:** Katja Wünsche and William Moore left Stuttgart Ballet to join you in Zurich; did other dancers join you as well?

**CS:** No, all the other new dancers, which are about a third of the company, I found via an audition we did here. We did two audition days and we had more than 700 applications and I think 400 people have been here.

**JA:** Did some dancers have to leave?

**CS:** About 10 dancers; we made the decision it is better if they find another company. Normally, when I see other choreographers or directors take over a company, usually there is about a 50 per cent change. I was quite happy that I could keep it so low.

**JA:** What will your next ballet be?

**CS:** The next ballet, which comes out this season, is *Leonce und Lena*, a production I did a long time ago. But we are going to make a new version for Zurich, because now I have the time to rework it. And then next season I will bring out two new productions. ▼



## Millepied to Lead Paris Opéra



Left: Benjamin Millepied at the Garnier Opéra in Paris  
Photo: Julien Benhamou

Choreographer Benjamin Millepied has been appointed as the new director of the Paris Opéra Ballet, succeeding Brigitte Lefèvre. The announcement was a surprise to many, as he was not one of the frontrunners recommended by Lefèvre.

Although born in Bordeaux, France, Millepied has spent much of his career in the United States, dancing for the New York City Ballet from 1995 until 2011. He was appointed a principal dancer in 2002.

His choreographic career began with his first ballet, *Passages*, created for students of the Conservatoire National Supérieur Musique et Danse in Lyon. After that, he has created works for numerous companies, such as New York City Ballet, American Ballet Theatre, Dutch National Ballet, Maryinsky Ballet and Paris Opéra Ballet. He formed the company LA Dance Project in 2011, after having garnered much mainstream recognition for his work in the movie *Black Swan*, starring Natalie Portman, who he later married.

His LA Dance Project appeared in Paris this May. He takes up his post at the Paris Opéra in October 2014.

### Study #3 at Sadler's Wells

The Forsythe Company will present the U.K. premiere of *Study #3* at Sadler's Wells, London, June 18-20. Having originally premiered in Frankfurt in November 2012, the piece includes movement sequences, compositional methods, music, text, props, costumes, lighting, scenery and technical effects from 30 of Forsythe's acclaimed works from the last 30 years.

Founded in 2005, the Forsythe Company draws on the intensive collaboration processes pioneered by Forsythe, producing works in the area of installation, film, performance and educational media.

### Bolshoi's *The Rite of Spring*

Below: Rehearsals for Tatiana Baganova's new staging of *The Rite of Spring*  
Photo: James Hill

Wayne McGregor's new production of *The Rite of Spring* for the Bolshoi Ballet has been put on hold following the acid attack on company Artistic Director Sergei Filin. It was decided to determine a new date for the production once Filin returns. In its stead, a new version of the same piece by Tatiana Baganova was produced, under the leadership of acting director Galina Stepanenko, to celebrate the centenary of Igor Stravinsky's *The Rite of Spring*.

Other companies who honoured the centenary with *Rite* productions included the GöteborgsOperans Danskompani, which presented two major international versions by two female choreographers Marie Chouinard and Pina Bausch.



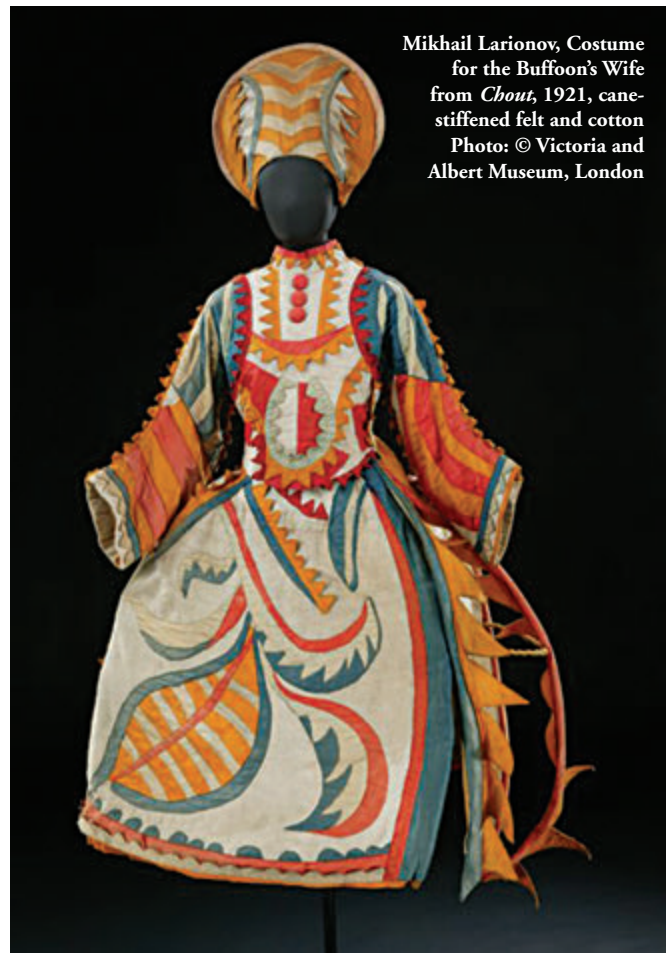


## Diaghilev and the Ballets Russes

The National Gallery of Art, Washington, DC, will host the exhibition *Diaghilev and the Ballets Russes, 1909-1929: When Art Danced with Music*, from May 12 through September 2. The gallery's 18,000-square-foot space will showcase some 150 original costumes, set designs, paintings, sculptures, prints and drawings, photographs, posters and 10 film clips.

The Ballets Russes propelled the performing arts to new heights through groundbreaking collaborations between artist, composers, choreographers, dancers and fashion designers, with such familiar names as Stravinsky, Balanchine and Nijinsky, among many others.

*Diaghilev and the Ballets Russes* is organized by the Victoria and Albert Museum, London, in collaboration with the National Gallery of Art, Washington, DC.



Mikhail Larionov, Costume for the Buffoon's Wife from *Chout*, 1921, cane-stiffened felt and cotton  
Photo: © Victoria and Albert Museum, London

Mikhailovsky Ballet in Nacho Duato's *Prelude*  
Photo: © Dave Morgan



### Duato: from Spain to Russia to Germany

Spanish choreographer Nacho Duato will become the director of Berlin State Ballet in August 2014, replacing Vladimir Malakhov. Duato will continue his work as artistic director of the Mikhailovsky Ballet until February 2014, after which he'll continue to work with the company as resident choreographer.

Duato has only been with the Mikhailovsky Ballet since January 2011, during which time he has staged the ballets *Duende*, *Without Words*, *Nunc Dimittis*, *Prelude*, *The Sleeping Beauty*, *Multiplicity*, *Forms of Silence and Emptiness*, and *Romeo and Juliet*. His famous *Na Floresta*, set to music by Heitor Villa-Lobos, premiered this May, and his upcoming plans for the Mikhailovsky Ballet include the premiere of a one-act ballet set to Andrzej Panufnik's music (working title *Promenade*).



# DANCE NOTES

## in brief

**Kaija Pepper**, a longtime contributor to *Dance International*, will take over the position of editor beginning with the Fall 2013 issue.

The **Rudolf Nureyev Foundation Medical Website** ([www.nureyev-medical.org](http://www.nureyev-medical.org)) has recently been relaunched. It is a key international dance medicine and science resource supporting the health, wellbeing and performance of dancers.

Prima ballerina **Darcey Bussell**, Royal Ballet Director **Kevin O'Hare** and Scottish Ballet Artistic Director **Christopher Hampson** will judge the finals at this year's Genée International Ballet Competition in Glasgow in September. Canadian-born Robert Binet, Royal Ballet choreographic apprentice, will choreograph *Variations* for both male and female competitors.

Founding artistic director of Miami City Ballet, **Edward Villella** will chair the International Jury for the USA International Ballet Competition, June 14-29, 2014.

**BalletMet Columbus** announced that choreographer Edwaard Liang will become its new artistic director effective in July 2013.

**Les Ballets Jazz de Montréal** was featured at the Cinémathèque Québécoise on April 3, with a glimpse into the origins of ballet jazz in Montreal as seen in *Warm Up and Up There ... Souls Dance Undressed Together*, two milestone ballets in the company repertoire, plus a documentary filmed at BJM performances at the Club Med in Martinique. The event, a historical retrospective of the company and dance in Montreal, also included discussions with former dancer Nathalie Breuer and BJM co-founders Geneviève Salbaing and Eva von Gencsy (see Eva von Gencsy's obituary on next page).

**Danzainfiera**, a four-day dance festival celebrating all disciplines of dance was held in Fortezza da Basso, Florence, Italy, February 21-24. World-renowned dance instructors offered free classes in both new and traditional disciplines. Dancers, choreographers and dance enthusiasts joined in the festival's many activities including competitions and innovative training methods, which were developed by Annarosa Petri and étoile Raffelle Paganini.

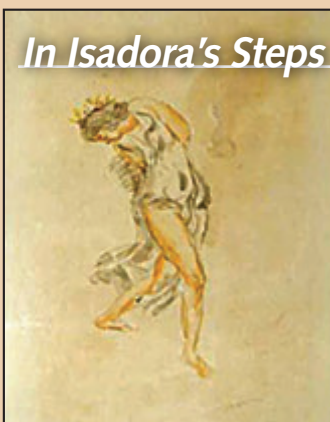


Demis Volpi

Left: Demis Volpi and artists of the Stuttgart Ballet in *Krabat*  
Photo: © Stuttgart Ballet

Artistic Director Reid Anderson has appointed Demis Volpi resident choreographer of the Stuttgart Ballet. The appointment took place onstage on March 22, following the world premiere of Volpi's first full-length ballet *Krabat*.

Volpi, born in Buenos Aires, received his dance training at the National Ballet School of Canada and the John Cranko School in Stuttgart, from which he graduated in 2004. That same year he joined Stuttgart Ballet as an apprentice and was accepted into the corps de ballet the following season. He received a commission from Reid Anderson in 2010 to create a world premiere for the Stuttgart Ballet. This was followed by commissions from Ballett Augsburg, American Ballet Theatre, Ballet de San Diego de Chili, Ballet of the State Theatre Karlsruhe and the John Cranko School.



In Isadora's Steps

Lily Dikovskaya, the last living pupil of Isadora Duncan (1877-1927), celebrated her 100th birthday, March 2, at her London home.

Originally born in London, England, of an Austrian father and Russian mother, she moved to Russia with her mother in 1921 and joined Duncan's newly founded Russian state school in Moscow at 20 Prethtsenka Street.

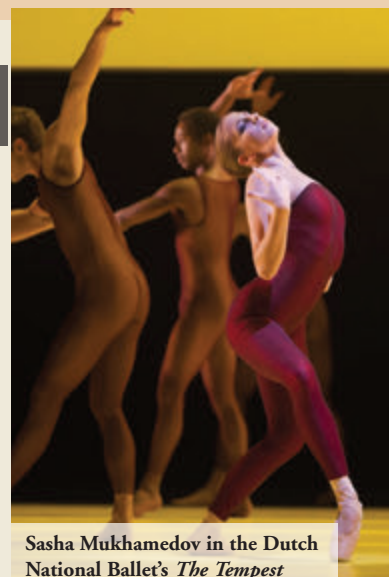
She remained a professional dancer with the Russian Isadora Duncan Dance Company until retiring to England in 1946. Stalin ordered the disbanding of the company in 1948.

Dikovskaya published her memoirs under the title *In Isadora's Steps*. It was released by Book Guild Ltd, UK in April 2008.

## Five World Premieres

The Dutch National Ballet under the artistic leadership of Ted Bransen will present a rich and varied programme of five world premieres in 2014. Krzysztof Pastor, resident choreographer at the Dutch National Ballet, will present a new full-length ballet: an interpretation of Shakespeare's *The Tempest*. Pastor is collaborating on this production with Iranian photographer and film and video artist Shirm Neshet, based in New York. Neshet is known for her work that exposes the isolated position of women in the Islamic world.

In *Dutch Doubles*, the company is bringing together four leading choreographers working in the Netherlands and four world-famous Dutch artists from other world disciplines, in four world premieres. Hans van Manen, resident choreographer with the Dutch National Ballet, will be working with 23-year-old harpist Remy van Kesteren. Ton Simons will be working with photographer Rineke Dijkstra and Juanjo Arqués with visual artist Krijn de Koning. Jorma Elo is creating his first work for the Dutch National Ballet and will be teamed up with fashion designers Viktor & Rolf.



Sasha Mukhamedov in the Dutch National Ballet's *The Tempest*  
Photo: © Angela Sterling

## Assemblée Internationale Festival

Canada's National Ballet School was the host for the second Assemblée Internationale Festival in Toronto, which ran from April 28 to May 4. Students and artistic staff from 18 professional international ballet schools took part in an intensive week of classes, performances, forums and professional development activities, which provided a rich educational experience and further built strong relationships within the international dance community.

Students from Canada's National Ballet School perform Jiri Kylian's *Six Dances* during a Spring Showcase performance  
Photo: Cylla von Tiedemann



## obituary



### Eva von Gency

1924-2013

Had Eva von Gency not forged a career in dance she might well have succeeded equally as a motivational speaker. Whatever moments of private anguish she endured — after all she emerged into adulthood in war-ravaged Europe — von Gency's public persona exuded unbridled enthusiasm. She always looked on the bright side and, if she couldn't find anything nice to say, her general policy was to say nothing at all.

Von Gency, who died in Montreal on April 11 at age 89, was an extraordinary woman by any measure, free-spirited, adventurous, charismatic and glamorous. Although she could have had no idea what her destiny would be when in 1948 she took advantage of a Canadian government resettlement programme for European refugees, von Gency in retrospect must have been very glad she did.

She was born in the southern Hungarian town of Csongrád, on March 11, 1924. Her initial goal was to become a classical ballerina. She received her formation at Budapest's Russian Ballet Academy, but later expanded her scope by studying at the Szineszgyesuleti Iskola The-

atre School in musical comedy and opera. With her homeland devastated by war and under Soviet occupation, von Gency moved to Austria in 1945 and joined Salzburg Landes Theatre as a leading ballerina before deciding to accept a sponsored placement as a maid in the household of a wealthy Winnipegger. Not that von Gency did much housekeeping. It was essentially a sham arrangement that allowed her to work with the then Winnipeg Ballet, still very much in its emerging phase and not yet even fully professional.

Von Gency stayed long enough to see the company become the Royal Winnipeg Ballet in 1953 and was soon established as one of the troupe's brightest lights. For her generation she would, as ballet parlance goes, have been considered "a big girl." Arnold Spohr, her principle partner through those Winnipeg years, would joke about his heroic efforts and, when decades later von Gency had become the elegantly svelte figure she remained, mused: "If only she'd been that thin when I danced with her." But make no mistake, von Gency had a strong technique and, as important, a wonderful gift for dance-acting.

She moved to Montreal in 1953 where a later refugee and almost exact contemporary, Ludmilla Chiriaeff, had established a troupe that performed for the nascent Radio-Canada television service. She danced for Chiriaeff through its transition into Les Grands Ballet Canadiens. She left in 1959 and within a few years had fully embraced an emerging hybrid form called jazz dance. At the suggestion of Montreal choreographer Brian Macdonald, von Gency studied with the best jazz-dance masters in New York, including the now fabled Luigi (Eugene Louis Faccuito), and then became Macdonald's assistant teaching jazz dance at the Banff Centre's summer programme.

Her most fateful decision came in 1966 when von Gency, who'd received her R.A.D. teaching diploma while still in Winnipeg, began teaching jazz in Montreal. "They were tremendously exciting times,"

she told me last year. "A new world was starting. Jazz was the music of liberation and passion, and its expression in dance was the art of freedom and human feelings."

Montreal went crazy for von Gency's fresh new blend of ballet and showy jazz dance. Von Gency and her student, Eddy Toussaint, thought the moment was right to launch a company, which, together with former ballerina Geneviève Salbaing, they did in 1972. Von Gency and Toussaint were the initial artistic drivers; Salbaing, with her contacts in Montreal's business and artistic community, the organizer. "The company could not have existed without Geneviève's organizational know-how," von Gency recalled.

Toussaint had left to form his own troupe by 1974. Von Gency remained as artistic director and choreographer, but resigned in 1978 leaving Salbaing to build the company into the international touring sensation it became. "I was so pressured. It was just too much," von Gency reflected as Les Ballets Jazz marked its 40th anniversary. "I did everything in my power for the company, but I somehow knew Geneviève would be the person to continue what we'd begun."

Von Gency's departure from Les Ballets Jazz turned out to be a new beginning for her. Already in her mid-50s, she threw herself enthusiastically into the thing she did best, teaching, not just across Canada, the United States and Europe but as far away as Guadeloupe and Morocco. For three years in the early 1990s, she was a listed faculty member at Cologne's leading dance academy. And, even after hip surgery, von Gency continued teaching recreational movement classes almost to the very end. Salbaing, older by a couple of years, was one of her occasional students.

To coin a Hungarian word that was akin to von Gency's personal mantra, her long life was *fantasztikus*.

Michael Crabb



# A Bold New Boléro

**Cherkaoui and Jalet are revisiting the famous work in a commission from Brigitte Lefèvre, director of the Paris Opéra Ballet**



Legend has it that on the evening Maurice Ravel's *Boléro* was premiered at the Paris Opéra in November 1928, a woman in the audience cried out "Au fou!" ("He's mad!"). When told of this afterward, the French composer reportedly replied: "She is the only one who really understood."

There is something indeed unnerving in the pulsating drumbeat and hypnotic melody of the musical "experiment" Ravel once described as "one very long, gradual crescendo," whose slowly mounting tension erupts in a thunderous, dissonant finale.

"It's basically madness, when you listen to it," says Franco-Belgian dancer and choreographer Damien Jalet.

Eighty-five years after Ravel bewitched audiences with the ballet score he composed for his friend, Russian dancer Ida Rubinstein, Jalet and his longtime collaborator Sidi Larbi Cherkaoui are revis-

iting the famous work in a commission from Brigitte Lefèvre, director of the Paris Opéra Ballet.

Lefèvre, who has closely followed the pair's career over the years, approached them after seeing their award-winning exploration of language and cultural diversity, *Babel* (2010). She found it fitting to invite them in what is her swan song year at the head of one of the world's most prestigious troupes. In September 2014, Lefèvre will be replaced by Benjamin Millepied.

"She's always been very supportive," says 37-year-old Cherkaoui, who recently choreographed the cinematic adaptation of *Anna Karenina*, starring Jude Law and Keira Knightley. "Because it was for her last year, it made a lot of sense for Damien and I to do it."

Jalet and Cherkaoui, whose collaboration goes back to 2000 within the Belgian collective Les Ballets C de la B, are among

the most sought-after choreographers in contemporary dance. Although they are no strangers to ballet, they recognize the daunting element of breathing new life into a work as well-known as *Boléro*.

"It's an intimidating piece," admits Jalet, 36, who began his career in the late 1990s under the wing of Belgian choreographer and filmmaker Wim Vandekeybus. "It's the quintessence of ballet music, in a way. If you want to work on something like this, you have to demystify it, while respecting it. You have to forget about everything around it and come back to the centre. It suggests very simple and primal things."

Tapping into the marrow of Ravel's 15-minute song, they quickly found themselves swept up in its "ascending and descending spirals."

"The *Boléro* is like a huge spiral," says Jalet. "It has something both progressive and cyclical."

But Cherkaoui and Jalet's take on desire promises to be a radical departure from Nijinska and Béjart. Instead of one seducer or temptress occupying centre stage, there is emptiness. Pairs of constantly twirling, dervish-like dancers orbit around what Jalet describes as an "eye of a storm," slowly pulling them in "like a cyclone."

"We're trying to create a hypnotic, sensorial experience," he explains. "More than having a *Boléro* from 'in-to-out,' it's 'out-to-in.'"

Mirroring this vast magnetic pull, the dancers themselves are either positively or negatively charged, attracting or repelling one another depending on whom they encounter.

"The idea of magnetism between two people is such a mysterious thing," muses Jalet. "We're trying to make it visible through a spiraling vortex between the bodies of the dancers."

"There was a time when the ego and identity were important," notes Cherkaoui. "I think it's about time we start understanding that relationships are important. So the dancers are twirling to become egoless ... The ego is supposed to spiral away!"

Easier said than done at the Paris Opéra Ballet.

The troupe is structured according to a five-tier hierarchy that is military in its rigidity. All dancers join the company at the corps de ballet level of "quadrille." An internal competition, held every year, offers them the chance of moving up the ladder to the ranks of coryphée, sujet and premier danseur. The highest and most coveted echelon is that of étoile, or star, which can be only be attained upon recommendation from the director of dance.

With their background in contemporary dance, Jalet and Cherkaoui thumb their nose at what they see as an antiquated pecking order. "This idea of hierarchy was one of the first things we decided to break," says Jalet. "I don't see 'étoile' written on the dancers' foreheads when I put them in a studio."

He adds that in this new ensemble-driven *Boléro*, every one of the 11 dancers "has their place and everybody can shine."

For Cherkaoui, who has worked in the past with the Monte-Carlo Ballet and the New York City-based Cedar Lake Contemporary Ballet, the crux of coaching classical dancers lies in making them expand their range of movement.

"Ballet dancers are really good at doing a pirouette on demi-pointes and turning on one leg," he says. "But working on the arms or elbows or shoulders, on which you can turn as well — like in hip-hop,

for instance — these are new techniques for them. There's a technical expansion going on right now in rehearsals, in terms of learning how to use body weight differently.

"Some male dancers think they're not flexible enough for it," he continues. "But it's just about where you put your weight. By teaching them how to expand in their knees or ankles or shoulder blades, they suddenly realize that they are much more flexible than they thought they were."

Although Jalet and Cherkaoui seek to move this new version of *Boléro* beyond its clichéd connection with Spain, their choreography will be infused with arm and wrist movements reminiscent of flamenco.

"It's not an easy choreography," admits Cherkaoui. "But it's because the music is so transparent that there's a lot of room for dance. It's not so much about illustrating the music, as using it as a wave to surf on."

Jalet agrees that "the worst thing that you can do with *Boléro* is try to simultaneously translate its music."

As Ravel's piece gradually adds layer upon layer of instruments, the dancers will peel away costume layers — namely long, black capes — designed by Givenchy's couturier Riccardo Tisci.

"What Riccardo is trying to do is take away the flesh so that only the bones remain," reveals Cherkaoui.

The anatomical yet finely embroidered costumes will be complemented by a minimalistic set design by Abramović which "plays with the idea of duality," according to Jalet.

"It has something to do with one becoming the other," he adds.

In a way, this complementarity echoes that of Cherkaoui and Jalet's own artistic tandem.

"We push one another out of our comfort zone," explains Jalet, who describes his own approach as darker than Cherkaoui's, who generally "likes to create something very transcendent, soft and areal. He likes things *piano*, I like things *forte*."

"He's very much about energy," adds Cherkaoui. "And I'm obsessed by details."

Although they don't always see things eye to eye, Jalet insists on the deep respect that binds them. "We're touched by the same things," he says. "Most of our best work we've done together."

The roots of their partnership go back 13 years, to *Rien de rien*, a nod to Edith Piaf's cri de coeur.

"If you had told me at the time that we would one day do a *Boléro* at the Paris Opera," ventures Jalet, "I would have probably thought you were crazy." ▼

## by Paul Ruban

"The melody looks for some sort of resolution and then goes back to the beginning," adds Antwerp-based Cherkaoui. "It's like a snake that bites its own tail."

With the help of their friend, Serbian performance artist Marina Abramović, Cherkaoui and Jalet applied this idea of a spiral to the forces of human attraction.

Seduction seems almost intrinsic to *Boléro*. The original 1928 choreography by Bronislava Nijinska had a sensual Rubinstein clicking castanets and whirling atop the table of an Andalusian tavern, enticing gypsy men at her feet. Maurice Béjart's famous 1960 version of this "danse lascive" involved a soloist on a round, red table — forcefully portrayed in its "masculine" 1979 version by Béjart's longtime muse, Jorge Donn — undulating suggestively under the gaze of 30 or 40 dancers.



# Olga Moiseeva



Reflects on her career as a principal dancer and coach at the Maryinsky Theatre

by Edith Pillsbury

Some of us are lucky enough to find a career that fits us well — one that suits our talents, our temperaments and our abilities, a career that both challenges us in ways we need to be challenged and rewards us in ways we need to be rewarded. Fewer of us find careers that are also our passion. Rarer still are those who discover not one, but two such careers. Olga Moiseeva is one of those fortunate few.

Olga Nikoleavna Moiseeva was born in Leningrad (now St. Petersburg) and was enrolled at the Leningrad Ballet School (now the Vaganova Ballet School) at age nine. She graduated in 1947, in the class of Agrippina Vaganova. Moiseeva was doubly fortunate, in that she not only had Vaganova as her classical dance teacher, but started her artistic career when Petr Gusev was the artistic director of Kirov Theatre. Gusev launched a whole generation of Kirov stars during that time, helping the young dancers with professional advice that came from his enormous experience.

The scope of her abilities and her splen-

did training prepared Moiseeva well to dance a broad range of the Kirov repertoire. Because she was an outstanding classical dancer, she shone in ballets like *Swan Lake* and *La Bayadère*, at the same time performing brilliantly the lead roles in contemporary ballets such as *Spartacus*, *The Path of Thunder* and *The Legend of Love*.

Moiseeva's career coincided with those of a generation of bright young choreographers. In addition to the standard repertoire, she danced in the ballets of Leonid Yakobson, Yuri Grigorovich, Vakhtang Chabukiani and Konstantin Sergeyev and created roles in several of their works, including Siyumbike in *Shurale* and Aegina in *Spartacus*, by Yacobson, and Mekhmene Banu in *The Legend of Love* by Grigorovich.

When she retired from the stage in 1973, Moiseeva had already begun her second career as a coach and répétiteur at the Kirov (now Maryinsky) Theatre. Among the ballerinas she has coached are Galina Mezentseva, Altnai Asylmuratova, Yulia Makhalina, Svetlana Zakharova and Ole-

sya Novikova, as well as Olga Chenchikova, Irma Nioradze, Uliana Lopatrika, Irina Zhelonkina and many others.

Recently, we spoke to Moiseeva about her career and about the vital role of coaches in the ballet theatre.

**EP: Who were your coaches at the theatre?**

OM: I had three wonderful coaches: Elena Lukom, Tatiana Vecheslova and Natalia Dudinskaya. Each worked on different roles with me. For example, Dudinskaya coached me in *Don Quixote* while Vecheslova was my coach in *Spartacus* and *The Fountain of Bakhchisarai*. Of course, Agrippina Vaganova also coached me. She was my teacher at the school during my last years there and then coached me at the theatre. She was amazing, both as a pedagogue and a teacher. She gave very precise technical corrections, but never interfered with our individuality. She coached so many of our ballerinas, including Alla Shlest, Natalia Dudinskaya, Olga Jordon, Alla Osipenko, Ninel Kurgapkina and me. She

also coached Tatiana Vecheslova, who became my coach, as well.

I rehearsed *Giselle*, with Elena Lukom — it is not really my role, but I was persistent in attempting this challenge. Although I danced *Giselle* just once, working on that role with Elena Lukom was an unforgettable experience for me. The way she showed me how to look, how to turn my head away — these nuances are so significant. Years later, I passed on those meaningful details when I worked with Galina Mezentseva, who was a beautiful Giselle. Later still, I rehearsed this ballet with Altynai Asylmuratova, another great Giselle. And the younger generation: Irina Zhelonkina, Olesya Novikova, Svetlana Zakharova.

**EP: You are well known for your dramatic talent as witnessed by your great success in ballets that require not just a brilliant technique but a profound and expansive sense of theatre. Were you particularly drawn to such roles?**

**OM:** I remember very vividly rehearsing with Vera Jacobson the title role in the ballet *Mother* to fantastic music by Rachmaninoff. That was during the filming of *Choreographic Miniatures* by Leonid Yakobson at the Lenfilm Studios. There were several choreographic miniatures in that film. The role I was dancing was a tragic one, of a mother who lost her child in the war. I was dancing barefoot, and running and dancing across a stage which imitated soil. Later, after the performance, the doctors looked at my feet and decided to give me anti-tetanus injections, but at the time of dancing I did not feel any discomfort at all. All I remembered was music, my role and my dance.

**EP: What was the transition from dancer to coach like for you? What was your final performance onstage?**

**OM:** I don't even remember my last performance! I was already coaching at the theatre when I stopped performing. My career never took a break. I was still dancing when the director of Kirov Theatre proposed that I coach two young dancers, Sergeyev and Efimova, for their *Don Quixote* premiere. Their debut was a great success. Later, I kept dancing while coaching at the same time. I am sure that it was most unusual that I sometimes danced in the same performance with a ballerina I was coaching. During the Kirov Ballet tour of Australia, I was dancing in *Swan Lake* and coaching Galina Mezentseva at the same time. I danced Odette and Galina was Odile.

**EP: Please explain the role of a coach at the Maryinsky, and the relationship between a ballerina and her coach.**

**OM:** The role of the coach cannot be overemphasized. My own coaches were among the greatest in ballet history. I was often invited to Moscow when I was a ballerina, and I worked with Marina Semenova. Those experiences contributed greatly to my artistic growth. The coach is not there just to make technical corrections — she is sharing her wealth of knowledge and experience.

The coach must understand the personality of the ballet artist, and she should listen to the dancer. The mission of the coach is to find and unveil the very best of the artist, and to help her with the finishing touches so that she shines. Then such work is rewarding for both the artist and the coach.

Usually, when I started coaching a ballerina, I would lead her through her whole career onstage. Altynai danced for 25 years and all those years I was her coach.

When I was dancing, I was always thinking about my public. I knew they had

come to the theatre to be amazed and to be charged by the art of ballet, and I tried to live up to their expectations. There was always some kind of exchange between us onstage and the audience. I was so happy when I could feel the contact between me and the public, like a conversation.

**EP: What do you consider your greatest achievements as a dancer? As a coach?**

**OM:** I would say that everything was important to me. As a dancer, I was glad when my performances were successful. It is very rare when a dancer is absolutely happy with her performance — there is always something you wanted to do differently.

An even better reward was my students whom I coached in the theatre. They were all amazing — Mezentseva, Asylmuratova, Zakharova, Makhalina, Chenchikova, Lopatkina, Novikova, Nioradze, Zhelonkina and the others. They are all superb. Each of them is a personality. ▼

## Altynai Asylmuratova

Altynai Asylmuratova is now the artistic director of the Vaganova Academy and is carrying on the legacy passed to her by Olga Moiseeva. I asked Asylmuratova about her thoughts on the importance of coaches and, specifically, about her own coach.

**EP: What made Olga Moiseeva such a brilliant coach?**

**AA:** It was what she had inside her, a gift that she had. It is not possible to teach it. Olga Moiseeva lived through a very difficult period of time: the Blockade, the evacuation to Perm; there were so many hardships. Even after the war ended, there were difficulties and privations. At the same time, the artistic environment was very exciting. She was working with such great masters as Yuri Grigorovich and Leonid Jacobson, tremendously talented people who were very dedicated to their art. Thus, she was surrounded by a creative energy that she absorbed and passed on to her own students, her dancers. This is how artists are born.

Our balletic traditions are passed, as we say, “hand to hand, leg to leg.” That is why coaches like Olga Moiseeva are so precious. One can look at a video and see from the outside,

but she would see from the inside. She knew the choreographic text. For example, she knew what Grigorovich wanted to say through this or that gesture — that knowledge is invaluable.

**EP: How does one coach an artist without imposing her own personality or interpretation on the dancer?**

**AA:** The coach is either an artist or she/he is not. This is why I admire Moiseeva so much, because being a strict pedagogue and establishing the framework of the role, she still would allow the dancer to develop her individuality within that set frame. Working like this, Moiseeva made the dancer think for herself, to decide what she should do and what she would like to do. At times, Moiseeva worked with Mezentseva and me together on the same roles. Galina would do a gesture from *Swan Lake* and Moiseeva would not allow me to imitate what she was doing. She said there should be no imitation, but that you should find your own individual approach.

She would always work on the technical details, but the creative aspect was also very important. It was balanced. I am very grateful for being able to work with her, and everything I received from Moiseeva I am using in my work now. ▼



# Sculpting Dancers

Dr. Miguel Capote is a sought-after Cuban physiotherapist who helps dancers get their bodies in shape

Dr. Miguel Capote is a physiotherapist whose Havana office looks out on the barbed wire-enclosed U.S. Interests Section compound. The Cubans installed a billboard across from the compound that reads “Venceremos!” (We shall win). The sign is visible from Capote’s examining room, where I spent an afternoon observing him treating Manuela Novarro.

Novarro, who is Panamanian, trained with Stanislav Issaev in Greenville, South Carolina, and danced with the National Ballet of Panama. After dancing at Cuba’s biannual international festival last fall, she was invited to join the Cuban National Ballet as a principal for one year. “How could I refuse an offer like that?” Novarro said rhetorically. As a company member, she benefits from daily 45-minute treatments by Dr. Capote and his son and associate, Miguelito.

Novarro sits perched on the treatment table with Capote at its foot, and Miguelito on one side. A galaxy of stars has made use of this table: Carlos Acosta, Tamara Rojo, Viengsay Valdés, Carlos Quenedit and Romel Frometa Castellon, among others.

The elder Capote points to a photo of Fidel Castro and relates a story. After Acosta and Valdés danced both *Don Quixote* and *Le Corsaire* in a single evening’s programme, Castro asked them how they could dance two such demanding works on the same evening. In unison, they answered: “Capote!”

At 74, Miguel says that he was born with the desire to help dancers and athletes do their best. He became chief of physical therapy at Hospital Ortopedico Docente Fructuoso Rodríguez, where he taught for almost 40 years. At first, he treated contemporary, modern and jazz dancers from Havana’s famous Tropicana, and other cabarets, who danced Broadway-style routines, and then ballet dancers. Should you refer to them as patients, he says, “There are no patients here. We have dancers.”

Miguelito says, “Ever since I was a boy, I accompanied my father to the hospital, observing. Little by little, I began to learn. He continues to be my school. I enjoy helping to shape dancers’ bodies according to a method designed for each one’s specific musculature. We don’t see results in 24 hours. I like working with those problems that take longer to resolve, and since we work as a team, when you came in and saw my father working with Manu, it was because I had been working with another dancer, and the work we do with one informs what we do with the next one.”

I ask Miguel how he would diagnose a complaint of coccyx pain. He says that it is more likely for a male dancer to injure the lumbar sacrum than the coccyx, almost always resulting from lifting his partner wrong. “Most injuries arise from a lack of preventative physical therapy because the musculature has not been prepared, trained or conditioned to, in this case, lift correctly. When the

Royal Ballet was here, Loipa [Araújo] brought in a dancer to correct his poor posture, which was responsible for the problems he was experiencing. Preparing to avoid injuries is our goal here. Loipa [now assistant artistic director at English National Ballet] says dancers deserve the same preparation as Olympic athletes and she’s right.”

Principal muscles are less prone to injury than auxiliary ones, because dancers tend to compensate for not using the principal ones correctly by overusing and abusing the auxiliary ones.

“Movement in classical ballet goes against nature,” Novarro reminds us. “And so they show us how to use muscles properly.”

I ask the Capotes how long treatment typically lasts and what regimen dancers follow once they have recovered.

Miguel smiles, shakes his head, and generously characterizes my wrongful assumption as a “misunderstanding,” one that surely issues from never before having seen body conditioning that rivals the Capotes’ thoroughness.

As Miguel places folded towels under a woven strap tethered to the table with vise grips, and ratchets it tight, he piles a calculated number of leatherette pillows under Novarro’s feet, saying, “Dancers come every day, whether injured or not. The whole point is to prevent injury, and if there is one, we don’t treat it exclusive of the surrounding musculature. We designed exercises tailored to each dancer, and we do not recommend that they do them outside of this office. We



By Toba Singer

are their partner, and the exercises are not intended to be done without a therapist, so I hope you won't describe them in detail, because once a dancer from China attempted them on her own, and ended up back here, injured!"

As Novarro crunches her core and gluts, tightens the back of her knee and lifts her legs in an arc, Miguel positions and directs the legs, and with each rep, shouts, "Tranca!"

"Tranca means 'block,'" Novarro explains, "and when I am in the studio, I'll remember his vocal cue, and tighten the back of the knee without having to think about it, strengthening the standing leg so that I will be less likely to have metatarsal problems in the future."

How do the Capotes account for the increase in injuries over the past decade?


"A very easy question to answer," says Miguel, "because in the world of classical ballet, they are asking more of dancers all the time. Watch a film of a *Swan Lake* from 15 years ago, and compare it with what you see in the theatre today! In the same vein, a runner was asked to run 100 metres in 12 seconds years ago, and now it has decreased to nine."

Miguelito adds, "They are asking more, but not preparing them. We prepare dancers for what they are asking them to do. We don't express our opinion; we just prepare them. We are against going to the gym because it adds too much bulk, and that destroys the dancer's line. Pilates is too general. Each dancer is different and needs a regimen custom tailored to his or her body and

musculature. We must be doing something right because dancers come from all over the world, and refer others to us.

Novarro adds her perspective: "They

sculpt dancers according to their needs. They are like architects who design individual buildings, and then watch them take shape." ▼









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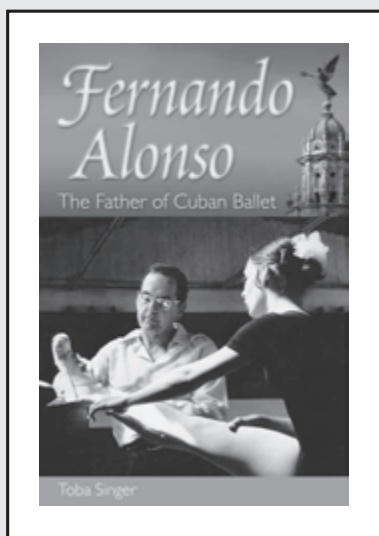
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## Fernando Alonso: The Father of Cuban Ballet

By Toba Singer, University Press of Florida, 240 pp., \$35 Cdn.

Perhaps it's something to do with the political disruption caused by revolutions and the subsequent need to take ideologically dogmatic sides. Regardless, it's never been easy to get a truly disinterested account of how Cuba, an impoverished communist-ruled Caribbean island of less than 12 million souls, not only managed to spawn a remarkable classical ballet company, but along the way developed its own distinct and much admired school of classical dancing.

For most observers, the National Ballet of Cuba's identity is almost indivisible from that of its reigning monarch, 92-year-old Alicia Alonso. Her image is in effect the company's brand. Not to be part of the cult that surrounds Alonso — she even has her own museum in Havana although it's not so named — is to risk excommunication.

Yet, as is well recorded although not always equally well recognized, ballet in Cuba would have had a very different history without the contributions of two remarkable siblings, Fernando Alonso and his younger brother, Alberto.

Alberto was the first to be drawn to ballet — on the grounds it would make him a better football player. Soon bitten by the ballet bug, he went on to a successful dance career, but more famously became the most important choreographer Cuba has yet produced. However, Alberto's decision to seek asylum in the

# Fernando Alonso

United States in 1993 royally blotted his Cuban copy book. He died in Florida in 2008.

Fernando, like his brother a keen sportsman and the subject of a new book from American dance writer Toba Singer, *Fernando Alonso: The Father of Cuban Ballet*, hovered as a teenager on the fringes of Havana's nascent 1930s ballet scene, but did not formally begin classes until he was 20. Already he'd met the sister of his boyhood friend, Antonio Martínez. The girl was six years younger than Fernando. He remembers how, when he went to visit his chum, she'd answer the door in pointe shoes, "practising even as I stood waiting for her brother." The then Alicia Martínez had, on account of her fiery eyes, acquired the nickname Unga, a shortened form of *húngaro*, the Spanish for Hungarian.

When Fernando decided in 1937 that he needed to train intensively in New York, Alicia soon followed, married him and by March 1938 had delivered their only child, Laura. The couple grew artistically as a duo. Both were part of the roster of dancers with which Ballet Theatre, (later American Ballet Theatre), launched in 1940. When that company hit a financial wall in 1948, they returned to Havana to found Ballet Alicia Alonso, the precursor of today's Cuban National Ballet.

Alicia was the star name. Alberto was artistic director/choreographer, and Fernando was general director and ballet master, a position he essentially retained until he and Alice irrevocably split in 1974 and he was shunted off to the relative provincial obscurity of the Ballet de Camagüey. By then, however, Fernando had played a central role in establishing the curriculum that has made Cuban-trained dancers the envy of the ballet world. Fernando drew from diverse sources, all the major "national" schools, but also including lessons learned from American musical theatre.

It is the singularity of Fernando's contribution to the Cuban School that constitutes the not always precise focus of Singer's rather odd book. It is not a biography, although its contents pro-

vide a mine of information invaluable to any future biographer. Apart from her introduction and occasional and not always warranted interjections, Singer's book is a collection of interviews, the most extensive with Fernando — effectively a mini-memoir — and the others with friends, former students and various professional colleagues. There are eight appendices including a somewhat redundant reprint of a 2008 Fernando/Singer interview for *Dance Magazine* in which Alonso seems to contradict himself, and a chronology that has Fernando starting ballet training a year later than in his own account.

Singer, an avowed socialist and labour activist, tries to keep her political sympathies in check and mostly succeeds. She is, however, given to asking leading questions and of failing to respond to answers that cry out for a follow-up. It is not clear if all the interviews were in person or whether some may have been epistolary.

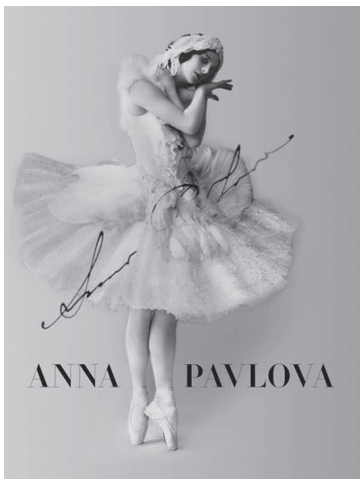
One clearly identified as falling into the latter category is the letter whereby Alicia Alonso responded to a list of questions Singer reprints in a prologue. Fernando's former wife, ditched in 1974 for a much younger woman by her skirt-chasing husband, offers a remarkably calm and considered response that bears close reading and has a distinct ring of truth to it. "A 'school of ballet' of a national character, the Cuban one," writes Alicia, "is not created by the will and talent of a single person."

Fair enough, but there's evidence aplenty elsewhere in the book to make clear that Fernando, with his scientific and methodical approach, put a very personal and enduring stamp on the Cuban school. He was, "the teacher of teachers," says Jorge Esquivel, who partnered Alicia in her 50s and beyond. "He knew the human body so perfectly that he could have graduated in medicine."

Reflecting on his pedagogical career, Fernando tells Singer: "I was now recapturing the feeling of satisfaction that I had felt on the stage — but exponentially!"

Michael Crabb

# Anna Pavlova



## Anna Pavlova: Twentieth Century Ballerina

By Jane Pritchard with Caroline Hamilton, Booth-Clibborn Editions, 175 pp., \$45 Cdn.

If for no other reason than that of having a decadent dessert of Antipodean concoction named in her honour, Anna Pavlova is among a small group of ballet luminaries whose enduring renown vaults the limited confines of their art form. Although her personal life was shrouded in mystery — if only the same applied to modern-day celebrities — Pavlova's professional career has been examined in numerous books. They began appearing in her lifetime and have continued ever since. The latest is a richly illustrated volume by Jane Pritchard, curator of dance at London's Victoria and Alberta Museum and a particular expert on the ballet history of the Pavlova era.

To categorize this as a coffee-table book, which it certainly is in scale, risks diminishing the value of its insightful text. Additionally, Booth-Clibborn, the publishers, have seemingly spared no effort to ensure that the elegance of the book's design and physical production should appropriately match the artistry of its subject.

The book is timed to coincide with the centenary of Pavlova's purchase of Ivy House in the Golders Green neighbourhood of London, which with its two-acre garden and pond — ideal for her swans — became the ballerina's beloved home. Not, of course, that Pavlova was able to spend as much time there as she might have wished, particularly during the First World War when she was largely away from England, touring the far corners of the earth. And Ivy House was not just a place to relax and entertain. The large hall did double-duty as a studio and was where

Pavlova first opened her school. The cellars housed more than wine; they served also as a storage area for her company's scenery and props.

Pritchard is quick to point out that her book is not intended as a biography. It offers interesting perspectives on facets of her career in order to support Pritchard's contention that Pavlova, born in 1881 and reared within the Imperial Ballet at St. Petersburg, was very much a 20th-century ballerina. "She was a woman who took control of her career," writes Pritchard.

The book is also written from a British perspective since it was perhaps in her adopted home that Pavlova's legacy was the greatest. For as much as Pavlova awakened an interest in ballet wherever she travelled, it was in London that her impact produced very tangible results. As Pritchard notes, quoting Frederick Ashton, among the many smitten by Pavlova's spell, it was "in London she made her home and inspired so many who were to create the English ballet."

Pritchard makes the valid point that Pavlova's achievements during almost exactly the same period have tended to be overshadowed by those of Diaghilev. Yet, it was actually Pavlova who, with her early determination to leave Russia and become a missionary in the cause of her art, first excited Western audiences and paved the way for Les Ballets Russes. Nor was her company's repertoire as artistically inferior to that of the Ballets Russes as is commonly believed. Her interest in the emerging medium of film, questionable though its results might be, were progressive and enlightened.

The photographs in Pritchard's book, many unfamiliar, are a constant delight, some of the most fascinating having little directly to do with Pavlova's dancing. She was, as Pritchard shows, keenly aware of the

need to maintain a public image. Pavlova understood the importance of glamour. She was never reluctant to be photographed because she was always elegantly dressed and properly behaved.

This sterling public image made Pavlova a natural for product endorsements. One of her first was for Odol mouthwash. Another was for Mercolised Wax whose manufacturers, despite what we would now regard as having dangerous mercury content, claimed their product was the ideal remedy for "Sunburn, Freckles, Windchap, &c." One wonders if she kept some handy for those long sea voyages.

Pavlova was as much an icon as an artist and as such had a subtly pervasive effect. Hilda Butsova, one of Pavlova's company members quoted in the book, aptly sums it all up: "What remains of Pavlova today is not a movement in the art, not a tendency, not even a series of dances. It is something far less concrete, but possibly far more valuable: inspiration." Or, as Marie Rambert more succinctly put it: "Pavlova excited in people the desire to dance."

*Michael Crabb*



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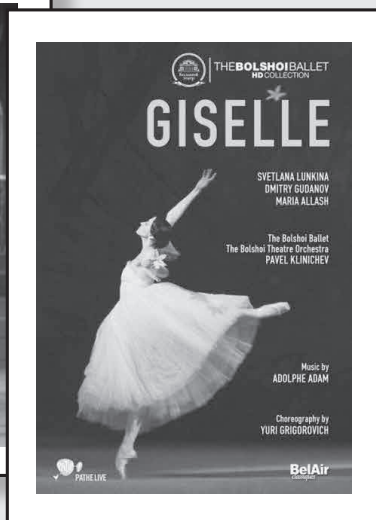
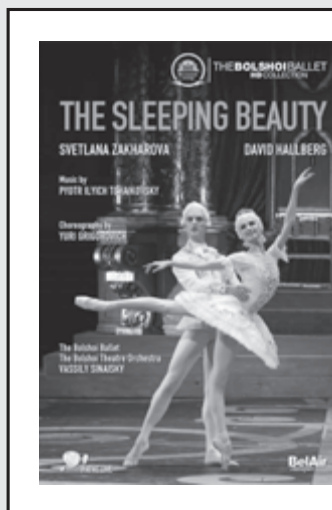
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## Bolshoi Ballet

**Bolshoi Ballet HD Collection:  
*Giselle* and *The Sleeping Beauty***

**Blu-ray and DVD, BelAir Classiques  
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While Moscow's Bolshoi Ballet makes headlines again with issues that are, sadly, not in the least related to arts, it's good to be reminded every now and then of what the company is rightly famed for: dance. Two new titles in the remarkable *Bolshoi Ballet HD Collection* have been released by BelAir Classiques, bringing performances of *Giselle* and *The Sleeping Beauty*, after being broadcast live in movie theatres, right into our living rooms and benefitting from today's best possible recording techniques.

Bolshoi performances of both ballets considered here have previously been released on home video. Collectors will probably own the older accounts with the legendary Galina Ulanova (1956) and Natalia Bessmertnova as *Giselle* (twice, 1968 and 1990), or *The Sleeping Beauty* with Nina Semizorova and Alexei Fadeychev from 1989. Regardless of the artistic quality of these treasureable performances, the progress in capturing dance on film has been so significant that the new high-definition releases gain extra value simply by the sheer beauty of the image and the fidelity of the sound.

Moreover, the French production team headed by Vincent Bataillon has found an agreeable way of mixing longshots with close-ups. Unlike so many other ballet films one never feels deprived of the essence of the stage action.

*Giselle*, featuring Svetlana Lunkina and Dmitry Gudanov, was filmed at the new Bolshoi Theatre in January 2011 and, for better or worse, is the very same Yuri Grigorovich production from 1987 that can be seen on the second Bessmertnova video. Grigorovich's adaptation was ini-

tially hyped as a modernization of the ballet, yet strikes even more as a regrettable step backward compared to the previous Leonid Lavrovsky staging.

The loss of balance between mime and dance, the lack of dramatic logic and the omission of most traces of the supernatural lessen the theatrical impact of Grigorovich's un-Romantic *Giselle*. The performance is, however, generally fine, even if this isn't one of Lunkina's most memorable efforts in the title role. Character as well as dancing remain a bit pale and predictable for someone who has been performing *Giselle* for almost 15 years. The Bolshoi corps de ballet is the real star of Act II, and Dmitry Gudanov reaffirms himself as one of the company's finest stylists. Maria Allash portrays a solid, adequate Myrtha, if little more. Chinara Alizade, however, is a little gem in the peasant pas de deux and Vitali Biktimirov an excellent Hans.

Image and sound are first-rate. The producers of this *Giselle* should check their sources though, as the onscreen synopsis wants us to believe the Wilis are "the vengeful ghosts of betrayed brides," which suggests quite a lot of philandering in olden times.

*The Sleeping Beauty* is the first title of the *Bolshoi Ballet HD Collection* filmed in the renovated old theatre. As will be remembered, it was with *Beauty* in a new staging by Grigorovich that the company reclaimed its place in the venerable, resurrected house in November 2011. The sense of occasion was furthermore enhanced by the presence of David Hallberg, the first American to join the Bolshoi on a permanent basis. The performance shown here, featuring Svetlana

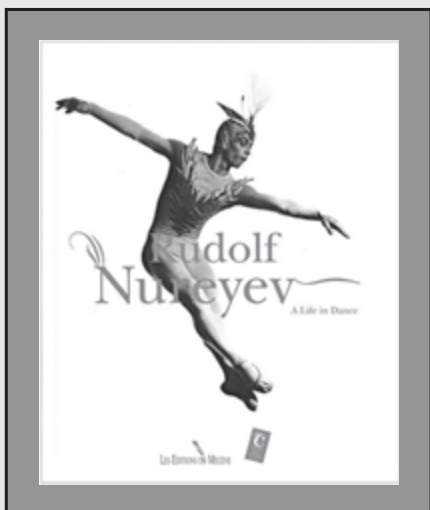
Zakharova as Aurora, Hallberg as Désiré and Maria Allash as the Lilac Fairy, was shot during the premiere week.

Unfortunately, Grigorovich's flimsy rewrite does Marius Petipa's *Sleeping Beauty* little justice. The lack of dramatic coherence and the total absence of fairytale magic in this virtually pure dance adaptation, as well as the many cuts in Tchaikovsky's music, are as annoying on screen as they were in the theatre. The opulence of the new Ezio Frigerio and Franca Squarciapino designs is, however, most impressively rendered by the high definition cameras, making this *Beauty* truly a feast for the eye. Sonically it is also very impressive, with the 5.1 DTS HD Master, reproducing the dramatic and robust account of the Bolshoi Orchestra under Vassily Sinaisky with superb detail and presence. There are some stage noises, mostly from pointe shoes on the decorated floor, although far less distracting than they were in the theatre.

Yet, as in *Giselle*, the main attraction of this new release remains the Bolshoi company. Strongly cast from top to bottom, the especially ravishing group of demi-soloists that links the principals with the corps would make any classical troupe envious. Both the prologue and Act III showcase an amazing lineup of talent, including among others Nina Kaptsova and Artem Ovcharenko (as tremendous Florine and Blue Bird), Daria Khokhlova as Candide and Cinderella, Chinara Alizade as Fleur-de-farine, and Anna Leonova and Anna Tikhomirova as Diamond and Silver Fairies. The omnipresent Allash may be an unremarkable Lilac Fairy, but both Zakharova and Hallberg are in a class of their own.

Marc Haegeman

# Rudolf Nureyev Exhibition



## Rudolf: A Life in Dance

Exhibition Catalogue, Centre national du costume de scène, hardcover, 160 pp, \$45 US.

Fine Arts Museums of San Francisco held a special exhibition, *Rudolf Nureyev: A Life in Dance* from October 2012 to February 2013. The book, an exhibition catalogue with the same name, was published in a special edition for the museum by Centre national du costume de scène, in Moulins, France, which also collaborated on the exhibition.

The centre of this book is about costume. The photographs of the costumes are a treasure. They were once worn by Nureyev personally or the dancers from the ballets he choreographed and danced in. There are more than 200 photos in either black and white, or colour.

Costume was a great passion for the dancer and the book states, "This man, madly in love with theatre wanted luxurious, elaborate costumes decorated with embroidery and trimmings; numerous props, jewels, crowns ..." His preferences were specific, "His doublets all had the same characteristics, a diagonal seam on each side of the front, starting at the inset of the sleeve and arriving in the middle of the waist while leaving freedom for the play of the torso. The waist is slightly lowered to stay in place during lifts and port de bras." Although Nureyev wore a variety of colours, it is noted that he favoured browns, blues and blue-greens.

The book is broken into sections and divided by ballet. It opens with Marius Petipa's masterpiece *La Bayadère*. Nureyev first performed part of the ballet — Act III, *The Kingdom of the Shades*, at Paris' Palais

Garnier, in 1961, while with the Kirov Ballet. It was the first time the ballet had ever been seen outside of Russia. He fulfilled his dream, by mounting the complete ballet at the Paris Opera just before his death.

For the 1974 production of *The Kingdom of the Shades*, costume designer Martin Kamer created a white velvet doublet for Nureyev. It had a scooped neck and contained white lace, braids, black trim and paste jewels decorations. Noëlla Pontois played the role of Nikiya. Her bodice was white satin and echoed the same elaborate patterning as her male lead, with lamé, braids and pearls. Her plate style tulle tutu was multi-layered and had short matching panels of fabric draped over top. Nureyev loved these particular costumes so much that he used them frequently for galas and tours, namely with the company Nureyev and Friends.

Ever the Prince, Nureyev's 1977 costume for *Romeo and Juliet* Act II was designed by Italian designers Ezio Frigerio and Mauro Pagan. The doublet of lime green velvet had silver lamé cutouts. The pirate-wide sleeves were tamed with arm bands of the same body fabric and garnish, clenched upon the bicep. Cuffs matched the arm bands, tapering the billowing sleeves.


The most colourful departure from Nureyev's chosen palette came from 1973's *Don Quixote* Act II, in his role as Basilio. It was designed by Australian Barry Kay for the Australian Ballet film, co-directed by Nureyev and Robert Helpmann. A vest of black velvet was lavishly decorated with gold braid. The silk under blouse was flame orange-red, with sleeves that expanded as they reached the wrists.

The book for the most part is bilingual — French translated to English, at least for the storyline text. If you do not speak French, deciphering the descriptions surrounding the photographs will be difficult. It has not been translated. If the exact detail of each costume's makeup isn't of interest to you, then this really doesn't matter.

The back of the book contains a section entitled Nureyev the Choreographer, in a timeline format. There is also a section with biographies of all the designers whose work is featured in the book.


All in all, *Rudolf Nureyev: A Life in Dance* makes a beautiful collector's item. It proves that Nureyev was not only a great dancer and choreographer, but a man with an eye for the visual and a sense of what costume should be.

Karen Barr



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**F**reddy and Pat's Bach were my long-ago introduction to Rachel Browne, the founding artistic director of Winnipeg's Contemporary Dancers, who died last year. I saw the two solos in 1991, when Browne, along with dancers Sharon Moore and Pat Fraser, was in Vancouver for the Dancing on the Edge Festival.

Over the decades, I was always excited to hear a new work of Browne's was touring to the West Coast and was thrilled that the city's first major show in the New Year was a tribute to Browne, at Scotiabank Dance Centre on January 15. The lineup included an excerpt from *Freddy*, set to satirical German songs written between the two World Wars, danced by Johanna Riley. Costumed in white pants and vest, with a perky moustache pasted above her upper lip, Riley brought the complicated mood swings of this dashing character to life.

The evening opened with sections from *Odetta's Songs and Dances* (1964), the first piece Browne created for Winnipeg's Contemporary Dancers. There's a certain period flavour — this is "modern dance," its shapes and rhythms evoking emotional force and passion, not cooler, more intellectually conceived contemporary dance as we know it today. That holds true for all the pieces we saw, including excerpts from *Sunstorm* (2002), with its mesmerizing mix of light and heavy physicality, and simple and grand emotions. *Radiance* was created in 2011 for Kristin Haight, who ended the piece — and the evening — leaping backwards, each bright attack into the air balanced by a muted landing, bringing radiance to the stage even as she retreated and the lights went down.

Browne ran the company only until 1983, but remained active on the Canadian scene until her death. Current director Brent Lott, and Artistic Advisor for the tribute Stephanie Ballard, did well to rally their forces so speedily to give Rachel Browne the send-off she deserved, presenting it first at home in Winnipeg before bringing it to Toronto and then Vancouver.

Ballet BC looked back, too, though only a little, with their reprise of a mixed bill from 2011: William Forsythe's *Herman Schmerman*, Jorma Elo's *1st Flash* and Medhi Walerski's *Petite Cérémonie*. The evening was part of the PuSh Festival, a mainly theatre event that prides itself on being cutting edge and intelligent: just like ballet can be, too, as Ballet BC proved. Only the monologue Walerski has included in the

piece — a clichéd description of the differences between men's and women's brains — felt stale, though Dario Dinuzzi delivered it with panache while juggling three balls.



Lesley Telford  
Photo: Rahi

The day after seeing Ballet BC on the Queen Elizabeth Theatre's large stage, I attended another, very different PuSh offering: Martin Chaput and Martial Chazallon's intimate *Do You See What I Mean?* In this participatory piece, each audience member was led blindfolded by a guide on a private tour of the city, through marijuana and coffee-scented downtown streets and into several indoor encounters. This included a dress shop filled with soft fabrics and women's voices, and an art gallery with sculptures whose shapes and textures were too unique to be deciphered by touch alone.

*Do You See What I Mean?* offers participants a chance to safely navigate a world that, without sight, I discovered to be a dizzying place alternately assaulting and seducing through sound, smell, touch and taste (we had a kitchen encounter, too). In the final scenario, a dancer's subtle touch encouraged each participant, still blindfolded, to run and even dance a little in the

darkness. Chaput and Chazallon's company, the Lyon, France-based *Projet in situ*, have presented this 2005 piece in Marseille, Lyon, Geneva and Paris.

The Chutzpah! Festival's opening dance bill in February included a beautifully performed 1993 duet by Israeli-born, Netherlands-based Itzik Galili. His *When You See God... Tell Him* was performed by Miguel Oliveira and Lesley Telford; both dancers were strong and supple, kinesthetically articulate and just so easy to watch. Telford, a Vancouverite who has been based in Europe for some time, also presented her new 60-minute trio, *Brittle Failure*, another beautifully danced piece. But it was overshadowed by Yoko Seyama's installation set of small paper houses, which filled the stage for much of the time, leaving the dancers on the periphery.

The 605 Collective were the middle act, presenting an untitled remix of new and old work. The group of five powered through their vocabulary of urban contemporary dance: grounded, restless, muscular. The ensemble sometimes looked a bit forced into "picture perfect" photo ops; what really worked is when Laura Avery, Lisa Gelley, Shay Kuebler, Josh Martin and David Raymond each did their own thing as part of a carefully co-choreographed and viscerally exciting chaos.

Not long after, a Montreal-based group of five — RUBBERBANDance's Elon Höglund, Emmanuelle Lê Phan, Daniel Mayo, Anne Plamondon and Victor Quijada — were at the Vancouver East Cultural Centre. Quijada's 70-minute *Gravity of Centre* seemed to follow a catastrophe-based action scenario, but really it was just a vehicle to showcase the troupe, giving these superb dancers a reason to embody a complex variety of physical and dramatic textures.

In a duet between muscular Quijada and slender, feline Lê Phan, she dances while in a handstand, tossing her feet as if writing in the air. During a solo arabesque, Lê Phan — in blue fishnet stockings and cut-off jeans — extended her leg to the side not with rock-hard certainty, but lightly, so it breathed a little, with the knee allowed a slight natural curve instead of being pulled rigidly up. That captivating arabesque had style and, most important of all, personality: an arabesque on which this report will happily end. ▼

Montreal was the sole Canadian city to see the National Ballet of China's *Raise the Red Lantern*, an intense, three-act ballet about the contrast between love and marriage and power struggles that defined male-female relationships in China's warlord era of the 1920s.

As expected from the flagship of Chinese ballet, this was a showpiece production. Impeccably danced and staged before a series of intricately patterned backdrops and suspended red lanterns, and brightly costumed in dazzling reds, yellows, greens and blues, its greatest coup was a fusion of contemporary ballet and music with larger-than-life Chinese opera characters backed by harsh, edgy traditional sounds of gong and clapper.

Sometimes, the two — contemporary and traditional — were shown at once, the ballet in front and the opera behind like a play within a play. In these instances, the Western eye was drawn to the exotic and elaborate, only vaguely noticing the familiar, if less forceful, ballet that seemed to be interpreting the dramatic actions enacted in the opera.

Driven to the edge of their seats by the power of the performance and the clang of gongs and clack of the clappers, spectators would have had to be made of stone to avoid being caught up in the ferocity of emotions overflowing onstage. The rape scene inflicted on the young woman chosen to be the Second Concubine to her warlord Master, was a stylized shocker. Their giant shadows fighting like shadow puppets loomed the full height of the proscenium. Seeking escape, the victim burst through the paper scrim with an audible tearing, a metaphor for her deflowering. My seatmate was aghast. This was take-no-prisoners ballet.

Violence marked nearly every scene. Apart from the rape, the most brutal and frightening was delivered by the Master's army. Costumed like the famous Terracotta Warriors in medieval armoured skirts, they exuded ruthlessness and discipline. I've never felt fear at a ballet before.

The third act was stripped clean of Chinese Opera elements leaving the ballet dancers vulnerable to the weaknesses of their choreography with its repetitive reaching and begging for forgiveness before their executions. Adapted from a film based on the 1990 novel *Wives and Concubines*, *Raise the Red Lantern* was created in Beijing in 2001. It was performed at Salle Wilfrid-Pelletier, Place des Arts, February 21-24, as part of the NBC's two-city Canadian premiere. The company performed *Swan Lake* in Vancouver.

Every bit as different — and even uncomfortably intriguing — was another

company making its first Canadian tour. Norway's Carte Blanche followed on the heels of the Chinese, February 28 to March 2 at Théâtre Maisonneuve, PdA, with a tall, big-boned cast uniformly costumed in skin-coloured body stockings.

Carte Blanche is a contemporary dance company trained as precisely as any ballet group. *Corps de Walk* by Israeli choreographers Sharon Eyal and Gai Behar clocked in at an hour of rigorously minimalistic, robotic movement driven by a similarly focused sound collage ranging from David Byrne and Ol' Dirty Bastard to Claude Debussy and Tuxedomoon.

The dozen dancers were technical virtuosos whose walk-based movements bloomed into layers of big kicks and small flickering hands in ways that seemed to come from somewhere else while simultaneously appearing organic. The fast-paced piece ranged from playful and humorous to militaristic and intolerably intense. Seemingly propelled by an inhuman force, dancers offered a repellant glimpse of a faceless society condemned to uniformity.

Two well-established Quebec City groups were shown at the Agora de la danse in February: Harold Rhéaume's *Le Fils d'Adrien Danse* and Karine Ledoyen's *Danse K par K*. These shared a number of similarities — comfortable use of all parts

looked like a wall, but which transformed into a fluttering sculpture. Harton's sensitivity and technical dominance soon eclipsed her three fellows and the imaginative set would destroy its own magic when dancers pushed it inside out.

Black on white, Rhéaume's *Fluide* appeared to be governed by ocean tides with dancers in unattractive baggy-butted trousers being pulled this way and that before being cast upon the floor. *Fluide's* set was a solid-looking stage-wide, three-level sculpture. A video of trees was projected on the top tier while dancers walked on and slid between the other two below.

When they dove into and slid up and down the horizontal tracks between the levels, the set came alive, obliterating memories of the rather uninspiring floppy-limbed antics of the amoeba-like bodies. Unfortunately, the inspiring use of the set was over all too quickly and it returned to being simply a handsomely lit block of under-utilized wood.

Also at the Agora in February, Montreal's José Navas reprised his autobiographical solo, *Miniatures*. A choreographer for his own Compagnie Flak and choreographer-in-residence since 2010 at Ballet B.C., Navas-the-dancer has monumental stage presence as well as technique and can change moods in a heartbeat. In seven



of the stage, dismally ho-hum costumes, themes about illuminating the unseen and large, innovative sets.

Ledoyen's *Trois paysages* was a three-part poetic voyage into invisible energies that used air as a catalyst. It was introduced by Sara Harton, a beautifully proportioned, infallibly precise dancer who repeated the same phrases several times before what

short vignettes — tributes to his father and Judy Garland among them — he offered his honesty and love of movement in simple, generous, intimate ways, even inviting the public to watch him mop up his sweat as he changed costumes.

Navas is an incomparable performer. As always, he left me with the impression of being in the presence of genius. ▼



Johanna Riley in *Pomme*  
Photo: Vince Pakhala



Alberta Ballet closed its 43rd season with the highly anticipated world premiere of *Balletujah!* choreographed by Artistic Director Jean Grand-Maître. The full-length contemporary ballet inspired by the soulful music and Prairie roots of Canadian singer/songwriter k.d. lang debuted in the musician's hometown, Edmonton, May 3-4 before its five-show Calgary run, May 8-11, at the Jubilee Auditoria.

The semi-narrative ballet depicts the passionate love affair between two women, set under the open skies of the Canadian Prairies that infuse it with Buddhist-like spirituality. The eclectic, 16-song soundtrack created by Claude Lemelin featured such classics as: *Turn Me Round*, *Constant Craving* and Lang's searing cover of Leonard Cohen's *Hallelujah*, as well as lesser known material from her 2011 CD *Sing it Loud*.

Alberta Ballet has announced that a brand-new Joni Mitchell ballet is also in the works, inspired by the Canadian icon's love songs that will debut in May 2014. The company also received four 2013 Canadian Screen Award nominations for its television adaptation of Grand-Maître's wildly successful Elton John extravaganza, *Love Lies Bleeding*, which premiered in 2010.

The Royal Winnipeg Ballet travelled to fin de siècle Paris this spring with a new production of Jorden Morris' 2009 blockbuster hit *Moulin Rouge – The Ballet*. The narrative full-length work that tells the tale of lovers Nathalie and Matthew, features a colourful cast of characters, including historical figures: Toulouse Lautrec, La Goulue as well as cabaret mastermind Charles Zidler who also falls in love with the fictitious young heroine.

Morris' highly stylized choreography blends classical ballet vocabulary with iconic cabaret dances, including the quadrille and high-kicking can-can performed en pointe by the corps de ballet dancers. The popular show, performed May 1-5 at the P.W. Centennial Concert Hall, included costumes by Anne Armit and Shannon Lovelace, sets and properties by Andrew Beck, with lighting by Pierre Lavoie.

Royal Winnipeg Ballet dancers have been kept busy moonlighting in Peter Quanz's "little company that could," Q Dance, which shares a simpatico relationship with the venerable troupe. First up, Q Dance performed Quanz's *In Tandem* at the Winnipeg Symphony Orchestra's 2013 New Music Festival on January 31; also marking the first time the hyperkinetic piece set to Steve

Reich's Pulitzer-Prize winning *Double Sextet* has been staged with live music — with the legendary composer in attendance.

Balletomanes were also treated to the creative dance laboratory's fourth annual production at the Gas Station Arts Centre, February 22-23 which showcased three world premieres choreographed by Quanz and Royal Winnipeg Ballet soloist Yosuke Mino. The mixed programme also notably included a modern dancer for the first time, with Winnipeg's Contemporary Dancers' Johanna Riley performing Quanz's new duet *Pomme* with Royal Winnipeg Ballet second soloist Sophia Lee.

The fruit-inspired piece featuring nearly 400 pounds of stage-strewn Granny Smith apples had its genesis when Quanz participated in Montréal Danse's Choreographic Research Workshop last December. One of his creative tasks assigned by faculty mentors Kathy Casey and Larry E. Lavender involved incorporating an apple in his choreography — thus pushing Quanz beyond his comfort zone while also planting the seed for *Pomme*.

After its emotional tour of *Toward Light: A Tribute to Rachel Browne* with three sold-out performances held January 8-15 in Winnipeg, Toronto and

Vancouver, Winnipeg's Contemporary Dancers returned home for its final shows: *The Trilogy Project* featuring three new duets choreographed by former company member Lesandra Dodson, January 26-27; and the self-titled *Sasha Ivanochko* offering two world premieres by the Montreal-based dancer/choreographer, April 26-28.

The company also showcased its youthful company in *Verge*, March 1-3, with the mixed repertoire programme featuring choreography by Artistic Director Brent Lott. Comprised of eight emerging dance artists trained at the Professional Program of the School of Contemporary Dancers, the now three-year-old initiative creates invaluable performing opportunities for tomorrow's dance artists.

The Professional Program of the School of Contemporary Dancers celebrated its milestone 40th anniversary

with a trio of gala shows, May 31 to June 2 at the Gas Station Arts Centre. More than 50 graduates — including nearly every member of the local professional dance community — performed three unique programmes, culminating with acclaimed choreographer Stephanie Ballard's *Homeagain* (2010).

The Banff Centre awarded its biannual Clifford E. Lee Choreography Award to Vancouver-based Donald Sales this year. The Tulsa, Oklahoma-raised dance artist travels to the Centre this summer to begin working on his commission that will premiere at the 2013 Banff Summer Arts Festival. The former Ballet BC dancer, who studied at Dance Theatre of Harlem and toured with Aszure Barton & Artists, recently established his own company Project 20, which debuted at Vancouver's Dances for a Small Stage last February.

The Centre also named renowned Canadian choreographer Aszure Barton as its 2012 Koerner Foundation Distinguished Guest Artist in Choreography. The New York-based artist and founder/director of Aszure Barton & Artists, who has also created works for Mikhail Baryshnikov, the National Ballet of Canada, American Ballet Theatre and the Martha Graham Dance Company, among others, will premiere her new work at the 2013 Banff Summer Arts Festival.

Lastly, Banff's Indigenous Dance Residency programme, housed within the renamed Indigenous Arts Department, will be held July 31 to August 24. Thirteen emerging and professional dance artists will work with dance artists from around the world during the three-week intensive, culminating in the performance of a short work late summer. ▼



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Toronto, still trying to shake off winter, got a welcome blast of fiery Andalusian heat at the end of March when celebrated flamenco artist María Pagés returned to the cavernous Sony Centre in late March, not as a featured member of *Riverdance* as she had 15 years ago, but as the charismatic star of her own company in a very personal work called *Autorretrato*.

That Pagés' Toronto debut was framed by an Irish stepdance show and performed to the music of Bill Whelan speaks to the fact that the Seville-born, Madrid-based artist is unafraid to explore flamenco's connections with other dance genres. After all, Pagés has choreographed for ballet stars Tamara Rojo and Angel Corella, collaborated on a shared programme with Belgian avant gardist Sidi Larbi Cherkaoui and even set flamenco to Shostakovich, albeit a familiar waltz.

Some flamenco purists frown on such promiscuity, but, as Pagés explains, "It can be traditional, modern and avant garde. In this way we get to know more about our art and about ourselves."

It was the search for her own personal relationship with flamenco that, with the help of Baryshnikov, led in 2006 to the creation in New York of an introspective solo, an "autorretrato" or self-portrait, that in 2008 Pagés reformulated as a group work for herself, three other women and four men, accompanied by a fine ensemble of flamenco musicians.

While not overtly autobiographical, the 80-minute *Autorretrato* clearly explores an individual dancer's search for personal self-knowledge, the kind that is never revealed by staring in a mirror (as Pagés does in the opening scene), but is acquired through the very act of dancing, which *Autorretrato* has in abundance.

Pagés, who mostly designs her own sets and costumes, has a wonderful gift for placing flamenco in an attractive theatrical setting without in any way cheapening the soulfulness that is the form's primary, one might almost say primal, appeal. In *Autorretrato*, she cleverly deploys not only mirrors but large picture frames as she explores her theme.

Although Pagés, with her tall body, handsome appearance and those famously long, serpentine arms, easily commands a stage, it is the way she integrates her company into *Autorretrato* that gives the work its human warmth. She may be the star — when she gets that huge shawl of hers whirling the crowd goes crazy — but she is no self-serving diva. As Pagés confides directly to the audience: "They are my family."

There were other welcome foreign visitors during the winter/early spring season



including two especially intriguing ones from Asia.

Tokyo-based dancer/choreographer Hiroaki Umeda made his local debut at Canadian Stage's intimate Berkeley Street Theatre as part of Spotlight Japan, a series of multi-disciplinary events involving different partnering institutions.

Umeda's choreographic palette is presumably broader than what the brace of related works he brought to Toronto

to avoid any suggestion of theme or content. In it Tao Ye and Duan Ni, both with shaved heads that minimize gender distinction and drably garbed in loose gowns that have vaguely monastic overtones, negotiate the same space in an oddly virtuosic duet. They begin flat on the floor and, when their bodies move, it's as if rag dolls have suddenly acquired mobility. And what mobility! These are two riveting, hyper-flexible dancers and, whether they like

when the dance attraction circles the city, but is unable, for lack of presenting support, to perform in a downtown venue. Such was the lot of Ballet BC, which made its first tour into southern Ontario under Emily Molnar's direction and came as close as Markham Theatre, scarcely 30 kilometres from the CN Tower. Only a smattering of downtowners, few of them former colleagues from Molnar's early years with the National Ballet, were in

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**Pagés has choreographed for ballet stars Tamara Rojo and Angel Corella, collaborated on a shared programme with Belgian avante gardist Sidi Lirbi Cherkaoui and even set flamenco to Shostakovich, albeit a familiar waltz.**

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represent, but they were curious enough in themselves to make him worth watching. Apart from a generalized aesthetic of urban grittiness, Umeda seems intrigued by the way light and sound can alter our perception of the body in motion and perhaps also how the body in motion can affect our perception of light.

This appears to be the case in *Haptic*, the shorter of Umeda's two solos in which pulsing changes of colour could either be viewed as triggers for his movement or vice-versa. But, then, he might just be another choreographer attempting to absorb the dancing human form into an enveloping visual landscape. This is much the case with *Holistic Strata*, a motion sickness-inducing spectacle in which Umeda's body at times becomes almost indistinguishable amid a dense swarm of luminous dots, part snowstorm, part starscape, projected onto both the floor and plain backdrop.

Chinese choreographers Tao Ye and his wife, Duan Ni, also seem intent on riding their dance of what might be viewed as its emotional or more human overtones, and it's no disgrace that they only partly succeed.

TAO Dance Theatre, founded only five years ago and yet to make its official debut in China — scheduled for Beijing this August — adopts what in Western dance terms would be called a minimalist approach. However, unlike so much Chinese dance that considers itself contemporary/modern, but is sadly derivative or overlaid with an excess of athletic showiness, Tao Ye, at age 27, can rightly claim, so far as is possible, to be a genuine original.

Although genial enough in person, Tao Ye the dancer/choreographer is a determined ascetic, driven to present the body as an independent moving entity, unemotional, unrepresentative and devoid of drama or readily perceptible meaning. This is most apparent in *2*, titled thus for the number of performers involved and

it or not, their personal charisma and the way they almost stalk each other inevitably generates dramatic interest. Try as they might, they cannot suppress their humanity although watching them attempt it is a rather moving experience.

Apart from big ballet with its powerful marketing clout, local presenters have a hard enough time getting Toronto audiences off their couches to attend a downtown event. Ask the folks at Harbourfront Centre in whose World Stage series Tao Dance Theatre appeared.

Imagine how much harder it then is

evidence. It was their loss because Ballet BC delighted those who did attend with a varied programme that showed them to great advantage as highly disciplined, versatile dancers who also know how to "sell" a show without being crass about it.

In the nicest way, they exude personality, a scarce commodity on dance stages these days, but one to which audiences — the folks who buy tickets rather than think up ludicrous artists' statements on grant application forms — heartily respond. As apparently they do to dance that is unabashedly humane. ▼

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Michelle Fleet (in air) with Jamie Rae Walker, Laura Halzack and Julie Tice in Paul Taylor Dance Company's *Scudorama*  
Photo: Paul B. Goode

The Paul Taylor Dance Company continues to present ambitious seasons of wide-ranging works for its New York City appearances, nowadays happily situated on the dance-friendly stage of Lincoln Center's David H. Koch Theater. The troupe's more or less annual New York City spring season covered three weeks this time and included ever-changing, rearranged mixed bills of three or four Taylor dances each.

The panoply of offerings invited a focus for approaching and assessing Taylor's work from any number of angles. Chronologically, the works spanned the years 1956 to the present. Temperamentally, the repertory included a sampler of contrasting tones, acknowledging Taylor's own sometime distinction for his creations as light and dark. To be sure, this often pat and simple way of defining Taylor's dances can be simplistic and even questionable, since the dancemaker varies his effects within each work as much as, more broadly, from dance to dance.

One particular way of seeing this canon was with respect to the designers with whom Taylor has chosen to work. Firstly and most rewardingly, especially after noting his presence in Taylor's audience during the run, the American and New York-based painter Alex Katz stood out as a stage designer of a most fine order. As has been Taylor's want, he has used certain visual art collaborators over the years in concentration before moving on to others. The works with Katz's

contributions during this run spanned a gamut from the time of his earliest Taylor collaborations to nearly his last, to date. This latter instance, with décor and costumes from Taylor's 1985 *Last Look*, Katz's penultimate collaboration thus far was included during the run, but I was unable to catch it.

Still, the other Katz works shown this season made a handsome trio of some of the earliest works still in active Taylor repertory. These included his colour-field efforts for Taylor's "scribble" dominated moves, to use a characterization that the choreographer himself likes at times to apply to his choreographic interests of a certain kind, for the 1961 *Junction*, which for a time following its first outing, came with the following programme note: "Pedestrians cross at the intersection of Tranquil Street and Turmoil Boulevard." This wording defines a handy set of contrasting intentions that fit within any number of examples of Taylor creations over time.

Likewise, from 1963, the nitty gritty display of strange, to put it mildly, human behaviour in a group work called *Scudorama* showed Katz's and Taylor's depictions of everyday and otherworldly behaviour, all of which still comes in the company's programme credits with a quote from Canto III, lines 34-36 of Dante's *Inferno*. Finally, completing this succinct selection, the run offered the marvellously witty and historic *Lost, Found and Lost*, from 1982, which comes with the following note: "The source

material for this dance is 'Events 1,' originally one of the '7 New Dances' first performed in 1957."

Each of these works reveals a strong side of both Taylor's dancemaking and of Katz's stage decoration, including costuming. The "scribbles" and pedestrian activity of *Junction*, with its spare accompaniment from excerpts of Johann Sebastian Bach's Solo Suites for Cello #1 and #4, amount to a haunting and sometimes wildly ritualistic occurrence for eight dancers, for which Katz's costumes of vivid blocks of saturated colours against his background of thin red ribbons as liquid-seeming hairline stripes provide a perfectly memorable surface and surround. The designs for *Scudorama* are seemingly less formal and far more dark and eerie. As the dance's cast of eight — with the beautiful Laura Halzack in the role made for Taylor's longtime early muse Bettie de Jong and the dryly sculptured Sean Mahoney in the often forbidding character originally performed by Taylor himself, seems to wander and slither through their space with Katz's hard-edge lumps in the background telling of heavy-hanging clouds, sometimes perhaps suggesting fecal matter, *Scudorama* proceeds with Clarence Jackson's collage-like score lending the whole an air of radio channels in and out of transmission range. The presence of faded beach towels as coverings or flicked lengths of cloth make for a look more sinister than casual. Katz's everyday dress and second-skin-of-colour body coverings complete the

picture of a world on the edge of oblivion.

The wit and ennui and matter-of-fact activity of *Lost, Found and Lost* create a wonderful blend of different worlds. Set against a blindingly white background growing out of an equally bleached floor, the cast of 10 more or less androgynously costumed men and women in black velour stretch jumpsuits strike sleek, fashion plate poses. Each sports a head-covering of stiff veiling fixed with sparkle detailing that walks a line between high style and shady disguise. Taylor is on record as noting that his choice of so-called “elevator music” for this dance was motivated by answering a self-imposed question about which music he hated the most. The final credit reads “Elevator music orchestrated by Donald York.” The resulting score makes one smile and perhaps even groan and yet somehow still hum along with the over-familiar strains filling the air as the five women and five men bring back from Taylor’s own experimental and workaday past a dance “exercise” from which he turned away in good measure after 1957. For this reworking, Taylor recycled would-be mundane material in new and fresh ways without betraying its inherent matter-of-factness.

Nowadays, for reasons likely as practical as they are aesthetic, design-wise, Taylor

works more or less exclusively with Santo Loquasto as principal set and costume designer. Loquasto was responsible for the designs of both new works Taylor showed during this run. *Perpetual Dawn*, to parts of Johann David Heinichen’s Dresden Concerti, is accompanied by a programme note of four lines of poetry by Emily Dickinson. It qualifies as what’s often called one of Taylor’s “dancey dances,” that is, one without an undercurrent of narrative. Set against a landscape of a kind of golden dawn — think Thomas Cole as mated with Nicholas Poussin — and dressed in rustic earth-toned clothing suggesting country folk, *Perpetual Dawn* unfolds as a free-spirited romp, with a wonderfully witty central interlude of pantomime for two women (Amy Young, who retired from the troupe with this season and flame-haired, eye-catching Heather McGinley). The contrasting moment of gesticulation takes one back, historically, to Taylor’s wickedly zany mimologue for the Indian Chieftan in his acerbic *From Sea to Shining Sea*, from 1965 and not in repertory here.


*To Make Crops Grow*, which had its premiere earlier this year, is almost all pantomime as it tells of a strange, rural lottery in which locals draw lots, and the unlucky one to draw the black-ball “ticket”

ends up being stoned by the rest of the assembled, including the shaman-like character called Ritual Conductor in the programme. It comes with a programme note that says: “Villagers perform hold-overs of an ancient ritual.” Three movements of Ferde Grofé’s Grand Canyon Suite provide the proceedings with accompaniment. The clincher, whence the individual drawing the fatal lot is turned on by all the others present, presumably to her death, is all eerily timed. A slow and almost delayed curtain closes off a stage picture of the assembled forming a circle around the fateful one. In Taylor’s telling, this is a woman who’s shown a great deal of fancy dress superiority. By way of climax, the villagers wield the stones they carry as if to crush the victim. In effect, the ring of slow motion activity suggests something between the horrors of a Greek tragedy taking place offstage and the urge to enact these for the audience at the same time.

As revealed on his newfound Lincoln Center stage, Taylor’s dances variously look fresher and scarier than ever, by turns. While the now 82-year-old choreographer calls almost all the shots, his design collaborators help make his dances variously effective and original. ▼

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No resting on those laurels at the San Francisco Ballet. Helgi Tomasson launched the company's 80th season and his 28th year as artistic director with a string of substantial world premieres, broken temporarily by a week with the visiting Hamburg Ballet in its Northern California debut performing John Neumeier's *Nijinsky*. The work left audiences cheering and the press mystified. But there was no denying that this kind of spectacular psychological melodrama cannot be found in the repertoires of American companies.

On Programme 1 of the season, England's Wayne McGregor made good on his promise of an original work for San Francisco with the hyper-energetic *Borderlands*, which bowed January 29 on the War Memorial Opera House stage. This first local commission from this uncategorizable artist left no observer indifferent. McGregor favours extremes and always seems to be operating at fever pitch. The movement style, more modern than classical, was familiar to audiences who had experienced McGregor's vaunted, ubiquitous *Chroma* for a couple of seasons. But, I found *Borderlands* a more focused and even intense work, less schematic in its trajectory. Just incidentally, this is as arduous an assignment as its 12 magnificent dancers will get all season.

McGregor bathes the stage's boxy borders in Lucy Carter's ever-metamor-

phosing lighting (the ballet was inspired by painter Josef Albers' many homages to the square). He exposes tender eardrums to the unrelenting electronic score by Joel Cadbury and Paul Stoney. And he delivers us to a world in which you cannot reduce a relationship to a single adjective.

These confrontations unfurl, as in *Chroma*, in a controlled environment where suddenly flaring limbs, jutting pelvises and lifts from the waist suggest an ambiguity that does not cease when the curtain descends. Throughout, we are on disorienting terrain: Transitions are abrupt, balances are treacherous, vertical jumps are frequent, change is unexpected. McGregor finds a measure of contrast in group forays, like the linked-arms quartet that recurs throughout the work. A trip to *Borderlands* requires no visa save abandonment to its intricacies.

Speaking of journeys, Alexei Ratmansky escorts us to no less than six nations in *From Foreign Lands*, the choreographer's first San Francisco commission in a decade. It bowed March 1, at the end of an extremely impressive programme, which began with a revival of Balanchine's *Scotch Symphony*. Both choreographers graft folkloric material onto the Western classical tradition. With Balanchine, all that Scottish footwork is mere décor. Ratmansky elevates divertissement to first principle. His musical inspiration is the orchestral arrangement of the two-piano *From Foreign Lands*, by

late German Romantic composer, Moritz Moszkowski. The score is scarcely memorable, but it proves eminently useful in context.

This journey includes stops in Russia, Italy, Germany, Spain, Poland and Hungary. These locales are peopled by 12 busy dancers (mostly from the principals' roster) who leap from locale to locale with multiple changes of tiered skirts, vest and britches (courtesy Colleen Atwood). Ratmansky hurtles across the landscape with breathtaking velocity, integrating folk gestures (clicking heels, folded arms, florid bows) with forays into ballet. What apparently occupies his dancers, regardless of country, is love and courtship.

The dancers rush from one vignette to another. In the German section, three men chase and elevate Sofiane Sylve as if she were a deity. A couple of minutes later, she joins three girlfriends as they're tossed aloft by swaggering swains. Ratmansky cast with a keen eye for talent and a kind of presentational grandeur. In the Spanish section, coquettish Maria Kochetkova, in red, spins madly. In Italy, Pascal Molat gives us Ratmansky's version of a show-off tarantella. There's a bit of heartbreak, too, as Garen Scribner chases the elusive Sarah Van Patten (who never looked more worth chasing).

Episodes tumble into each other, without any transitional material, and Ratmansky's gentle wit, so warm in a piece, like *Namouna* at New York City

Ballet, dominates here, too. This dance may also be the sunny face of the choreographer's *Russian Seasons*, with its stress on the cohesive power of community to heal. I dare say that *From Foreign Lands* will probably not figure as a major entry in the catalogue of Ratmansky's dances, but it bears all his fingerprints, flatters his dancers and affords a huge heap of pleasure.

Not every new ballet last winter prompted such admiration. Succumbing to the temptation to choreograph *The Rite of Spring* in the centennial year of its creation, San Francisco Ballet's choreographer-in-residence Yuri Possokhov, at artistic director Tomasson's urging, took on the task, and provided a bewildering spectacle that barely probed the surface of Stravinsky's modernist masterpiece. Possokhov found reasonable solutions to the composer's changing meters and fierce accents. Ukrainian-born, he conscientiously delved into the libretto (by Stravinsky and Nicolas Roerich) that recalls virgin sacrifice in pagan Russia.

Yet, the epic he spun from this material, with its creeping, crawling, bare-chested men and willing, disrobing women, suggested nothing so much as date night in old Minsk. Hormones may rage in spring, but Possokhov mini-

mizes the choosing of the sacrificial victim. She, in the guise of the vulnerable Jennifer Stahl at the February 26 opening, emerges from the pack in the opening moments; she is pursued by company newcomer Luke Ingham. Soon, the stage is awash with episodes of wenches tossed with legs spread and crotches highlighted.

Our victim ends up tied to saplings (and supposedly ripped apart at curtain fall). The piece looks seriously silly and dramatically undercooked and fails to live up to the promise afforded by the harmony and weight of the Stravinsky score which Martin West conducted with considerable intensity. Possokhov does have some interesting ideas. Like the Nijinsky original, he gives us a pair of village elders (James Sofranko and Garen Scribner), wrapped together in a vibrantly printed skirt, gesticulating with rage as they consign the victim to her doom. If only the remainder of this *Rite* showed comparable imagination.

The same programme revived two of last year's major San Francisco Ballet commissions, previously unreviewed in this space. Ashley Page's *Guide to Strange Places* (to the John Adams' score) thrusts four principal, colour-coded couples, four soloists and six corps into a space-

redefining, voluptuously phrased series of episodes that bespeak a substantial choreographic sensibility that should be better known in North America.

Mark Morris' *Beaux* lives up to its reputation and then some. This all-male excursion clads its nine dancers in wildly hued camouflage suits (by Isaac Mizrahi, who also designed the backdrop in a similar pattern) and proceeds to smash gender stereotypes (as he has in the past) with great goodwill. In confounding our expectations of what ballet men and women do onstage, a tall chap freezes in unsupported arabesque; another boy is carried aloft like a village maiden; two guys mingle in what looks like a pas de deux, until one escapes the other's clutches; the dancers unashamedly form daisy chains.

For Morris, *Beaux* is moderately understated and confused some members of the audience. But this is a wry and witty confection, Morris' eighth for the company, and the dancers, headed by Vito Mazzeo, Rubén Martín Cintas and Jaime Garcia Castilla, were miraculously attuned to Morris' style and tone. Watching them all preen, pose and prance, you realized that this is probably what fauns do on their days off from doing whatever fauns do. ▼



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Recent programmes by the Royal Ballet at Covent Garden under its new Artistic Director, Kevin O'Hare, have been stimulating in their choreographic diversity. The company, nowadays an intriguing international mix rather than a largely homegrown band, has successfully applied itself to the varying period styles of Fokine and Petipa, Balanchine and Robbins, Cranko and Ashton, as well as to new works by Alexei Ratmansky and Christopher Wheeldon.

The Ashton evening was memorable mainly for the farewell performances by Tamara Rojo, who has left the Royal Ballet to devote her energies to acting as director and a principal ballerina with English National Ballet. The work chosen for Covent Garden was the famous Fonteyn/Nureyev vehicle, *Marguerite and Armand*. Interestingly, it also coincided with the 50th anniversary of its creation. The work is, in fact, simply an extended tragi-romantic pas de deux created with a deliberately limited, although effective, dance vocabulary, but it is also an ideal union of the arts, set to a Liszt score that combines his B minor piano concerto and La lugubre gondola, and using delectable designs by Cecil Beaton.

On February 12, the house happily rose to applaud a fine performance by a favourite actress-dancer, ably partnered by another guest artist Sergei Polunin (soon to be seen again in London with the Peter Schaufuss Ballet's *Midnight Express*). Most of the other works that evening — *La Valse*, the *Meditation from Thais pas de deux* and the *Voices of Spring pas de deux* (from the opera *Die Fledermaus*) — were minor items from Ashton's magnificent total oeuvre; but *Monotones I and II* are another matter. They comprise a short masterwork, exquisitely conceived and controlled, especially in the two men/one woman *Monotones II*. This was devotedly handled by Marianela Nuñez, Federico Bonelli and Edward Watson.

A triple bill that began with Carlos Acosta and Nuñez in Balanchine's durable *Apollo* included the new works by Ratman-

sky and Wheeldon. Ratmansky's musical choice was *24 Preludes* set to the 41-minute long 1967 orchestration of Chopin's preludes by Jean Françaix. Four couples were extremely well cast, and engaged in a fluent, classically based series of solos (particularly striking in virtuosity for Steven McRae), duets and varied ensembles, pleasingly linked in mood and tempi to the Chopin score. Costumes and lighting, by Colleen Atwood and Neil Austin, were, however, rather too muted and unvaried to lend any visual excitement.

Wheeldon, in *Aeternum*, possibly attempted too much by setting choreography to Britten's difficult 1940 *Sinfonia da Requiem* (the choice of music honoured the centenary of Britten's birth). The resulting work had its obscurities and, for me, needed far greater clarity of intention and ingenuity of choreographic invention. The opening *Lacrymosa* was for a mourning Nuñez with a small ensemble. This led to the *Dies Irae* with a stressful series of duets for Nuñez and Nehemiah Kish and some violent solo work for James Hay. The finale, *Requiem Aeternum*, cleared into serenity with a pas de deux for Nuñez and Bonelli. This ended with them walking together into a calm sky — death, perhaps, after a harshly troubled life?

Fokine's *The Firebird*, in its choreographic unity with the Stravinsky score and the Gontcharova designs, provided its usual impact and had a spikily dramatic interpretation of the eponymous role by Itziar Mendizabal. Robbins' 1970 *In the Night*, set to Chopin nocturnes, displayed this choreographer's sensitive musicality in duets for three couples reflecting youthful charm, mature sophistication and unrestrained, passionate love, but it never quite reached any satisfying resolution.

*Raymonda Act III* was crowned by an

impeccable and appealing partnership from Alina Cojocaru and McRae. Cranko's ballets are all too rarely now seen in Britain, but the Royal Ballet does continue to present the admirable *Onegin*. This time the role of Tatiana was exquisitely and movingly danced by Cojocaru, who is one of the company's most treasured artists. She was admirably partnered (unexpectedly, because of an injury to Johan Kobborg) by guest artist Jason Reilly, who was trained at the National Ballet School of Toronto before joining Stuttgart Ballet in 1997. He returned to the National Ballet of Canada in 2009. McRae was the Lensky, a finely coherent interpretation from the carefree and buoyant dance enchainements of the first act to the tragic quarrel and the ensuing poignant solo before the fatal duel.

English National Ballet under Rojo has announced repertoire plans that include a tribute to Nureyev and one new acquisition, Kylián's *Petite Mort*. There has, however, been considerable publicity in other directions. Anyone without knowledge of this important company's complex history from its beginnings as London Festival Ballet under Dolin and Markova would (incorrectly) assume that Rojo was now in charge of an ailing and unappreciated organization! She has sought the help of Dame Vivienne Westwood's "iconic British fashion house" for the creation of a new "brand, with a fresh logo and colour palette" to style their dancers in novel marketing images.

In the Critics' Circle National Dance Awards 2012, announced on January 28, a very much overdue tribute was paid by giving the De Valois' Award for Outstanding Achievement to Robert Cohan. No one has ever earned it more justly — Cohan's magnificent creation and directorship of London Contemporary Dance Theatre (quite apart from his great contribution as choreographer) are insufficiently acknowledged. British contemporary dance in all its various branches is more indebted to him than to anyone else. ▼



Tamara Rojo and Sergei Polunin in the Royal Ballet's *Marguerite and Armand*  
Photo: Alastair Muir

Melbourne's 2013 Dance Massive Festival has grown exponentially since it was last held two years ago. The 2013 programme featured works by Melbourne's major contemporary dance companies and demonstrated that the independent dance sector is growing in size and power.

Moreover, the success of Dance Massive 2011 has now spawned an "Off" Dance Massive programme in 2013, with even more programming designed to capitalize on the increased audience. With both Balletlab and KAGE presenting as part of the "Off" programme, as well as a collection of artists presenting more casual Open Studio showings, audiences in Melbourne were scrambling to see all the works on show.

One of the most anticipated events of the Dance Massive season has been the second work created by Anouk van Dijk for Chunky

Dijk overseas) held in *An Act of Now*. Langlois is excellent in her role, particularly at delivering the text. However, the cast as a whole is still a little uneven when it comes to really embodying the demands of this choreography.

A highlight of Dance Massive was *Gudirr Gudirr*, performed by Broome-based dancer, Dalisa Pigram. The work explored Pigram's Asian-Indigenous heritage, using spoken word and dance to draw attention to the complex issues of cultural and environmental sustainability. Pigram's use of language is extraordinary in this work, particularly in the way her text is interpreted through projections. *Gudirr Gudirr* is soon to embark on an overseas tour.

Stephanie Lake and Larissa McGowan also presented their latest works *Dual* and *Skeleton* as they look to launch their choreographic careers alongside their continuing performance schedule.

tact partnering work.

As with a number of recent contemporary works, *Dual* utilizes a non-traditional seating arrangement, setting the audience in two opposing seating banks. It is a similar setup in Lee Serle's *P.O.V.* (with the notable difference being that half of the audience members sit on stools in the middle of the performance space itself) and with Balletlab's *And All Things Return to Nature Tomorrow*. In these works the notion of perspective is explored, often bringing audience members into the action and guaranteeing a unique show at each performance.

Improvisation is at the heart of *Conversation Piece*. In this collaboration between Melbourne-based Lucy Guerin Inc. and Sydney's Belvoir St. Theatre company, a seven minute improvised conversation between three dancers becomes the source material for everything that follows. The work looks at verbal and non-verbal com-



Move. *247 Days* is van Dijk's latest offering, with a title inspired by the number of days she has spent in Australia. Like *An Act of Now*, which premiered as part of last year's Melbourne Festival, *247 Days* reflects on the passage of time and depicts characters struggling with isolation within the context of a crowd.

Van Dijk's work utilizes her movement style, Countertechnique, which sends the body spinning off its' central axis. When done well, the movement gives the impression of a whip that spirals in and out of the ground. There are elements of martial arts in the kicks and deep lunges in the movement, as well as a sense that the energy is being driven, spiralling upwards, from the top of the head.

Lauren Langlois is the lead dancer in the work, taking over the kind of pivotal position that Nina Wollny (a longtime dancer with van

McGowan's *Skeleton* breaks down and explores the impact of a crash on the body. After a number of years working with Garry Stewart at Australian Dance Theatre, it is clear that McGowan shares Stewart's interest in the mechanics of the body. Jethro Woodward's soundscore matches a noise for every movement, amplifying the sense of pain and distortion in a work that looks at the trauma of breaking bones. Lake's *Dual* is very different in style and tone from McGowan's grotesque and violent physical language. *Dual* is essentially a choreographic exercise, in which a duet is split and performed as two solos. The solos are reunited at the end, giving a different insight to the movement material. Sara Black and Alisdair Macindoe perform beautifully in these roles, drawing out the differing dynamics that take the body from thrashing across the floor to rippling in response to con-

munication, interpreting and translating a simple conversation between friends using a handful of iPhones and some very clever apps.

For a long time now Guerin has investigated the flow of information in her works. With *Conversation Piece*, Guerin has found a formula that works, bringing together a strong cast and reducing the audience to hysterical laughter on more than one occasion.

The weeks leading up to Dance Massive have been quiet for Melbourne's ballet fans, with the Australian Ballet touring interstate. However, after wowing fans at its outdoor Telstra *Ballet in the Bowl* performance, the 2013 season is just about to kick off with *Don Quixote*.

It will be two more years until the next Dance Massive hits Melbourne, and we can only look forward to what will be on show next time. ▼



Since its opening in 2011, the Royal Opera House Muscat in Oman has presented a string of prestigious artists. In January, the Royal Danish Ballet and the Royal Danish Orchestra were invited to present two evenings of August Bournonville's *La Sylphide* and the festive Act III of his *Napoli*.

On the surface, Bournonville's ballets may seem a long way from the Arab world. However, the essence of the story — the tragic outcome of James' choice between his bride-to-be and an enticing dream creature, the sylphide — is universal. The joyous dancing at the wedding celebration in *Napoli* also transcended any cultural barriers — the Oman audience gave the performance a standing ovation.

For corps dancer Jonathan Chmelensky,

Neumeier's *Romeo and Juliet* remains a masterpiece of dramaturgical variety and has been a returning favourite in the Danish repertoire since 1974. At the premiere in March, Jürgen Rose's cleverly transformable scenography with simple architectural features once more transported us to Renaissance Verona and the feud between the Montague and Capulet families that causes the tragedy of the star-crossed lovers.

Opening night featured experienced principals in the title roles. As Romeo, Ulrik Birkkjær convinced with his boyish charm and unconcealed infatuation with Susanne Grinder's Juliet. She can still play a cheerful, naive girl, as she stumbled down the stairs to meet her future husband at the ball. Captured by Birkkjær's gaze,

marriage demands. Defending her right for true love, she grew into a headstrong young woman, who took responsibility for her fate and acted upon it. No wonder soloist Gregory Dean's Romeo fell head over heels for her at the ball. It was also a delight to witness the joyful and dramatic facets in his characterization, now added to his always excellent technique.

As Benvolio, both Alexander Stæger and Charles Andersen displayed their joy of dancing. Alban Lendorf's sprightly Mercutio was full of pranks. When the playful teasing of the staggering, drunken Tybalt caused him to accidentally injure Mercutio, Lendorf's face, alternately grinning and distorted with lethal pain, fooled everybody into a great applause of his theatrical performance, before they realized the grim truth. Romeo's headlong, mortal revenge of his friend then set off the fatal development of the young love story.

Gitte Lindstrøm was an emotionally quiet Lady Capulet receding from her daughter's touch, but with a suggested intimate relationship with her nephew, Tybalt, resulting in a frantic outburst at his death. Mads Blangstrup portrayed him with a haughty attitude and a lightly inflammable temper ignited by the sight of any Montague family member. Dazed by booze, his rude awakening to the desperate fight for his life led to his dramatic fall from the balcony of the Capulet house.

In the outdoor scenes, colourful street life bubbled with eager joy, and little, individual stories happened all around. The swordfights were whipped up into a daring, breathtaking tempo to be stopped only by Sergei Prokofiev's fortissimo, dissonant chord. The orchestra under Graham Bond's superb baton took the changing moods of the drama to its fullest potential.

During the years 1970 to 1995, internationally acclaimed Danish photographer John R. Johnsen captured a wide range of renowned dancers and companies through his lens. New York City Ballet, Béjart's Ballet du XXe siècle, Martha Graham's and Alvin Ailey's companies, as well as the Royal Danish Ballet, to mention only a few, are portrayed in the studio and onstage. Now a magnificent selection of his black-and-white photos has been published in a splendid book *Dance in the Mirror* with enlightening articles. Chosen by dance critics Erik Aschengreen and Anne Middelboe Christensen in collaboration with Johnsen, each photo is a gem that captures the perfect moment of flow, intensity and sensuality of the moving body. A whole spectrum of moods makes the dance come alive on the page. His entire oeuvre is now safe at the Royal Library in Copenhagen to a great extent digitalized. The book is available both in Danish and in English. ▼



the tour to Oman was especially memorable. After Artistic Director Nikolaj Hübbe's introductory speech to the company in the studio, he suddenly turned to Chmelensky, who was doing the splits on the floor, and appointed him to soloist.

The French-born dancer joined the company in 2007 directly from the Cuban National Ballet School. Recently, he has excelled in Balanchine's *Tchaikovsky Pas de Deux* and has made a lasting impression as a perky Gaston in John Neumeier's *Lady of the Camellias*. In March, he got his biggest challenge so far as the principal male character, Sir William, in Hübbe and Eva Draw's new, colonial version of *La Bayadère*. Here his virtuoso technique merged with sensitive characterization.

her emotions were awakened. Their pas de deux after the spontaneous marriage was coloured by his unfortunate killing of her cousin and loaded with agonizing passion. Grinder's desperation matured into determination to drink the frightening potion to avoid marriage to the noble, but dispassionate Paris. The double suicide in the burial vault was all the more shattering, as she awakened only seconds after he has expired, and she stabs herself folding his arm around her in a final, eternal embrace.

In the second cast, Juliet was danced by the young corps dancer Ida Praetorius, a winner of this year's Erik Bruhn competition. She was a giggling, unaffected girl, a nimble sunbeam in the sombre Capulet household eclipsed by her parent's rigid



In keeping with the promise made in his winning proposal for the directorship of the Ballet Nacional de España (Spanish National Ballet), Antonio Najarro has staged *Clásicos de la Danza Española* (Spanish Dance Classics), a work comprised of five beautiful works from the company's repertory, works that easily could have, or already had, fallen into obscurity despite their choreographic brilliance. What made the bill — featuring works by Antonio Ruiz Soler, Juan Quintero, Victoria Eugenia, Pilar Azorín and José Granero — particularly strong was the plurality of Spanish dances represented.

Although internationally known for its flamenco performances, the Spanish National Ballet was created to preserve and extol all styles of national dance, which is far richer than most international audiences are aware. Although two of the programme's pieces were flamenco, including the entire second half of the show, comprised of Granero's legendary *Medea*, the lesser exhibited *Escuela Bolera*, *Jota Navarra* and *Jota Aragonesa* were also included to the noticeable delight of a cheering sold-out audience. This variety of styles, performed to live accompaniment provided by the Orchestra of the Community of Madrid at the shows premiere gave the company's dancers the opportunity to prove their impeccable training and proficiency in Spain's folkloric and classical dances.

*Clásicos de la Danza Española* was a far cry from the chaotic mess that was Najarro's first official production with the company, *Ángeles Caídos* (Fallen Angels), a production that was meant to

be so monumental that it caved under the weight of its own promise. All of the current stars of the contemporary flamenco scene — Rafaela Carrasco, Rocío Molina, Olga Pericet, Javier Latorre Manuel Liñán and Rúben Olmo — were called into the ballet's headquarters to choreograph bits and pieces of a work that was as disjointed as it was boring. Collaborating with these guest performers/choreographers and creating a new (horrifically tacky) wardrobe must have cost the company a small fortune. The far superior *Clásicos de la Danza Española*, on the other hand, revived works to which the company already owned the rights, and made use of each production's original costumes, which have been meticulously preserved throughout the company's 34-year history.

The Victor Ullate Ballet also drew from its extensive, 25-year choreographic history for the headlining piece of its most recent production *Nexo Y Jaleos*. The triple bill began with two new works. The first, a contemporary piece set to Stravinsky's *The Rite of Spring* called *Nexo* by Arantxa Sagardoy and Alfredo Bravo, a young choreographic duo that has also created works for the Compañía Nacional de Danza and their own company Compañía Plan B. Despite the choreographer's apparently warm acceptance within the national dance scene, *Nexo* did little to impress critics and audiences. More ritualistic and redundant than cyclical, the piece drew lukewarm applause on opening night.

*Y*, also a new choreography by the company's Artistic Director Eduardo Lao, was a beautiful breath of fresh air. This simple male duet in the classical

style was a harmonious combination of elegance, strength and sensuality. Gorgeous, perfect lines were made soft, smooth and entrancing. Minimalist costumes and nothing but a soft wash of light as scenery proved that a successful work of new art doesn't have to be costly and overdone to engross and bedazzle.

The evening's crowning glory was *Jaleos*, one of Victor Ullate's most lauded choreographies. The 16-year-old piece was updated with new costuming and lighting (a key element in the work's contemporary and rhythmic nature), but its essence remained the same. The work is quintessentially Spanish, basing its structure and theme on flamenco's rhythmic patterns. It is an upbeat, striking and successful marriage of Spanish artistic sensibility and neoclassical ballet. As the final beats of *Jaleos* filled the theatre, a resounding cheer emanated from the audience. I like to think that it was not only the amazing stamina and technique of the dancers and the unforgettable choreography, but also the reflection of one's culture in an art form that can often seem so foreign.

With the Spanish economy in a state that would very generously be described as rocky and additional funding cuts being made to the arts each year, it seems most cost effective for Spain's largest and longest-running dance companies to look back rather than look forward, at least for the time being. The greatness of both the Spanish National Ballet and the Victor Ullate Ballet lies in decades of prolific and high-quality work. What better time to expose new audiences to this rich repertory of Spanish creativity. ▼



Saul Daniele Ardillo and Johanna Hwang  
in Aterballetto's *workwithinwork*  
Photo: Alfredo Aneschi



It is a peculiar Italian belief: miracles can always happen, above all when you least expect them. Let's speak about the current dance season: amidst all the economic cuts and problems the cultural and performing arts sector has had to suffer, something of wonder happens that makes you hope for better days.

For instance, although the economic budget cuts compelled the Aterballetto company to reduce new productions, Artistic Director Cristina Bozzolini decided that this was still the right time to give a clear signal that Aterballetto can move beyond former resident artist Mauro Bigonzetti's epoch. Her plan? To open the company's repertoire to new collaborations in order to enhance the strong artistic quality and technical versatility of the company dancers for so long tied to Bigonzetti's elaborate and manneristic style. She has invited Italian dance makers of the younger generation and different poetics, as well as European choreographers to show Italian audiences a broader perspective. New

productions already announced are by Eugenio Scigliano, Johan Inger, Cristina Rizzo, Edward Clug, Michele Di Stefano and Andonis Foniadakis.

To signal this important turning point, Aterballetto turned to William Forsythe, a friend of the company since he created one of his seminal masterpieces, *Steptext*, for it in 1985. The American maestro decided to provide a piece for the entire company of 18, *workwithinwork*. An interesting and unusual choreographic dialogue with the violin duet by Luciano Berio, *workwithinwork* (1998) is a typical post-classic creation. In the frame of the classical canon — noted by dance en pointe and Balanchine's quotations and poses — Forsythe disassembles the physical attitudes, makes arms move with different speeds and transforms torsos in sparkling curves, but what makes this piece peculiar is the lyrical moods of many duets. Aterballetto danced it with heart and stamina, sensibility and love for movement, confirming it to be a top level contemporary ballet company.

Another little miracle in Italian dance happened when Venice Biennale president Paolo Baratta announced the new artistic director of the dance session with a three-year mandate. After international artists Karole Armitage, Frederic Flamand, Carolyn Carlson and Ismael Ivo (who remained in office for eight years), there is finally an Italian choreographer at the helm, Virgilio Sieni. One of the most creative and original choreographers in the country, Sieni emerged in the lively 1980s, when contemporary dance rose in Europe and a new generation of choreographers appeared in Italy coming from different artistic fields.

Sieni, a true Renaissance man, is not only from Florence, but has also deeply absorbed and researched the same artisan practices of the Renaissance workshops where artists such as Botticelli and Raffaello blossomed. He has also been charged to organize a college for developing choreographic creativity and an international dance festival in 2014. The very first results of his artistic vision will be shown at the end of June.



At the beginning of February, just a few days after Sergei Filin's dramatic attack, a small group of young dancers from the Bolshoi Theatre arrived for a unique sold-out evening in Legnago, a small town near Verona. The event was due to the good relationship between an Italian artistic committee set in the Veneto region and the Benois de la Danse organization in Moscow: after an amazing Benois de la Danse Gala in 2008 in Vicenza, the Italians asked the Benois organization to imagine a new project dedicated to younger talents. In Legnago's small and pretty Teatro Salieri, we had the chance to admire the new generation of soloists. I was particularly fascinated by Denis Rodkin's soft musicality and adamant legato in *The Talisman pas de deux* with young Angelina Vorontsova, and Artiom Ovcharenko's smart personality with the sparkling Anna Tikhomirova in *Corsaire*,

where the couple performed a glorious declination of body language that the Russians have been known for for centuries. But what amazed even more was the way these outstanding dancers face the contemporary idioms and peculiar styles of current dance makers: the excerpt from Wayne McGregor's *Chroma* with the incredible dynamics he creates for any part of the dancers' body was danced by Yulia Grebenshikova and Karim Abdullin in a sophisticated and carefully chiselled way. Truly exhilarating was also the Balanchine's speedy *Tarantella* with Daria Khokhlova and Andrei Bolotin. The programme offered other examples of Soviet and Russian choreography: from the historical Goleizowsky to the young expressive Radu Poklitaru, until Yuri Grigorovich, president of the Benois Prix and resident choreographer at the Bolshoi. We saw the passionate Tango from his famous *Golden Age* danced by two strong performers, Tikhomirova and Pavel Dmitrichenko. Just imagine our surprise, some days later, hearing that he was involved in Filin's attack. ▼



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**F**ollowing months of speculation about the identity of the new dance director at the Paris Opéra Ballet, the out-of-the-blue appointment of Benjamin Millepied brought with it incredulity, dismay, happy surprise and even more speculation. What plans the man has for the company — if he has any yet — has become a guessing game amongst ballet-goers. Millepied, himself, revealed little at the press conference organized to officially announce his appointment.

Following an exceptional 20-year tenure, Brigitte Lefèvre does not hide the fact that her favourite contenders were either Laurent Hilaire, ex-étoile and present ballet master, or Manuel Legris, one of the prominent stars of the Nureyev generation and present director of the Vienna State Ballet.

Among the Paris Opéra contingent, étoile Nicolas Leriche, who will retire next season, had also applied. Incidentally, his wife, étoile Claire-Marie Osta, who retired last year, has recently been appointed director of the Dance Conservatory in Paris. Other illustrious candidates included Sylvie Guillem and Angelin Preljocaj.

Lefèvre maintains that her preference is no reflection on Millepied, whom she respects and appreciates to the point of having already invited him twice to do creations for the company. As it so happens, he will be back as a guest in her very last season





with a commissioned *Daphnis and Chloé* performed by the Paris Opéra dancers. Lefèvre simply argues that Paris Opéra-trained Hilaire or Legris were more relevant choices in order to warrant the preservation of the French School tradition. She has also throughout her career as director emphatically exposed the public to a modern and post-modern repertoire while inviting contemporary artists to create for the company.

The appointment of Millepied also coincides with the arrival of Stéphane Lissner, replacing Nicolas Joel as general director of both the Garnier and Bastille operas. Lissner, vastly instrumental in Millepied's appointment, mainly let on that he was first and foremost seduced by Millepied's sophisticated musical taste and knowledge. The odds are that the new big shot was out to make a splash and inject a solid dose of youth and glamour into the 300-year-old institution.

So far, the PR move has worked wonders and even the non-specialized press has been prompt to publish articles and photos of the handsome Millepied in crisp white shirt and dark slim suit so that even total novices now know his name.

Meanwhile, the Paris Opéra has turned to the past with celebrations of the tri-centennial of the École Française. It was the dancing King Louis XIV who, with the help of first-ever ballet master Pierre Beauchamp, set the rules for ballet and clearly spelt out in a decree the specifics of the French School.

After 300 years of triumphs and tribulations, is it still possible to identify a typically French style? Lefèvre or Élisabeth Platel, now heading the Paris Opéra ballet school in Nanterres just outside Paris, both insist on a certain *je-ne-sais-quoi* combining a typically French elegance, refined footwork and a contempt for virtuosity recommended by King Louis XIV himself, a prime advocate of stiff pomp and ceremony.

The various events in April at both the Garnier and the Royal Opera of Versailles included a special evening with the ballet school students and one with students from various other schools in Europe.

The Paris Opéra also recently celebrated the 20th anniversary of the death of Rudolf Nureyev, whose coffin had been carried down the Garnier's grand staircase by some of the Paris Opéra dancers including his friend, étoile Charles Jude. Jude recently organized a Nureyev celebratory evening with the Bordeaux Ballet company, which he has been running since 1996.

In July, Legris will equally proffer a Nureyev evening as director of the Wien Staatsoper, the guest company at the ninth edition of *Les Étés de la Danse* headed by Marina de Brantes and Valéry Colin, an ex-Paris Opéra dancer. This year, *Les Étés* taking place in Théâtre du Châtelet in Paris will present three different programmes — including *Don Q* as a full length — concocted by Legris, ever the keen and youthful man, who was clearly happy and full of praise for his

company in Vienna. The programme alone looks totally enticing. The event will also include the showing of some 10 films revolving around Nureyev as well as an exhibition dedicated to photographs and memorabilia of the eternal dance icon.

Born on a train in the middle of nowhere, the impecunious, uncouth little Tatar was to shoot to international fame and wealth and never die. He still lives on in the fond memory of those he trained and even those he tyrannized, and keeps fascinating the younger generation who never knew him. Nureyev is the stuff of legend and the generation of dancers he led and inspired was definitely one of the best in Paris Opéra history.

The company today, for all its elegance and brilliant corps de ballet, is seriously lacking in stars of the calibre of those from what's now referred to as the Nureyev generation.

For the past 10 years, there has been, for that matter, a spate of étoiles named well past their 30th birthdays and some just years before retirement time.

The latest named in Roland Petit's *Carmen* is 34-year-old Eleonora Abbagnato. A Sicilian-born beauty, Abbagnato stood out from an early age, but somehow stagnated as première danseuse and repeatedly took time off to dance elsewhere, namely in Italy where she married football player Federico Balzaretta.

Back with the company since the beginning of the season, she has indeed shown remarkable technique and sensitivity in the various roles she has performed. I unfortunately missed her in *Carmen*, but it is not hard to imagine that beyond her very fine technique she brought a very special touch to the role with her natural beautiful looks and sensuous femininity.

Now here's surely a glamorous étoile that may herald a whole new generation as led by the no less glamorous Monsieur Millepied. ▼



## Vancouver

**T**he National Ballet of China's crisp and sparkling *Swan Lake* made a thrilling argument on the side of traditional classical ballet during a visit to Vancouver February 27 to March 2. When the Queen Elizabeth Theatre's stage filled with swan maidens in white pancake tutus, feet encased in pale pink pointe shoes, the dream that Marius Petipa and Lev Ivanov first staged at Russia's Maryinsky Theatre in 1895 was vividly recreated.

The technically precise and almost eerily strong corps de ballet — every one of them gifted with dramatic presence — made perfect sense of the classical restraint of this dreamy romantic work. In jagged, edgy postures, rows of long-limbed, raven-haired women conjured up a vision of creatures with a grace all their own. They live in a world all their own, too, in the misty lakeside where they congregate shyly in pristine rows or form swirling circle formations.

For the sake of love, Odette breaks free from their ranks, and on that premise the plot hinges. On opening night, Wang Qimin sparkled and quivered in an ecstasy of desire for Prince Siegfried (Li Jun), but also — or so it seemed — for the music itself, so closely entwined was she with Tchaikovsky's dramatic score. Wang's whole body breathed up and sighed down with every step and pose. As Odile, she was suitably icy, manipulating Siegfried into position in their pas de deux, clearly toying with him. Li was a little distant in the difficult role of the world-weary prince, but was still a superb partner, with a light touch that allowed Wang her own freedom and agency. Even when engaged in close supporting manoeuvres, Li mostly managed not to hover but to dance.

On closing night, Cao Shuci made her debut as Odette/Odile, with Xing Liang her young Siegfried. Both were dramatic and dynamic, though neither has quite found their role. One of the evening's sweetest moments came at the end of the Black Swan variations, when they are together again, embracing with gusto (probably relieved to have got through their solos intact). But this was too warm and human a moment to be shared between the duped prince and the manipulative Odile. In fact, I almost found myself rooting for her at that point!

That's the fun of *Swan Lake*, and part of its lasting validity: it offers a chance for the world's great ballerinas to dig deep into their dramatic resources and invest the challenging classical form with

emotional resonances. Cao and Xing will have opportunity to grow into their characters, to revel in the extremes of personality that define this ballet.

The National Ballet of China's three-act production premiered in 2007, directed by the great Russian ballerina Natalia Makarova. Her version, created in the 1980s, is true to the spirit of the original, with additional choreography by Frederick Ashton and Makarova.

The set by Peter Farmer, lit by Han Jiang, was grand (for the court scenes) and magical (by the lakeside). Costumes by Galina Solovyeva were delightful, with lovely touches like the red feather perched on the men's flat hats in Act I, and the hint of blood red in the bodices of the six black-swan maidens in Act III.

At the end, instead of Odette's and then Siegfried's leap off a promontory into the lake, Makarova tries something more delicate. Odette runs onto the stage into the arms of Siegfried, who then carries her upstage, where both are submerged into the lake courtesy of a billowing black cloth. Somehow the drama didn't come through for me until the second performance, when Cao propelled herself toward Xing, who drew her to him though her whole body arched backwards, creating a vibrantly etched moment of distress. Von Rothbart's death up on the rock where we first saw him, which follows, felt obligatory, without dramatic evolution. The only serious disappointment, though, was the evening's recorded music.

This beautifully schooled company, rooted in Russian classical style since its founding in 1959, toured here from Beijing as part of Ballet BC's season. Audiences both nights I attended were ecstatic and the theatre was bustling, a sign of the increasingly lively ballet scene that's returning to the West Coast.

Kaija Pepper

## Winnipeg

**B**illed as a creative dance laboratory, Peter Quanz's **Q Dance** has a knack of not only offering innovative mixed repertoire programmes, but consistently defying expectation and pushing the boundaries of classical ballet to the limit.

Comprised of an elite ensemble of Royal Winnipeg Ballet dancers, the four-year-old troupe presented three world premieres plus an established work February 22-23 at the intimate Gas Station Arts Centre.





Q DANCE in *Untitled*  
Photo: Vince Pakhala

The visually arresting *Pomme* begins with Winnipeg's Contemporary Dancer's Johanna Riley lying atop 400 pounds of Granny Smith apples strikingly lit by Robert Mravnik. When lithe, buried ballerina Sophia Lee suddenly reveals herself by sitting bolt upright, the audience's surprise was palpable. The 11-minute piece's Butoh-like simplicity is further underscored by Anne Armit's modernistic Japanese kimonos, as the two top-knotted, bare-footed dancers form sculptural shapes in silence. The apples serve both as effective props that are tossed, chomped, rolled on and precariously balanced on heads and hands, as well as potent imagery hinting at Biblically inspired ideas of "knowledge" and "temptation."

Another promising work was the simply named *Untitled* presented last June as a work-in-progress. Inspired by photographs of an opera house in the former East Germany, destroyed during the Second World War and later painstakingly rebuilt, the ensemble piece set to Latvian composer *Peteris Vasks'* *Musica Adventus* also features the choreographer's own set design. Armit's effective costumes include simple cotton dresses and pedestrian suits. Quanz creates a postmodern community revolving around romantic couple Jo-Ann Sundermeier and Tristan Dobrowney, whose disintegrating relationship runs like an unraveling thread throughout the classically driven, 28-minute work performed en pointe.

Particularly striking moments saw Amanda Green, Sophia Lee and Alanna McAdie leaping diagonally into Alexander Gamayunov, Mino and Eric Nipp's arms. Quanz underscores this further by having the ensemble precariously tilt seven straight-backed wooden chairs backward, thus mirroring individual dancers' propulsive lifts and treacherous falls. The piece's emotional jugular comes during

the climactic pas de deux, in which Sundermeier reaches backward to caress Dobrowney's face, sitting as poker-straight as the wooden chair slats, as though yearning for human connection. Their fluid bodies entwine briefly until Dobrowney slowly erects a fortress of chairs around his partner, who is ultimately shut out by her entire, stony community. This pensive ballet is riddled with ambiguity — and regret — with Quanz wisely leaving it up to the viewers to draw their own conclusions.

Mino's *Kevät* (Finnish for "Spring") performed by Yayoi Ezawa, Sarah Davey, Chenxin Liu, Amar Dhaliwal, Luzemberg Santana and Thiago Dos Santos shows the growing skill of this emerging choreographer who also performed his prize-winning solo *Koji* during the company's June 2012 show. The abstract ballet choreographed to David Lang's percussive score showcases Mino's intricate movement vocabulary which ranges from complex, syncopated rhythmic combina-

tions to contrasting, suspended lyricism.

Quanz chose to end the programme with one of his most successful works to date: *Luminous*, commissioned by Hong Kong Ballet in 2010, that explores romantic relationships at different stages in life. Set to Canadian composer Marjan Mozetich's sweeping *Affairs of the Heart*, the piece begins with eight dancers dressed in Armit's gloriously iridescent body suits gently swaying back and forth drenched in Mravnik's hazy, moon-soaked lighting. This delicate image of teetering on the edge suggests the emotional vulnerability of lovers that recurs like a leitmotif throughout the work. Green's heart-stopping falls, caught only at the last split second by Dobrowney, become the physical embodiment of complete trust and surrender, in this mature work that capped the evening with refined, polished beauty.

Holly Harris

## Toronto

In late winter, the **National Ballet of Canada** became the first company other than its originator, Hamburg Ballet, to perform John Neumeier's *Nijinsky*, the American-born choreographer's attempt in two acts to depict the inner torment of a Russian dancer once hailed as the "God of Dance." First performed in 2000 by the company Neumeier has long headed to mark the 50th anniversary of Nijinsky's death, it's an ambitious if not unflawed work, yet compelling enough to generate a rapturous reception from the National Ballet's loyal Toronto audience and to illicit outstanding work from its large cast of featured characters.



Skylar Campbell and Sonia Rodriguez in National Ballet of Canada's *Nijinsky*  
Photo: Bruce Zinger





Although the dancing Nijinsky is portrayed within the ballet by a number of different dancers, the central character, the one whose unhinging we see, is naturally the most prominent role, and for principal dancer Guillaume Côté it was a chance to show a greater range of emotion than ordinarily comes his way. He relished the opportunity and even when Neumeier's choreography lapses distastefully into thrashing stereotypes of schizophrenia, Côté brought touching dignity and pathos to the role.

Neumeier cast only one other dancer in the title role, 21-year-old Californian corps member Skylar Campbell. Understandably, his interpretation tended more to childlike innocence and psychological confusion than downright psychosis. It was almost as if the world around him was mad and he its sane victim, which actually is not so far from the truth of Nijinsky. It was certainly an affecting portrayal.

Michael Crabb

## Chicago

A wicked tale never felt so good. One of the more compelling reasons to see *Othello*, which was remounted by the **Joffrey Ballet** this Spring at the Auditorium Theatre in Chicago, is its novelty.

Originally produced as a co-commissioned project between American Ballet Theatre and the San Francisco Ballet, *Othello* premiered for American Ballet Theatre in 1998 with original choreography by Lar Lubovitch and an original composition by Academy Award-winning composer Elliot Goldenthal.

By most measures, the choreography and the music work in near-perfect harmony: Goldenthal's composition is a bombastic blend of ominous twang and riotous revelry, akin to an action-packed movie score; Lubovitch's fusion of ballet and modern techniques is a cyclically proportioned, non-stop pace of long, flexed gestures and lucid limbs. Perpetual motion is a noticeable Lubovitch *modus operandi*. He relies on a free-flowing philosophy in open space. For the Joffrey ensemble, it must be liberating. Never was a corps of dancers moving so early and so often.

Lubovitch, known for his modern dance background, doesn't categorize *Othello* as a ballet. Instead, he labels it a "Dance in Three Acts," according to the subtitle. It's an appropriate labelling, if not for the choreography then for its provocative adaptation of an age-old

Neumeier, who also — polymath that he is — designed the sets, costumes and lighting, bookends his ballet with the same setting, the Suvretta House Hotel ballroom in St. Moritz, Switzerland, where in January 1919 the already institutionalized Nijinsky performed for invited guests a solo he called *Wedding with God*. It was his last public performance.

As represented by Neumeier, it's an unsettling solo that alternately recalls Nijinsky's legendary prowess as a classical dancer and the spare, almost minimalist angularity of the dancer's choreographic experiments with modernism.

At a crucial moment, Nijinsky, already hallucinating, thinks he sees in the audience his former Svengali-lover, the impresario Serge Diaghilev. This is enough to breach Nijinsky's psychic dam and unleash a surreal, kaleidoscopic stream-of-disturbed-consciousness in which famous roles and incidents in his short but celebrated career whirl and jostle about him.

Apart from the ever-brooding presence of Diaghilev, for whom one suspects Neumeier has little personal admiration, we meet all the key members of Nijinsky's family and, of course, Romola de Pulszky, the Hungarian woman who ambitiously insinuated herself into the dancer's life and, much to Diaghilev's annoyance, married him in 1913. As her reward, she had a wretched life with Nijinsky and has not always been portrayed

with as much sympathy as Neumeier clearly accords her.

Having set up the main players, if at times a tad confusingly for those inexperienced in the history of Nijinsky and the Ballets Russes, Neumeier ups the psychotic ante in his overwrought second act. It is an attempt to enter Nijinsky's demented mind, troubled as it was by the savagery of the First World War, referenced in the ballet by a male corps wearing army jackets over ersatz Calvin Klein pale blue undies. One of the soldiers is costumed as Petrouchka, one of Nijinsky's most famous roles. If you know Fokine's ballet, you get the implied message.

Neither in his choreography nor designs does Neumeier try to recreate the actual choreography, Fokine's nor Nijinsky's. They are evoked. Nor for the most part does his assembled score provide musical signposts to these roles. In the first act, most are danced to Rimsky-Korsakov's *Schéherazade*. The second act is dominated by Shostakovich's Symphony No 11. There's not a note of Stravinsky despite clear choreographic references to Nijinsky's controversial *Sacre du printemps*.

If nothing else, and it's much more, *Nijinsky* is quite a spectacle and a refreshing change from dramatic ballets' too common over-reliance on linear narrative. It also gives the dancers plenty to chew on.

Shakespearean classic. It's a collection of particular scenes, mainly the seedy ones. Rarely does the audience feel comfortable as the dance unfolds. There's precious time (if any) to prepare for the ensuing tragedy of the story. That's not necessarily a bad thing. As a result, the drama feels tangible and less like a whimsical foray into a star-crossed fantasy like in *A Midsummer Night's Dream* or even *Romeo & Juliet*.

Such a pervading, menacing feeling is a bold choice by Lubovitch. He immediately thrusts viewers into a world that embraces its dastardly themes of jealousy, deceit and betrayal. Even in the opening scene, at the wedding of Othello and Desdemona, the mood is decidedly anguished; it feels more like a funeral than a wedding.

The challenge for Lubovitch, perhaps, is how to portray these dark themes onstage without relying on a predictable formula. Instead of frivolous dalliances, *Othello* gets to the point: we're not waiting for adagios and indulgent solos. Here the choreography means to emphasize character and intuitive movement, as opposed to rigid techniques and awe-inspiring tricks.

To that end, *Othello* is a refreshing change for a genre that typically relies on one-dimensional illusions and archaic pantomime. Lubovitch seems bent on proving those tactics wrong, or at the very least insufficient. This *Othello* is a modern dance with a modern approach. If that means less emphasis on the classicisms of ballet, then so be it.

The first act opens with Othello (an imposing Fabrice Calmels) on his knees taking part in pre-wedding ritual. The scene unfolds as the conniving Iago (Matthew Adamczyk) begins plotting his scheme of deceit. Standing an imposing six-foot-six, Calmels is built for the title role, but gives his character nice depth with a soft reluctance and ambiguity. His second act pas de deux with April Daly as a sensuous Desdemona is a devilish trance of tainted love and impending doom. The charged spirit of Aaron Rogers as Cassio shines throughout, skillful in his turns and leaps. The things that stand out for *Othello's* main characters are the eventual bent torsos and inverted legs. Turns are quicker, sometimes turned in. The base of technique is noticeably more grounded, organic and raw. One particular scene — a solo by Calmels — sees Othello fall into a crazed madness, his subsequent movement almost tribal in its ferocity.

Perhaps the most exciting aspect of Lubovitch's *Othello* is its historic legacy. Having been produced by three of the

Adhony Soares da Silva, 15, in a solo from *La Fille Mal Gardée*



Viingsay Valdes and Osiel Gouneou in Peter Quanz's *Double Bounce*



Giselle Bethea, 13, in a solo from *Esmeralda*

most prestigious dance companies in the United States, it has progressively proven its value as one of the original, major American story ballets over the last 30 years. The promise of *Othello* is not only what it offers now, but what it offers the future. Lubovitch took on a tremendous task and succeeded in no small way, to the benefit of companies like American Ballet Theatre, San Francisco Ballet, the Joffrey and their respective patrons.

After the May 5 performance, Joffrey effectively retired *Othello* from the company's active rep. Judging by the standing ovation at the conclusion of opening night, though, the question on most people's minds is not why now, it's what's next.

Matthew de la Pena

## New York

**T**he Youth America Grand Prix is not immune to zealotry. Yet the organizers have taken steps to maintain a sense of proportion. Past galas dedicated to great stars or teachers

have recognized the artistry that surpasses mere athleticism. At this year's gala, held at Lincoln Center for the Performing Arts on April 17, premieres helpfully shifted the focus from high-vaulting leaps to creativity, while short films preceding some numbers took us into rehearsal. Introducing the stars as ordinary people, behind-the-scenes views emphasized the artistic process rather than measuring the dancers' achievement.

Rampant fouettés still demanded to be counted, however. They even insinuated themselves absurdly into *Magalénha*, the samba that 14-year-old Maria Clara Coelho danced en pointe. As for the men, the new fashion in pirouette stunts seems to be drawing the foot into passé from a small attitude in front. Since the attitude loses definition as the foot approaches the knee, the move inevitably looks sloppy — even with the crisp execution of a virtuoso like 20-year-old Jorge Lopez Barani. The *Flames of Paris* duet paired his youthful brawn with Maria Kochetkova's delicacy.

This evening's most egregious lapse in taste, however, came not from the peanut gallery of contestants, but from



Thiago Bordin, Hélène Bouchet and Lloyd Riggins in Hamburg Ballet's production of John Neumeier's *Purgatorio*  
Photo: Holger Badekow



the revered Nina Ananiashvili, who, with an assist from Lil Buck, plucked and eviscerated *The Dying Swan*. Let's be clear about this. Lil Buck's folds, slithers and pivots on the side of his foot are fascinating and perfectly acceptable as a language for interpreting Saint-Saens. What is not acceptable is transforming Fokine's chagrined solo into a duet in which the ballerina wriggles her arms as vigorously as possible to compete with the boogaloo. In composing *The Dying Swan*, Fokine intended to replace such mindless showboating with poetry. The Swan must die alone.

An outstanding soloist, in fact, can take an elaborate tableau — the betrothal scene from *La Bayadère* for instance — and condense the drama into an eloquent backbend. Svetlana Lunkina, the Bolshoi Ballet's gift to Canada, proved the point dancing Nikiya's monologue. Gaunt and wearing a black veil that billowed behind her like a pursuing tragedy, Lunkina made her character's sufferings vivid. This artist has a remarkable capacity to focus her gaze, helping us to "see" what she sees, and at one point she risked a searching appeal to the audience. Picking up the basket of flowers, this grief-stricken Nikiya did not recover hope and innocence, but performed a ferocious victory dance.

Another gala highlight was Peter Quanz's polka-dotted *Double Bounce*, a duet receiving its local premiere. Match-

ing David Lang's playful score with insouciant stretches off-balance, the choreography makes a terrific showcase for two Cuban dancers whose technique gives them the freedom to horse around. Perky Viengsay Valdés, in a rubbery tutu, found her match in Osiel Gouneo, a dancer of impeccable clarity and fluid impulse.

Emery LeCrone's *Partita No. 2 in C Minor*, to Bach, boasted an intriguing composition. Not the usual piano ballet, it featured varied circlings and moments of tension as the man and woman pulled away from each other. Repeatedly, too, the man was called upon to catch the ballerina's weight. New York City Ballet stars Teresa Reichlen and Tyler Angle sparkled.

Kochetkova returned with fellow San Francisco Ballet dancer Lonnie Weeks in Wayne McGregor's *Borderlands Pas de Deux*, and they looked wonderfully fluid in this slouching, collapsing affair.

The youngest heroes of the evening, however, were those who showed exceptional ability in the classics. Tossing off six pirouettes, 15-year-old Adhony Soares da Silva remained poised on half-toe and ready to extend the phrase in a solo from *La Fille Mal Gardée*. Gisele Bethea, 13, stretched her lovely feet and moved with windswept freedom in a solo from *Esmeralda*.

Robert Johnson

## Hamburg

**Y**ou do not have to be dead to suffer the tortures of the damned. For the composer Gustav Mahler, the discovery of his wife Alma's adultery did the trick. It is this event John Neumeier has taken as the starting point for his ballet *Purgatorio* (2011), one of 16 Neumeier ballets the **Hamburg Ballet** is presenting this season celebrating John Neumeier's 40th anniversary as director of the company.

*Purgatorio* is not a biographical rendering, but is based on biographical facts. Alma had already composed a series of songs when she met Mahler. But when they married, he forbade her to pursue this occupation. In 1910, during a stay at a health resort, Alma met the architect Walter Gropius, with whom she entered a liaison. As Mahler learned about the affair, he had just begun his 10th symphony, which remains unfinished because he died the following year. To win her back, he for the first time since they married, started taking an interest in her work and helped her rework her songs to get them published. Neumeier has created a grand drama in which he draws a picture of a man and a woman interlocked in an excruciating love for each other, but at the same time intensely engaged in other worlds. Mahler is consumed by his creative work, Alma by her affair.

Neumeier has divided the ballet into

two parts. The first is to Alma's music with texts by various poets sung live on-stage by Charlotte Margiono. According to Neumeier, it represents Alma's point of view and shows us the woman she was through her music and the woman she has become.

We meet Alma (Hélène Bouchet) as a subordinate wife and elated lover. With Mahler (Lloyd Riggins), her movements are subdued. She follows him, but he — reading his music — is oblivious of her. To get his attention, she pulls at him and they engage in a tug and pull, dance some steps, then link arms and stroll along with dignity. The phrase is often repeated between dancing where she longingly nestles up to him and adapts her movements to his.

With Gropius (Thiago Bordin), she becomes scintillating and joyful. Especially moving are two moments. A gentle touching of the arms turns into holding hands with intertwined fingers. A simple gesture expressing a world of love being affirmed in a lift where he moves her straight into the air and turns, making it look as if their bodies have become one.

Bouchet is wonderful; with Mahler, she's pliant and obedient, with Gropius, a slight turn of her torso and the folding of

her legs becomes a lascivious invitation. Bordin is the considerate lover with an impeccable technique. When he hangs in mid-air doing the perfect splits, it takes your breath away.

The second part, Mahler's point of view, is to his unfinished 10th symphony, revised for orchestra by Deryck Cooke in 1976. It follows the five movements of the music, of which the third Purgatorio has lent its name to the ballet. Throughout this part, Mahler agonizes in despair over Alma's infidelity while rambling between his creative world and the real one.

Four alter egos — perhaps representing his creativity — seemed in the first part to be an inseparable part of him. Now they have become a group, which he has to enter by force. A creator spiritus (Alexandre Riabko) accompanies him. He is perhaps the creator of a couple (Anna Laudere and Edvin Revazov), who dance in the adagio and scherzo using a classical vocabulary as if they were the perfect incarnation of Mahler's and Alma's relationship. This has changed. Now it is Mahler who is pursuing Alma.

At one point, he lifts her, but instead of yielding, she kicks her legs in order to get free. He meets Gropius, they shake hands and dance in a fierce combat.

Mahler even seeks consolation from his mother (Anna Polikarpova), an amazing dancer, who with the simple gesture of her arched instep expresses all her love for her son.

At the end, Mahler and Alma reconcile. With an enormous effort and a big gesture, he puts his arm around her shoulder. They walk as if miles apart, a look at each other brings them together. They embrace, sit down, he puts his head in her lap and she pats him on the head like a mother. Riggins was every bit a tormented man going through his personal purgatory. His transition from creative genius to cuckold was heart-rending.

*Purgatorio*, Neumeier's 14th ballet to music by Mahler, is drama at its best. In the sets, suggesting Mahler's period, and timeless costumes — these and the lighting are by Neumeier — the company presents this story of emotions with the utmost conviction and great technical prowess. During his 40 years as director in Hamburg, Neumeier has not only created many unforgettable ballets, but he has also nurtured a wonderful company. He deserves all the accolades this season has brought him.

Jeannette Andersen

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# Notebook

by Michael Crabb

Two years ago, in a smart-alec sort of way and in the wake of Darren Aronofsky's execrable movie hit *Black Swan*, I wrote a column suggesting that if that eminent director were considering a sequel, he could do no better than focus his attention on the scandal-ridden Bolshoi Ballet. Not long before a senior member of the artistic management had resigned in disgrace after the circulation of sexually explicit photographs of an unsavoury and compromising nature, I went on to suggest a possible scenario that involved a plot to assassinate the Russian president while he was attending a Bolshoi performance. Sadly, according to my farcical construction, it was the prima ballerina who ended up in a body bag.

My heart sank in recollection of that glib suggestion as news broke of the shameful mid-February acid-in-the-face attack on the Bolshoi's current artistic director, Sergei Filin. When it comes to the Bolshoi, one should not jest.

Even now, despite accusations and arrests, the truth behind the event is not entirely clear and, being Russia, probably never will be — as anyone who has read David Remnick's fine column on the subject in the March 18 edition of the *New Yorker* might conclude.

And, of course, although it pales in comparison, Canada was understandably fascinated by the earlier but apparently

unconnected news that Bolshoi star Svetlana Lunkina, in fear of her safety, had fled Moscow for the law-abiding security of semi-rural Kleinburg, Ontario, outside Toronto.

That story, which quickly sank from the headlines once the Filin incident occurred, was in its own way equally clouded by speculation and intrigue. It turns out Lunkina did not exactly flee because of the business complications affecting her embattled husband. She already had permanent residence status in Canada so was hardly seeking asylum. Even so, she decided a backwater was preferable to a ballet hot spot, and it certainly underlines the fact that the Bolshoi Ballet is an uncomfortable place to be right now. Whether this is just an extreme expression of what it has always been, nobody knows for sure. All we do know is that they do things differently in Russia where love of ballet, personal rivalries, political ambitions and big money mix in explosively volatile and disagreeable ways.

Something else I also recall about that 2011 column is that Maureen Riches, this magazine's long-serving and soon-to-step down editor, sent me an email message saying she'd had a jolly good laugh over it and welcomed an injection of humour into a magazine that most of the time and quite properly regards ballet as beyond the reach of satire. I

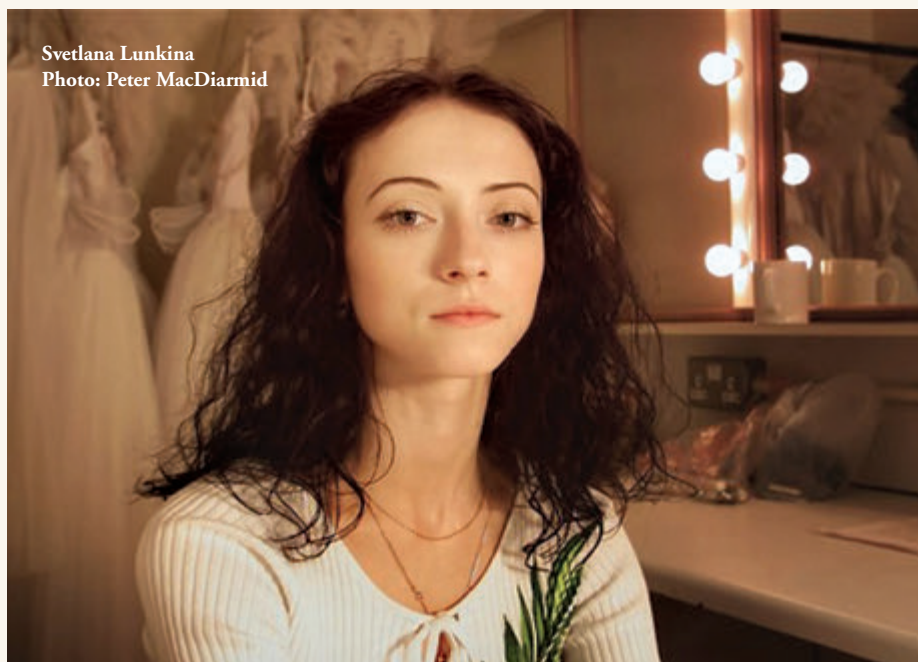
could have responded that ballet hardly needs satirizing when so often it makes a mockery of itself, but I refrained.

My point in mentioning this is not to make Maureen complicit in my ill-judged commentary on Bolshoi scandals, but to highlight the fact that among all the editors around the world for whom I've written over the past 40 years, she was the one most likely to take the trouble to say if she liked what you'd done. I recall another time, although not the story itself, that Maureen told me had touched her so deeply it brought tears to her eyes. Writers can go a lifetime without hearing something like that.

Maureen has been the most encouraging, I might well say indulgent of editors. Even as I write, I am woefully derelict in meeting a deadline that is certainly two weeks past. Threatening emails? No. Screaming voicemails? No. Just a polite reminder that Maureen is patiently awaiting the overdue copy that her most procrastinating of contributors is still, as usual and to no avail, angsting over obsessively.

Unless one has worked for Maureen during the past 28 years, it's hard to gain a sense of the extraordinary contribution she has made to the survival of this magazine in a challenging and perilous marketplace. Having myself edited a magazine, for a much shorter duration and in a considerably less trying era, I have some understanding of what it involves. But I was fortunate. All I had to do was plan editorial content, commission it and, with excellent assistance, render it suitable for publication. All the tedious stuff was someone else's business. Not so with Maureen. She's had help, of course, but basically she's borne the lion's share.

But why do it? At least for as long as Maureen has. I can tell you it's not the money because this magazine survives on a shoestring. The answer is simple. Maureen is at heart a huge enthusiast. She loves dance and relishes the opportunity to serve it according to her skills and capacity. And, although she's as much a flag-waver for Canadian achievement as any other immigrant Canadian — and there are no greater patriots than immigrants — English-born Maureen has steadfastly held to the principle that the *Vandance Magazine* she nursed into adulthood as *Dance International* should discuss Canadian dance in a global context. And she's made sterling efforts against strong headwinds to make sure the magazine reaches an international audience. Congratulations Maureen on a job well done, modestly and with none of the fanfare it so greatly merits. ▼



Svetlana Lunkina  
Photo: Peter MacDiarmid



Emilie Cozette in Paris Opéra Ballet's *Suite en blanc*  
Photo: © Sébastien Mathé



# Editorial

As you know, from reading Michael's Notebook, after 28 years of editing *Dance International*, I am stepping down as Managing Editor with this issue. It has been a wonderful journey and I do not doubt for a minute that I will miss the magazine a great deal.

In 1982, when the then editor left the magazine on his desk, half done, and disappeared, three of us, Margaret Fleming, Muriel Schubert and I, took on the onerous task of trying to keep the magazine going and in 1985, through attrition, I assumed full editorial responsibilities. From these very small beginnings that began with a black-and-white, 32-page magazine then called *Vandance*, eventually it became the 64-page, coloured, *Dance International* that you see and read today.

I would like to thank all the many writers we have published, read and enjoyed over these 28 years; you are the reason that each issue we print is a joyful celebration of dance throughout the world. Many writers have become good friends and I will mention just a few here: Kathrine Sorely Walker, a celebrated writer, wrote her first Letter from London in 1987 (now Letter from Britain) and is the only one to send in her copy on time every time; Max Wyman, who wrote the Notebook page for years and was a great source of "dance" information; Michael Crabb, who followed Max and still does Notebook, plus articles for almost every issue, and is someone I can e-mail and call about any problems I might have; Allan Ulrich, from San Francisco, who I first met in Copenhagen in 1992, at the second Bournonville Festival, and who has sent us reports from his city ever since; Robert Greskovic, the New York correspondent, who has written a lively, engaging piece in every issue since he took over from the late Anita Finkel in 1997; Gary Smith, from Hamilton, who writes charming pieces and outstanding reviews from the Stuttgart Ballet; Silvia Poletti, from Italy, who writes with such intelligence and fervour; and François Fargue, from Paris, whose pieces can make me laugh out loud. I am indebted to you all.

A very special thank you to Brenda Finamore, my longtime art director of 20 years. You have prepared so many front covers — three per issue is not unheard of — re-done, several times, layouts until they are "just right" without a grumble, and you always welcomed me into your home office for the five days it took, every three months, to get *Dance International* prepared. You made the magazine what it was and is, with a beautiful layout. Each time it became a magazine you wanted to keep not throw away after reading. Thank you to my two copy editors, Margaret Jetelina, who has been with *DI* for 12 years. She proofread and fact checked every issue — even with her third child on the way she managed to complete the Winter 2012 issue before going into labour three days later. I call that dedication! And Gabriele Walkow, a relatively new copy editor for four years who worked for me as my assistant editor for two years until she moved to Florida, still doing the proofing and also taking on the social media and the web page for *Dance International*, with boundless energy and enthusiasm. You have all made putting each issue together, from layout to the finished product, seamless.

And, finally, thank you to the Vancouver Ballet Society, Canada Council for the Arts and the B.C. Arts Council, for your valuable support and encouragement.

"Begin at the beginning," the King said, very gravely, "and go on till you come to the end: then stop."  
Lewis Carroll, *Alice in Wonderland*

Maureen Riches





Principal dancers Greta Hodgkinson and Aleksandar Antonijevic: Photography courtesy of Sian Richards

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