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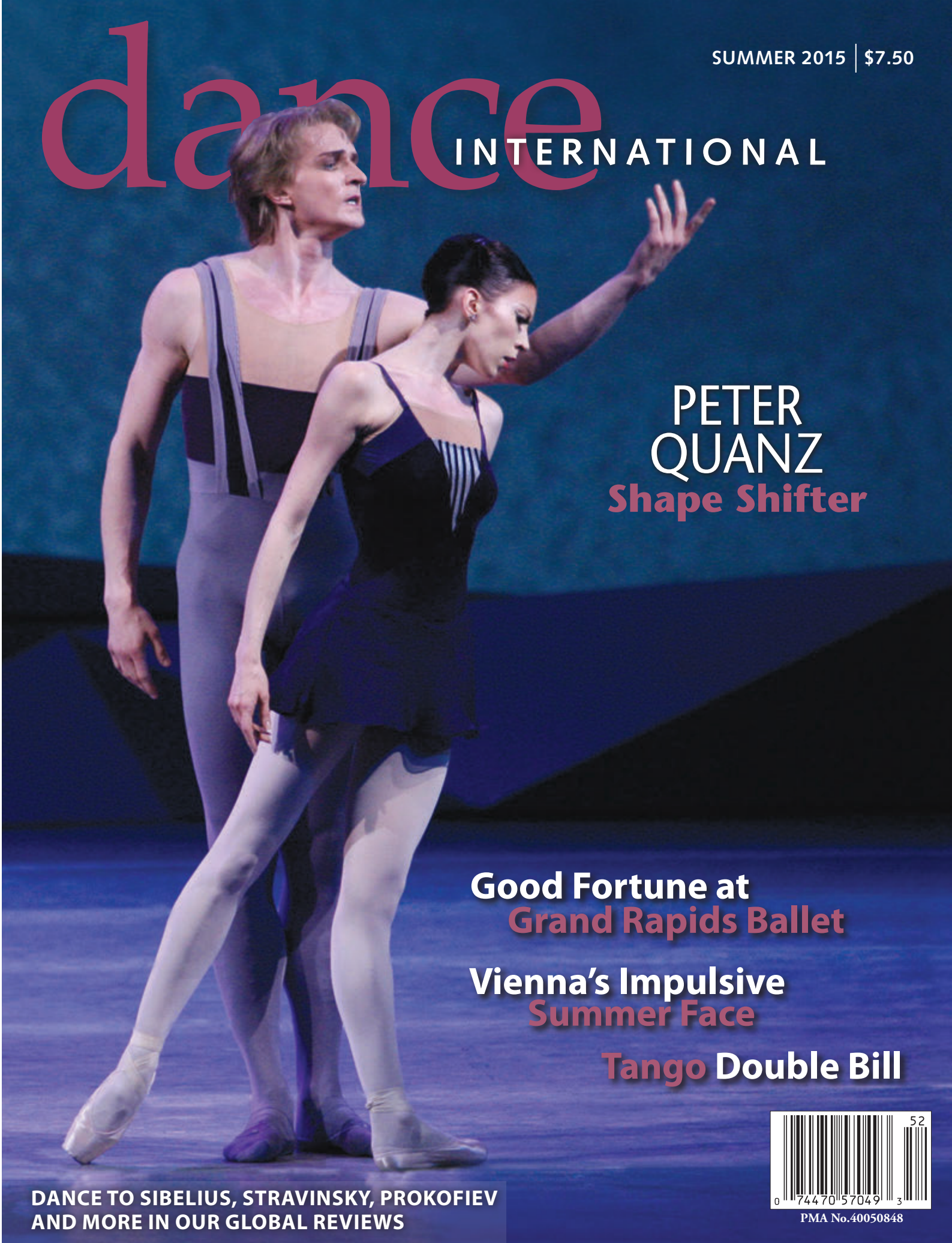

PETER QUANZ
Shape Shifter

Good Fortune at Grand Rapids Ballet

Vienna's Impulsive Summer Face

Tango Double Bill

DANCE TO SIBELIUS, STRAVINSKY, PROKOFIEV AND MORE IN OUR GLOBAL REVIEWS

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I love watching dancers work in the studio during class or in rehearsals. Chatting with artists, whether in a formal interview or over coffee, is another great pleasure. For those of you who also like going behind the scenes, I thought I'd share a little background about *Dance International*.

We're published out of Vancouver, British Columbia, situated on the southwestern coast of Canada, next to the Pacific Ocean, an isolated position but with a lovely and mild, though often rainy, climate. Our publisher, the Vancouver Ballet Society, was founded in 1946 to support local dance. In 1977, their newsletter became a more formal publication called *Vandance*, which has grown into the glossy, globally relevant *Dance International* magazine.

The Society is a not-for-profit organization: we're all in this because we love dance, and we love reading about dance. **We believe dance needs a place to live after and beyond the stage, and that smart, honest and passionate discussion is crucial to a healthy arts ecology.** I've come to think of us as a boutique magazine: small, special, uniquely styled for the discerning reader. Only we aren't priced the way most boutique items are: we want to be affordable for everyone.

As we produce each issue, we tirelessly scheme, worry, brainstorm and celebrate. It's never easy, which is why we've published our first Donor Ad on page 30, to encourage your support in this marathon endeavour. Beyond the struggle to pay printing and mailing bills, we'd like to build our presence through increased marketing and offer a more equitable fee structure to our contributors.

After all, writers — and their dedication, talent and expertise — are the backbone of *Dance International*. In the pages that follow, enjoy the journey in dance that each one has crafted for you in their features, reports and reviews.

Kaija

Kaija Pepper
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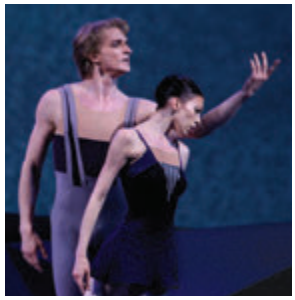
Viktoria Tereshkina and Ilya Kuznetsov of the Mariinsky Ballet in Peter Quanz's *Aria Suspended*
Photo: Natasha Razina



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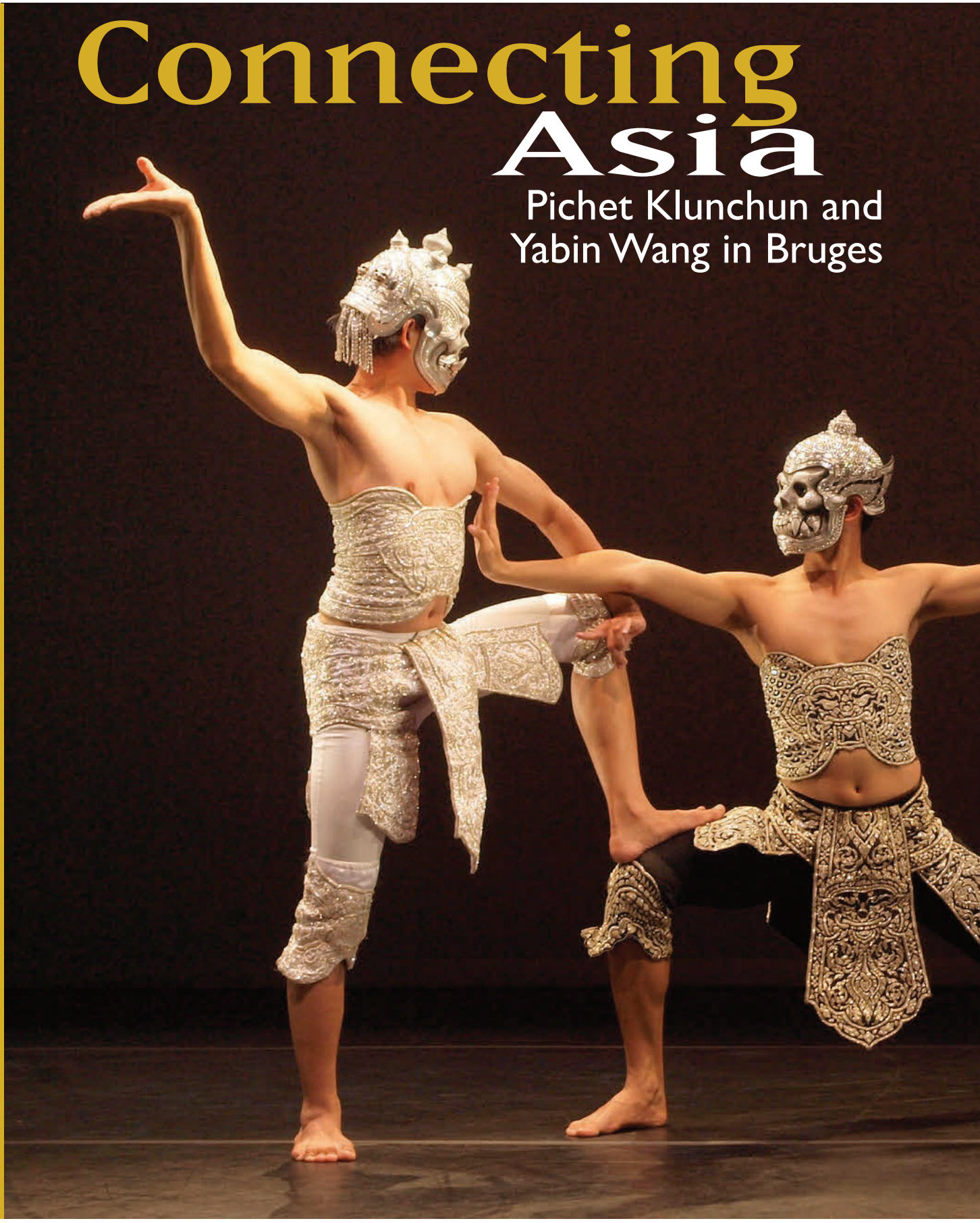
Connecting Asia

Pichet Klunchun and Yabin Wang in Bruges



When Samme Raeymaekers, artistic co-ordinator of Belgium's December Dance festival, was trawling international events in search of inspiration several years back, he noticed an interesting development taking place across the countries of Southeast Asia. He calls it a "push to the future," a growing awareness among young dance artists that if they wish to retain their own cultural identities, it is not to their advantage to merely imitate Western contemporary work, so readily available on YouTube; they have to look to their roots for inspiration.

by Judith Galebrown

Noppadon Bundit, Porramet Maneerat, Jirayus Puatput and Padung Jumpan in Pichet Klunchun's *Black and White*
Photo: Weerana Talodsuk

Left: Yabin Wang in Sidi Larbi Cherkaoui's 生长*Genesis*
Photo: Zhang Yi

Below: Sidi Larbi Cherkaoui's 生长*Genesis*

Connecting Asia became the theme for 2014's December Dance in the tiny city of Bruges, nicknamed Venice of the North. Juxtaposed between the tempting chocolatiers and elegant boutiques are a variety of theatres, whose programming during the run up to last Christmas featured thought-provoking contemporary dance from Asia.

Two companies spearheading the festival are strong examples of the drive to break loose from conventional barriers while still respecting the past. Thailand's Pichet Klunchun, known for his lauded collaboration with iconoclast dancemaker Jérôme Bel, formed his own company in the 1990s in order to develop, modernize and thus enrich the art of khon, the ancient Thai masked dance. The Pichet Klunchun Dance Company is known throughout Asia for innovative creations; *Black and White*, which was presented at the festival, is among its best-known works.

Yabin Wang, a dance superstar in her native China, is famous for her breathtaking work as the dance double for Zhang Ziyi in Zhang Yimou's 2004 film *House of Flying Daggers*. She commissioned acclaimed Belgian choreographer Sidi Larbi Cherkaoui (recently announced as the new artistic director of Royal Ballet Flanders) to create a piece that became the poetic 生长*Genesis*, an arresting East meets West production.

Over the course of the festival, I met up with Klunchun and Wang, and also had a short telephone chat with Cherkaoui.

Pichet Klunchun was easy to pick out among the dancers clad in sweats who strolled into the *Black and White* rehearsal in the Magdalena Theatre prior to their opening show. A few minutes late for our meeting (having mistaken the venue), Klunchun's ascetic, rather severe features softened when I exclaimed at the beauty of the intricate silver mask he was carrying. "We make them ourselves, our costumes as well," he told me. "They're all modern versions of the ritual khon dress."

As he talks, his enthusiasm for this ancient art is palpable. But it is an uphill struggle; the Thai people view the monarchy as god-like, and, in their rulers' eyes, any court rituals — such as khon — are sacrosanct, even though they have, perversely, allowed the dance to become a glossy tourist attraction. Klunchun is isolated from the Thai khon community who, he says, regard him as a "black swan" (read "black sheep"). Nevertheless, he ambitiously declares: "In the future, first we need to build our own theatre in Bangkok and, later, our own school!"

Klunchun started dancing at 16, when he began training with khon master Chaiyot Khummanee. His first forays into contemporary dance were taken when he was awarded a six-month scholarship to study in New York in 2002. He is often compared to Britain's Akram Khan — late starters both, the men's roots lie in traditional Eastern dance, which they have modernized. Klunchun professed his admiration for Khan and the new generation of Western choreographers. "I would carry their baggage or clean the stage just to work and learn from them!" he exclaims, refreshingly modest. But Klunchun is no pushover; answering my question about his collaboration with Bel, he says with a disarming smile, "We shared a space [as equals] and had the same views on art, culture, etc. With one difference though — in the West, you're allowed to die onstage; in our theatre, that's taboo!"

From the beginning, Khummanee imbued him with an inclusive, broad-minded approach to art. Klunchun's studies in the West opened his eyes to modern dance, and also served to clarify his own ideas. Martial arts, contemporary movement and khon technique, fused with Buddhist energy, form the building blocks of his own style. Most interesting was his take on contact improvisation, the inspiration for which he found in the old *Ramayana* Indian murals; watching *Black and White*, the contact influence was clear when he used the dancers, clad in flesh-coloured briefs, to form sculptural, constantly changing groups.

In *Black and White*, against a huge projection of a *Ramayana* battle scene and to the intermittent plucking of a sitar, we are introduced to the priest and the prince, the monkey and the demon. Their silver and black costumes and masks are pared-down versions of the traditional, and reveal the taut muscular bodies of the dancers. There are echoes of the painting in the movement: deep lunges and high leg lifts, flexed ankles and wonderfully supple hands. As the priest, the prince and the demon face each other off and the monkey figure cavorts between them, two new figures appear: a goddess clad in a shimmering white sheath-like dress and a dark warrior. The two prowl the stage. He moves menacingly, his eyes fixed on her, his feet beating the floor angrily. Her steps are serene and slow, her arms and hands — the fingers ending in long glinting nails — furl and unfurl around her as she walks.

Black and White is a portrayal of the conflicting forces present in modern-day Thailand, which in Klunchun's opinion is 40 years in retrograde since the recent political coup. It also represents the artist's, and ultimately Thai society's, search for a state of balance.

Martial arts, contemporary movement and khon technique, fused with Buddhist energy, form the building blocks of [Klunchun's] style.

Yabin Wang met me backstage at the Concertgebouw Theatre after the performance of 生长*Genesis*. Calm and poised, and showing no sign of fatigue, she recounted her initial meeting with Sidi Larbi Cherkaoui. They met at her invitation several years ago, in Tokyo; the rapport was instant. The pair share much in common; both are hyper-flexible movers, charismatic onstage and children of the media. Cherkaoui's initiation to dance came when he took part in TV and variety shows with a hip-hop group, while Wang enjoys enormous popularity at home as the leading actress in a TV soap. "I had been fascinated for a long time by [Cherkaoui's] subtle, poetic choreography," Wang says, "searching for everything I could find on YouTube. It was so different from anything I had known."

Wang started dancing early at Beijing Dance Academy, where she studied classical Chinese dance, classical ballet and contemporary movement. Wang's experience in the West broadened her outlook, influencing the development of her own style. Together with her husband Li Hong, she set up a dance company in Beijing, the Yabin Studio, which leads modern dance in China and commissions work from international and national artists, some of which is presented in the company's annual production, Yabin and Her Friends.

生长*Genesis*, whose theme is the creation of humankind, featured three Yabin Studio company dancers, plus Wang herself, as well as three dancers from Cherkaoui's Eastman company. Cherkaoui's choreography was so fluid and instinctive, says Wang, that it didn't take long for her and her dancers to absorb his style.

In 生长*Genesis*, there is a buildup of sculptural tableaux vivants, many influenced by the anatomical paintings of German Renaissance painter Albrecht Dürer. A body on a dissecting table is manipulated like a puppet; later, all seven dancers close in to form a living tree, hands fanning out in intricate formations. In the closing scenes, a live reading of the gospel of Genesis is a background to the tempting of Adam by Eve (the latter a dancer in a soft dress and with flowing hair), with Wang as the sinuous Serpent, her sleeves elongated and menacing. And so the seeds of anger and conflict are sown in a dance into which all are drawn, arms striking out at the air around them and at each other.

A feature of the choreography is the inventive hand design, always a defining element in Cherkaoui's work. Wang proudly points out that the tableau featuring the dancers' hands weaving the design of a tree originated from an idea of hers.

Later, when I spoke with Cherkaoui, he praised Wang's "long and eloquent limbs." As well, he said, "She's not afraid to take risks, and I admire her sense of humour and ability to problem-solve when things go wrong."

The third festival headliner was Japan's well-travelled butoh company, Sankai Juku, formed in 1978 and still led by veteran founder Ushio Amagatsu. Amagatsu's monumental *Umusuna: Memories before History* (2012) is a bold attempt to visualize the creation of the earth and the development of our species.

Also on offer were solo performances from two young South Koreans, Kim Jae duk and Kim Bo ra. Jae duk is certainly one to watch for — his *Sinawi* was an unconventional, highly musical update of a traditional ceremonial song. The Taiwanese U-Theater combined contemporary dance, percussion and martial arts for their futuristic *Beyond Time*, while Belgian/German choreographer Arco Renz collaborated with dancers from the Vietnam National Opera Ballet to explore the complexities of a modern communist society. Altogether, it was an illuminating journey, a dance festival that focused on unconventional approaches to tradition. ▼

Pichet Klunchun in rehearsal
Photo: Nattapol Meechart

THE ROAD TO

PETER QUANZ AT HOME AND ABROAD

Vanessa Lawson in *VLNCello*
Photo: Bruce Monk

Background: Sophia Lee and Johanna Riley in *Pomme*
Photo: Vince Pahkala

Yosuke Mino and Sophia Lee in *Double Bounce*
Photo: Vince Pahkala

Q DANCE

Q Dance made its debut at the Guggenheim Museum in New York in 2009, four months before it was actually founded in the mid-size prairie city of Winnipeg, Manitoba. Artistic director-to-be Peter Quanz was premiering his contemporary ballet, *In Tandem,* as part of a double bill shared with New York modern dance choreographer Larry Keigwin. Both works were set to *Double Sextet* by American minimalist composer Steve Reich, who was in attendance. In his review, the *New York Times*' Alastair Macaulay praised the "sophisticated use" Quanz made of ballet vocabulary, and his attention to "the music's detail as well as its layered complexity."

Chenxin Liu and Elizabeth Lamont in *Quantz by Quanz*
Photo: Vince Pahkala

BY KAIJA PEPPER

American Ballet Theatre in *Kaleidoscope*
Photo: Marty Sohl

The review is illustrated with four of the six Royal Winnipeg Ballet dancers who performed *In Tandem*. Most of the cast knew Quanz from their RWB school days, when they were students together. They did the Guggenheim commission as a bit of a favour, and for the chance to perform in New York; the $10,000 budget was allocated for travel expenses and costumes — Anne Armit's striking geometric patterned leotards — with nothing left over for salaries.

Armit was then director of wardrobe at the Royal Winnipeg Ballet, whose artistic director, André Lewis, was also on board for the project. Lewis generously facilitated the dancers' involvement in rehearsals at the company's studios when they weren't busy working with Jorden Morris on what became the blockbuster ballet *Moulin Rouge*. When it was time to head out to New York, Morris helpfully agreed to the dancers' weeklong absence.

The process of creating *In Tandem* with the Winnipeg dancers went so well that Quanz wanted to repeat it. "I'd been running around all over the place making work for different companies where I didn't know the dancers beforehand," Quanz says. "I realized that in Winnipeg, with my own company, I could have one project a year that would be like an anchor."

The Royal Winnipeg Ballet's support has been critical to Q Dance's development. In 2013, when Q Dance was included as part of their season for the first time, Quanz had the assistance of the established company's marketing professionals, contributing to the success of a sold-out four-night run at the intimate Gas Station Arts Centre. He also enjoys access to studio space in their spacious downtown home.

"Each company has its own culture," Quanz says about the relationship between the two groups. "It's not just getting one person on board, you have to convince everybody there's a reason why it's good to do the extra work. It takes a lot of discussion."

Q Dance founding member Vanessa Lawson, a former principal dancer with the Royal Winnipeg Ballet, is now a ballet master with both companies. RWB first soloist Yosuke Mino, another founding member, continues to dance for both. "Peter was my classmate at the RWB School," Mino recalls. "We'd learn steps on a Monday and be expected to memorize them for the rest of the week. None of us really did except Peter, so we'd always put him in the front. He's got a brain!" Mino teases.

Quanz grew up in the small Ontario town of Baden, where he was raised as a Mennonite. He knew from the age of nine he wanted to be a choreographer, after his parents took him and his sister to see Brian Macdonald's production of *Guys and Dolls* in Stratford, Ontario. "It was the way he did the set changes," Quanz recalls. "The actors and dancers were choreographed in how they carried them off. A scene would kind of ebb away and another one replaced it; it was all beautifully interwoven." When he told his grade four teacher about the

Bulat Radniev of Buryatian National Ballet rehearsing *Dzambuling*
Photo: Natasha Ulanova

"There are three great artists I really look up to: Picasso, Stravinsky, Balanchine. All these artists had a dialogue with the past while making something in the present."

show, she asked if he wanted to be up onstage. "I said, 'No, I have ideas and I want to tell the dancers what to do.' She said, 'OK, it sounds like you're a choreographer and should go to ballet school.'" He did, to the Academy of Dance in nearby Waterloo, Ontario, where he was taught by Carolyn Zettel-Augustyn.

His choreographic drive was strong early on, and while still in high school, the University of Waterloo allowed him to choreograph alongside students in its now defunct dance program. When he met Macdonald at the Banff Centre's summer dance intensive, he received more creative opportunities.

Quanz left home at 17 to study at the RWB School, making several pieces for its Young Choreographers' Evening. He also worked privately with Arnold Spohr, who had long retired as the company's artistic director but was still a keen talent-spotter. Spohr, who died in 2010, had presented works by several men — Macdonald, Norbert Vesak, John Neumeier and Oscar Araiz — early in their careers; Quanz was his last discovery. "Mr. Spohr gave me grueling four-hour-long classes where he would teach me how to coach, how to break things down," says Quanz.

After graduating in 1999, he danced briefly with Dutch National Ballet and Stuttgart Ballet, but visiting leading European choreographic centres and companies as an observer proved more compelling. He travelled by hiding in the bathroom on trains, he ate cheap soup in company canteens and he snuck in the back door of opera houses in order to see performances. "I needed an education," Quanz says. "I needed to see what people were doing."

He also needed to make work, which he did at Stuttgart Ballet through the Noverre-Society's Young Choreographers' evening, and, in 2002, at the New York Choreographic Institute. *Allegro con Moderato*, for the latter, led to John Meehan's invitation to make a piece for American Ballet Theatre Studio Company.

SpringScape was created for 12 young Studio Company dancers during a residency at the luxurious White Oak Plantation in Florida. After-hour activities included horseback riding, archery and bowling. Quanz, who has a wry sense of humour, wrote about finding inspiration while bowling, posted at ballet.co.uk: "One of the girls always did a funny little jump before releasing the ball, while I moved into arabesque on plié to gently let go. I combined both techniques to create one of the steps in my ballet, which appears in the First and Third Movements."

American Ballet Theatre's Kevin McKenzie saw *SpringScape* and asked Quanz to create a piece, resulting in *Kaleidoscope*, to Saint-Saëns. After attending the 2005 premiere at New York's City Center, Tobi Tobias wrote about it for *Bloomberg News* (republished in her blog *Seeing Things*), calling *Kaleidoscope* "an astonishingly confident and inventive neoclassical work by a little-known choreographer, 26-year-old Canadian Peter Quanz."

Other major works that year included *Quantz by Quanz*, a neoclassical ballet for 14 dancers to a classical concerto for flute by Johan Joachim Quantz, created for the Banff Centre's Clifford E. Lee Choreographic Award commission, and *Charlies Kreuzfahrt* (*Charlie's Cruise*) for Germany's Chemnitz Ballet. Chemnitz snapped him up after Quanz sent videotapes of his work all over Europe. *Charlies Kreuzfahrt*, his first full-length narrative ballet, was set to Cole Porter, and placed its title character, Charlie Chaplin, aboard a luxury yacht.

And so Quanz's career has gone, one thing leading to another, in what has quickly become an impressive big-company résumé. In 2007, he was the first Canadian choreographer to create a work for Russia's Mariinsky Ballet, *Aria Suspended*, set to Stravinsky's *Symphony in C*. In 2008, he premiered *Jupiter Symphony* with Pennsylvania Ballet; in 2009, the year of *In Tandem*, Quanz's *In Colour* premiered at the National Ballet of Canada. There were two major commissions in 2010: *Le Papillon*, about Romantic ballerina Marie Taglioni and her pupil Emma Livry, for the National Ballet of Cuba; and *Luminous*, to music by Marjan Mozetich, for Hong Kong Ballet. Also that year, his first work for the newly established Q Dance: *Double Bounce*, a playful, contemporary duet set to David Lang.

Quanz headed to Siberia the following year, where he made *Souvenir de Bach* and *Dzambuling* for Buryatian National Ballet. He also premiered the full-length narrative *Rodin/Claudel* for Les Grands Ballets Canadiens de Montréal. Quanz's achievement in evoking sculptures by both the great Auguste Rodin and the great, though less known, Camille Claudel, was a highlight of the choreography.

"As a guest choreographer," Quanz says about his travels, "you have to navigate the many needs of the institution while still exposing your own self." There have, of course, been some instances where the challenges were onerous, where Quanz felt like a mere replaceable part. "Dance is a messy business," he says. "Many people are involved, aesthetics collide, individuals confront Goliaths of institutions." He admits, too, there have been times when prestige competed with artistic priorities.

Though Q Dance now takes up much of his creative energy, he has projects in process with Montréal Danse and China's Wuxi Song and Dance Theatre. "They all tumble!" he says of the latter, anticipating getting to know the company of forty dancers. These global assignments are necessary for financial survival, but also, says Quanz, "I get incredible cultural immersions. I get to learn how other people do things, I get to work with fabulous dancers, to meet other choreographers."

He's interested in cultural history, too. "There are three great artists I really look up to: Picasso, Stravinsky, Balanchine. All these artists had a dialogue with the past while making something in the present. That's what I want to do."

Quanz praises Balanchine's range: "Balanchine made *Theme and Variations*, a classical ballet with Tchaikovsky music, which premiered a year after *Four Temperaments*, a black-and-white ballet to a commissioned score, the most modern possible, by Hindemith. Then there's *Slaughter on Tenth Avenue* [to music by Richard Rodgers, and originally part of a musical, *On Your Toes*]."

Today, at 35 years old, Quanz continues to hone and define his own aesthetic territory. That includes narrative ballets like *Charlies Kreuzfahrt*, *Le Papillon*, *Rodin/Claudel* and the period whodunit spoof, *Murder Afoot,* for Q Dance's 2013 home season, which is filled with iconic ballet references. But even his more abstract works have a hint of story. "Rather than just movement for the sake of movement, Peter is really interested in exploring emotions, which adds depth," André Lewis says. "In *Luminous*, for instance, which is plotless, there are connections between people, as well as between movements, and all those connections mean the difference between something having real quality and being just average."

Christine Winkler in *La Route des Rencontres,* Stuttgart Ballet Noverre-Society's Young Choreographers 2001
Photo: Courtesy of Peter Quanz

"In *Luminous*, for instance, which is plotless, there are connections between people, as well as between movements, and all those connections mean the difference between something having real quality and being just average."

– André Lewis

Luminous is one of three Quanz ballets Lewis has remounted on the Royal Winnipeg Ballet. In June, the RWB will present another Q Dance mixed bill, this time at the mid-size, 800-seat Manitoba Theatre Centre. For the evening, Quanz commissioned Gabrielle Lamb, the Savannah, Georgia-born recipient of the Banff Centre's 2014 Clifford E. Lee Choreographic Award. Lamb danced a principal role when Les Grands Ballets Canadiens remounted Quanz's *Kaleidoscope,* and, he explains, "We hit it off well. Now she's living in New York and doing a lot of choreography."

Quanz will remount his 2013 Q Dance work *Untitled*, which explores trust and betrayal in a close-knit community. It's inspired by a story he heard while working in Chemnitz about an artist whose wife, unknown to him, was a member of the Stasi, the East German secret police, and provided reports on his activities. The piece is called *Untitled* because, he explains, there is no word to describe such an act of betrayal.

Alert to his responsibilities as the artistic director of Q Dance to provide a range of ballets to the loyal audience he hopes to build over the long term, he plans on making another very contrasting piece for the bill. "For the new work," Quanz says thoughtfully, "I think I need to do something bright and fun." ▼

Amanda Green and Tristan Dobrowney in Royal Winnipeg Ballet's production of Peter Quanz's *Luminous*
Photo: Bruce Monk

Communicator, Chameleon

A Choreographic Statement

by Peter Quanz

In origami, a blank, uncreased paper, usually mathematically perfect, is systematically folded into another shape. These forms are sometimes representational, sometimes modular or abstract. The goal is clear: an empty canvas is manipulated into a predictable outcome. Precision, replication, a sense of space — these are the values.

As a child, I was fascinated with origami. After folding a complex pattern, I enjoyed unfolding my work to look again at the blank page. No longer uncreased, it betrayed the memory of my movements. A gifted origami artist can study those folds and understand how to use geometrical language to articulate new forms. While I never gained this level of skill, I developed a curiosity for investigating structure, for asking questions about process, and this informs much of how I make a dance.

With dance, I am able to fold space and time in new ways. Form is a preoccupation in all my work. I am also a communicator who wants to excite others with ideas and information. My work teases something from an existing body of knowledge — some of which is specific to each piece, some of which has been built up over a lifetime of dancing, choreographing and just living.

Often the exact point of a creation isn't clear when I begin. I don't set out with a preconceived message or meaning; the goal is not always evident. Content is in a constant process of emerging from the confines of structure. This discovery is what I love about dance; it is a messy art form by many collaborators who rely on the human body to try to say something relevant. At heart I feel I am merely a vessel to coax and curate movement.

I do not think in a linear manner. Instead, a polyphony of ideas jumble simultaneously. Similarly, I do not choreograph in a linear manner. My preparation includes journalling, listening to the music for the ballet, reading voraciously and examining images from current news, fashion and art that might unlock an entry point for rehearsal.

The blank page/stage signifies both the potential of a new adventure and the fear of making those first choices. Decisions made early in the process crease the empty space and provide information for the entire collaboration. Seemingly dead-end ideas might provoke an unusual discovery. Often, I build a phrase and variations that are reimagined when later combined with music. It's a negotiation between the physical demands and sonic shape that tests the dancers' movement texture. I'm curious about the repetition of movements in a variety of contexts, in the structural magnification of gesture.

Shape shifter. Chameleon. Shaman. These words represent something that can transform itself on the exterior while maintaining its core. I believe in being adaptable. My choreographic practice has been tempered by immersions into various cultures through commissioned projects from around the world, and each environment influences the dance. The infusion of another cultural perspective helps me clarify who I am in relation to my own background — a classical ballet-trained Canadian from a small-town Mennonite community.

What also fuels my work is exploring how dancers interact, and I free space for them to leave their individual footprints within my choreographic structure. A dancers' instincts and body of knowledge encourage the human qualities within a piece. Often my most carefully built, most complex movement material pales in relevance alongside the simple gesture of a dancer's hand on a shoulder or a cheek. Yet without the structure, there would be no setting or context for that gesture. It would not have aesthetic value or resonance on its own.

One of my favourite moments comes when, sitting in an empty theatre and looking at the blank stage, my mind races to imagine the potential it holds. A performance begins and the collision of decisions made, battles won or lost, roles crafted, all intersect with the unknown of live theatre. What yesterday was a surprising birth in the studio is merely fodder for yet another discovery tonight. ▼

Peter Quanz in rehearsal with Richmond Ballet, 2014
Photo: Sarah Ferguson


IT'S AMAZING WHAT GOES INTO
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NEW YORK
AMANDA GREEN Principal Dancer at the Royal Winnipeg Ballet as Juliet in *Romeo & Juliet*.
Amanda has been wearing *Gaynor Minden* pointe shoes since 2006.
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Good Fortune
at Grand Rapids Ballet

by Steve Sucato

Patricia Barker at the reins

A lot has changed for Patricia Barker since she burst onto the world stage, starring as Clara in the 1986 *Nutcracker: The Motion Picture*. One of the United States' most popular and gifted ballerinas, Barker enjoyed a celebrated career as a principal dancer with Seattle's Pacific Northwest Ballet and as a guest dancer globally, became a spokesmodel and designer for dancewear manufacturer Bloch, and had her own dancewear company BKWear. Nowadays, the 52-year-old Richland, Washington, native has exchanged her trademark long blond hair and pointe shoes for a pixie cut and penny loafers as artistic director of Grand Rapids Ballet, Michigan's only professional ballet company.

Barker took over the reins in 2010 from Gordon Peirce Schmidt. She inherited 16 dancers and a remodelled Meijer-Royce Center for Dance that houses the company and school studios, administrative offices and a theatre. She also inherited a company in debt with virtually no existing repertory apart from a 30-year-old *Nutcracker*, after Schmidt took with him his 50-plus ballets created for the group.

Since then, Barker has built a growing repertory of ballet and modern dance classics, including works by Petipa, Balanchine, Limón, Taylor and Tharp, along with new contemporary ballets by some of today's brightest choreographers, such as Annabelle Lopez Ochoa, Brian Enos and Olivier Wevers. "A lot of things interest me," says Barker on her philosophy of choosing repertory. She takes her cue from Balanchine, who, she says, had the freedom to create ballets and refine them on his own terms.

Part of her philosophy involves exposing Grand Rapids audiences to classic versions of full-length story ballets such as *Sleeping Beauty* and *Swan Lake*, and also to take those classics and make contemporary versions Barker believes can be more approachable to audiences and easier to tour.

So far the company has done that with contemporary versions of *Swan Lake* and *Romeo and Juliet* by Mario Radacovsky, artistic director of Ballet of the National Theatre Brno, and with Wevers' 2014 *A Midsummer Night's Dream*. That formula has helped the 43-year-old company regularly sell out home performances, increase funding (including a $2.5 million capital campaign and a $1 million estate endowment gift) and hire more dancers. It has also helped usher them onto the United States' national dance stage.

Nicolas Schultz and Laura McQueen Schultz in Mario Radacovsky's *Black Swan White Swan*
Photo: Chris Clark

Left: Grand Rapids Ballet in Olivier Wever's A *Midsummer Night's Dream*
Photo: John Clay

Right: Patricia Barker in studio with Grand Rapids Ballet dancers
Photo: Michael Auer

Barker feels the fuller a dancer's life experiences are outside the studio, the more they have to draw on as artists. She encourages them to go to museums, see other performances and have hobbies, friends and passions outside dance.

Perhaps the biggest boost to their stature and the most challenging project Barker has taken on as a first-time artistic director was mounting a new million-dollar *Nutcracker*, which premiered in Grand Rapids last December. The hugely successful production featured set design by Chris Van Allsburg (the Caldecott Award-winning author/illustrator of *The Polar Express* and *Jumanji*) and Eugene Lee (the Tony Award-winning stage designer for *Wicked*), with choreography by Val Caniparoli.

Barker was inspired to run her own company by her mentor at Pacific Northwest Ballet, co-founding artistic director Francia Russell, whose example she still looks to. That, coupled with what she learned from her prior experience as a former artistic advisor for the Slovak National Ballet, plus the great team at Grand Rapids Ballet, has helped her to succeed.

"I love trying to figure new things out," says Barker of her role as artistic director. "I have this great talent in front of me, but the challenges are how to get my dancers to believe in themselves and how to attract audiences to our productions."

The number of dancers wanting to join the now 33-member rank-less group has increased, making Grand Rapids a destination for talented professionals from around the world. Unlike most professional ballet companies, there are no divisions of labour among trainees, apprentices and company members. Barker has them all train together and compete for the same roles. Their titles are an indication only of experience and pay scale.

"I got to work with the greatest choreographers and stagers of the 20th and 21st centuries," says Barker. "I danced some of the greatest classical works ever created. I want all my dancers to have the opportunity to work with leading choreographers, to have a chance at a great role and to have new ballets created on them."

Barker feels the fuller a dancer's life experiences are outside the studio, the more they have to draw on as artists. She encourages them to go to museums, see other performances and have hobbies, friends and passions outside dance. That approach has paid off in the dancers becoming more confident and versatile. "My favourite thing now," says Barker, "is when a choreographer or stager comes in and says they'll need six hours for a pas de trois, and then come back and say they've done it in one."

Barker says she has few stipulations on the type of performer she hires other than looking for technically sound, athletic and versatile dancers. She does not look for a certain height, and lacking wonderfully arched feet is not an eliminating factor. "I want dancers who are hungry to dance and can fit in with other members of the company."

One of those dancers whose petite stature houses a talent too big to ignore is Japan's Yuka Oba, who joined Grand Rapids Ballet in 2011 after two years with Slovak National Ballet. She describes Barker as a tough taskmaster in the studio who genuinely cares about the wellbeing of her dancers, adding, "Patricia is warm and welcoming about the dancers approaching her with their health and personal issues." Oba has also choreographed for the company, something Barker encourages as part of the growth process of her dancers.

Barker extends that open spirit to the choreographers she works with. The company's annual MOVEMEDIA contemporary series gives established choreographers time and space to do the piece they have always dreamed of doing or to work on a ballet they would like to redo. Past MOVEMEDIA choreographers have included former Hubbard Street Chicago dancer Robyn Mineko Williams, Ballet BC dancer Andrew Bartee and former Nederlands Dans Theater dancer Andrea Schermoly.

The 2014-2015 season closed in May with Radacovsky's latest premiere for the company, *Beethoven*. Set to the composer's Symphony No. 9 (the Choral), the work — which paints a dramatic picture of Beethoven's life, loves and music — was performed at Grand Rapids Ballet's own 300-seat Peter Martin Wege Theatre. The theatre is a blessing in many ways, saving money on theatre rental and allowing choreographers time to play onstage. But Barker says its full half-fly rail system has drawbacks, limiting the types of stage drops and lighting configurations that can be used. Larger ballets are performed at the 2,400-seat DeVos Performance Hall.

Increasing touring is Barker's latest focus. Grand Rapids Ballet already tours throughout Michigan and the last two summers appeared at Dance St. Louis' Spring to Dance Festival. This October they are slated to perform in Seattle at the Cornish Playhouse at Seattle Center. Barker feels their repertory, especially the full-length contemporary ballets, is built for touring. The company is presently in talks with representatives of Grand Rapids' European sister city Perugia, Italy.

Barker is also Grand Rapids Ballet School's director. The school boasts several noted alumni, including New York City Ballet principal dancer Maria Kowroski. Barker has revamped the curriculum and created a Junior Company for

dancers ages 10-19. The Junior Company has helped to increase the organization's community outreach while offering its students performing opportunities through its own unique repertory.

The turn of fortune at Grand Rapids Ballet since Barker's arrival has translated into the company becoming one of the city's premier arts organizations. Barker was named in 2014 as one of the 50 most influential women in West Michigan by *Grand Rapids Business Journal,* and this past January the magazine named the ballet company's executive director Glenn Del Vecchio as one of 2014's Newsmakers of the Year. The number of local arts organizations wanting to collaborate with them has also increased, says Barker. Recent collaborations have been with the city's symphony, opera and museum.

With Grand Rapids Ballet's profile on the rise, Barker says she and her husband Michael Auer, the company's creative director (a position that bridges the marketing department and the artistic staff), have settled nicely into their new community. They purchased a home, and discovered restaurants and even a market that sells fish from Seattle. As for the creative side of her life, "It's not about me anymore, it's about my dancers," says Barker. "Their triumphs and where we can go as a company are what excite me now." ▼

Dance notes

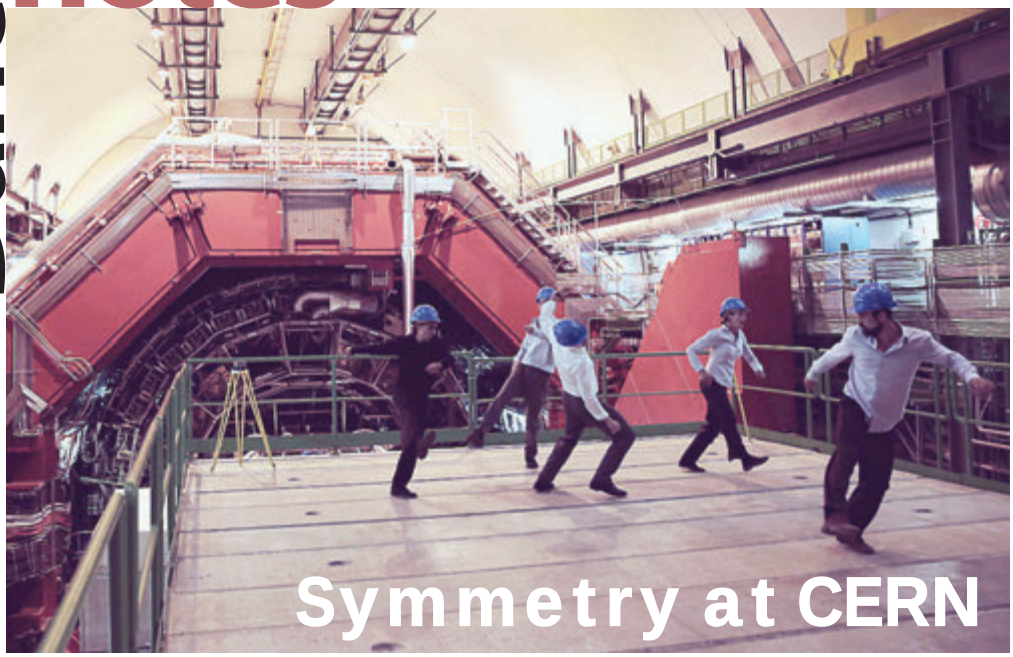


Photo: Masha Osipova

***Symmetry* is a 28-minute dance and opera film directed by Dutch film-maker Ruben van Leer and choreographed by Lukas Timulak, a former Nederlands Dans Theater dancer. The story follows a researcher (played by Timulak) at CERN, the European Organization for Nuclear Research, which is working on the theory of everything and the smallest particle of our existence. A 25-minute sister documentary, *Symmetry Unravelled*, directed by Juliette Stevens, explores the combination of art and science.**

Dance / Radiance / Colour

Eric Gauthier | Photo: Maks Richter

Colours – International Dance Festival premieres in Stuttgart on June 25 and runs until July 12. Presented by Eric Gauthier, an ex-Stuttgart Ballet soloist and the artistic director of Gauthier Dance, and produced by Theaterhaus Stuttgart, the festival includes all "colours" of dance, from contemporary and hip-hop, to tango and circus art. The event integrates professional performances as well as workshops for beginner dancers and members of the public, creating an atmosphere in which the entire city can participate.

Colours brings together local and international work, with contributing groups from countries such as France, Australia, the United States, Great Britain, Belgium and South Africa. Canadian Compagnie Marie Chouinard will premiere *On the edge, still humid, soft virtuosity* and give the German premiere of *Henri Michaux: Mouvements*.

Photo: Jack Blake
Courtesy of *Dancing Times*

Mary Clarke 1923-2015

Mary Clarke, editor emeritus of Britain's *Dancing Times* magazine, has passed away. London-born Clarke was an instrumental voice in British dance writing as both critic and historian. She was editor of *Dancing Times* from 1963 to 2008, and among her many published books are *The Sadler's Wells Ballet: A History and an Appreciation* (1955), *Dancers of Mercury: The Story of Ballet Rambert* (1962), *The Encyclopedia of Dance and Ballet* (editor, with David Vaughan, 1977) and several books with Clement Crisp, including *Dancer: Men in Dance* (1984) and *Ballerina* (1987).

Mikhail Baryshnikov and Elena Tchernichova onstage at the Metropolitan Opera House, 1983
Photo: Nina Alovert

Elena Tchernichova
1938-2015

An "artist behind the artists," the late Elena Tchernichova had a profound impact on the way that 20th-century ballet is performed today. As senior ballet mistress at American Ballet Theatre (1977-1990), she assisted Natalia Makarova on her staging of *La Bayadère* and Mikhail Baryshnikov on his staging of *Don Quixote*. Tchernichova was gifted as a coach to dancers, including Gelsey Kirkland, Alessandra Ferri, Diana Vishneva, Polina Semionova, Anthony Dowell and Fernando Bujones.

In Joel Lobenthal's 2013 biography of Tchernichova, *Dancing on Water,* she is portrayed as an artist who rose through the Soviet system to redefine classical ballet standards and performance practices. A classmate of Rudolf Nureyev, she was an enfant terrible of the Vaganova Ballet Academy and later challenged Russian views on contemporary ballet. As director of the Vienna State Opera Ballet (1989-1991), she staged her own versions of *Don Quixote* and *Giselle,* of which *Giselle* has been maintained in the repertoire.

Tchernichova knew how to unlock potential within people she felt were talented. As a coach, she viewed her work as extending outside the studio, and conversations were often wide-ranging, involving philosophy and other art forms. Her home — whether in New York, Vienna or St. Petersburg, where she enjoyed the last years of her life — was an open salon that offered engaging conversation among artists of all disciplines.

I met Tchernichova in New York through mutual friends, and it was thanks to her that I received an invitation to create a work for the Mariinsky Ballet in 2007. Each night I would describe the challenges of the day, and she offered insight to help me understand the complex machinations of managing a major creation. She also rattled me out of my systemic way of seeing things, encouraging me to view my work from an energetic or emotional level.

Tchernichova leaves a long legacy to the international ballet community through the repertoire she staged, the dancers she coached and the people she taught. Nobel Prize-winning author, Joseph Brodsky, wrote in his Afterword to *Dancing on Water*: "A rehearsal master may indeed … refuse the career of a ballerina herself, for that would mean confining dance to only one body. Elena Tchernichova has elected to dance in them all, and that's what you see when the curtain rises."

Elena Tchernichova was born on February 7, 1938, in Leningrad and died in her home in St. Petersburg on February 6, 2015.

— PETER QUANZ

Cedar Lake closes its doors

New York-based Cedar Lake Contemporary Ballet, founded in 2003 and known as a hotbed for original work, is set to close. The company of 16, founded by Walmart heiress Nancy Laurie, was directed by Benoit-Swan Pouffer from 2005 to 2013, and since Spring 2014 by Alexandra Damiani. Cedar Lake's impressive facility will shut after June performances in Brooklyn featuring choreography by Emanuel Gat, Jacopo Godani, Crystal Pite, Johan Inger and Richard Siegal. At press time, there was no official announcement regarding the reason for closure.

Cedar Lake Contemporary Ballet in Jo Strømgren's *Necessity Again*
Photo: Paula Lobo

Whirling, Welcoming Dervishes

by Linde Howe-Beck

Throughout Turkey, Muslim mystics known as whirling dervishes are performing their 700-year-old religious ceremony for unlikely audiences — tourists. Followers of the 13th-century poet and religious writer known to the West as Rumi and to his followers as Melvâna, meaning "our guide," the dervishes perform a highly structured, seven-part ritual to show submission to God. Their greetings, reverences, prayers, chants and whirling, under the direction of a leader and lasting about 45 minutes, is known as the sema.

I recently watched a sema in Göreme in the heart of Central Anatolia, where strange conical-like formations made of soft volcanic debris and shaped by the wind have provided cave-like hideouts and homes for centuries. Göreme's dervish lodge is carved out of the same soft lava-like material. Spectators entered through two large windowless rooms and descended a curved staircase to a domed ceremonial space. It was hung with coloured lights and ringed with red and white arches separating the ceremonial space from public seating.

The ritual began when four black-robed musicians entered, bowing to the holiest spot — represented by a turban that rested on the ground — before taking their places opposite. A drum sounded a salutation; the ney (a reed flute), representing divine breath, wailed. Then a lyre and a droning oud introduced strong, uplifting rhythms.

Four bearded men appeared wearing tall felt hats (representing their tombstones) and black cloaks (their shrouds) over white robes that frothed around their feet. They sat on sheepskins along with their leader, a fifth man dressed entirely in black. At the melancholic sound of the ney, they slapped their hands on the floor in obeisance, rose, and removed their black coats, revealing short white jackets and floor-length circular skirts.

With hands crossed on their chests, they bowed before the turban. Slowly, eyes downcast, they began to spin. As their skirts unfurled, the dervishes seemed to grow huge. In short soft boots, they turned right to left, right feet almost stationary, left feet propelling their turns. Heads tilted slightly, they extended their arms, right hands open to receive energy from the heavens, left hands drooping to channel the blessings to the earth.

The effect was one of floating and time seemed suspended. The word "whirling" conjures up fast, almost frantic, action. But this turning by the dervishes was stately and measured. Spectators sat hushed as a great peace permeated the hall.

At no time did I, as an observer, feel like a voyeur. Quite the opposite: I felt welcomed and privileged to be present. Sufism is an inclusive religious observance based on love and acceptance of people of all creeds.

With occasional nods of his chin, the leader directed turners through the short ritualistic sequences. Dervishes who appeared to achieve ecstasy during their turning were obliged to return to the moment, stop whirling and to bow again to begin the next series toward emotional and spiritual purification.

At the end, musicians and dancers formed a circle, bowed and chanted together before departing silently. Then, ceremony finished, dancers returned to whirl joyously for spectators' adoring cameras — and, I hope, for themselves as well. ▼

Above: Whirling dervishes
Photo: Courtesy of Trafalgar

Left: Painting on the walls of dervish lodge
Photo: Linde Howe-Beck

BBC Young Dancer Debut

by Gerard Davis

In 1978, the BBC launched a competition called *Young Musician of the Year*. Open to any classical musician under the age of 18 residing in the United Kingdom, it was divided into four categories — keyboard, strings, brass and woodwind. The finalist in each category went to the grand final, where a panel of experts chose an ultimate winner. The whole process was shown to a national audience on BBC TV.

The competition, held every two years since, led to a new competition called *Eurovision Young Musicians* in 1982, which has benefitted the classical music industry hugely in both public awareness and unearthing new talent.

Then, in 2014, the BBC announced it was going to use the *Young Musician* format for a different art form, and *BBC Young Dancer 2015* was born.

Open to dancers 16-20 years old who have never been employed on a professional full-time contract, the competition is split into four categories — contemporary, ballet, hip-hop and South Asian. The application process promises competitors they will be rewarded for "technical command, creative and expressive ability, as well as hard work and dedication."

After an open video audition in November 2014, selected contestants underwent a series of heats and workshops until their category finals in March 2015. The winner of each final (plus two wildcards chosen by the judges from the remaining competitors) went to the grand final in May, where they competed for one £3,000 prize to help further their dance studies. The grand final was held at Sadler's Wells in London and screened live on BBC; in the weeks leading up to it, the category finals were televised alongside a raft of related programs on several of the BBC's national radio stations.

The BBC recognizes that it's crucial the competition isn't just another *X Factor* quick fix to fame, as Jan Younghusband, head of commissioning for music and events, explains. *Young Musician* offers "a terrific insight from the professionals about how great music is made, and *Young Dancer* plans to follow suit and allow audiences to explore all the hard work that goes into professional dance."

Tamara Rojo, Wayne McGregor and Matthew Bourne were among the judges for the grand final, but even the heats and category finals boasted some of the U.K.'s top dancers, choreographers and company directors. Sharon Watson, artistic director of Phoenix Dance Theatre, judged the second round of the contemporary heats in December, where she and her fellow judges Richard Alston and Emma Gladstone whittled down the hopefuls from more than 20 to just six.

"*Young Dancer* cuts through the frills and decorative approach to the idea that everyone can dance," Watson says. "This is about people taking things from a very serious grassroots viewpoint to hopefully a successful career within dance."

Although she welcomes the exposure *BBC Young Dancer* will bring the industry, last October Judith Mackrell, the *Guardian*'s dance critic, voiced concerns over the competition format in her blog for the paper. "Competitions on this kind of public scale put intense pressure on very young and potentially vulnerable performers," she argued. "They almost invariably place hardcore technique over expressive or stylistic nuance."

Kenneth Tharp, chief executive of The Place (home to London Contemporary Dance School) and one of the judges for the category finals, sees things differently. "The competition is a vehicle by which dance can raise its profile," he says. "It's a format that engages the public, but I hope it will educate as well as entertain. The more people who see and understand dance, the more dance will start to feel as accessible as sport, where almost everyone, whether amateur or professional, has an opinion."

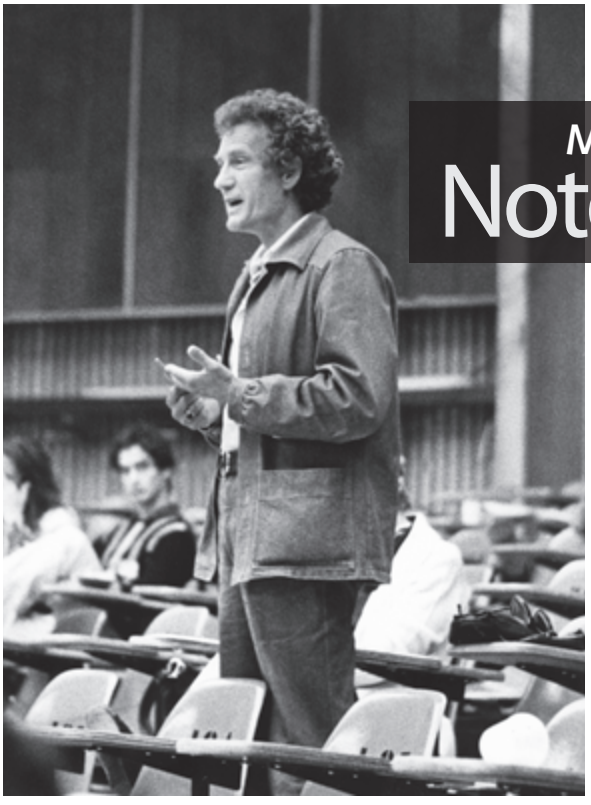
Tharp's experience running the Place Prize, a competition for young choreographers that's been going for 10 years, taught him it wasn't only the winners who benefitted. "In fact," he says, "sometimes it was those artists who didn't win who went on to the greatest success — Hofesh Shechter being a good example."

The list of competitors who've failed to win *BBC Young Musician* is arguably even more impressive than the list of winners. One is composer Thomas Adès, who entered as a pianist; today, as well as having his scores performed by the world's greatest orchestras, he recently had an evening of dance performed to his music at Sadler's Wells by choreographers including Wayne McGregor and Crystal Pite.

Tharp sees no conflict in four disparate styles of dance competing side by side. "For the young dancers, it offers them an opportunity to stand alongside their peers and to learn from each other. I'd like to think that in the end the qualities of an outstanding dancer transcend both style and genre." ▼

Connect with us to discover the results of the May 9 finals: Twitter: @DIMagazine Facebook: Dance International

Michael Crabb's Notebook



Left: Grant Strate at the 1977 Dance in Canada Conference in Winnipeg
Photo: Michael Crabb

Below: Harold DaSilva, Lillian Jarvis and Earl Kraul in Grant Strate's *The Fisherman and His Soul,* c. 1957

Photos: Courtesy of Dance Collection Danse

In bygone days, when the circus still had exotic allure and a hint of danger, people sometimes dreamt of running away to join one. Usually this happened in childhood. Grant Strate actually did it, except he waited until he was an adult, and a lawyer.

Well, maybe not the circus; but, in 1951, to abandon a respectable and potentially profitable career to join a still fledgling ballet troupe was the next best thing. For a man of that era, especially one from a Mormon family, there was nothing respectable about becoming a ballet dancer and it certainly offered no financial security. Yet, when British dancer and choreographer Celia Franca swept through Edmonton, Alberta, in search of talent for her soon-to-be-launched National Ballet of Canada and made Strate an offer, he accepted on the spot. He never had cause to regret that momentous decision. It established a pattern of risk-taking that animated his career.

Strate, who died February 9 at his home in Vancouver, aged 87, had as long, full and varied a life in dance as he could possibly have wished for. He was a dancer, a choreographer, an educator and mentor, a builder of enduring institutions and, throughout, a fierce advocate for his art and its practitioners. It is not an exaggeration to claim that Strate played a seminal role in shaping Canadian dance into the varied, inclusive and adventurous form it is today. None of the boldly modernist works Strate created during his almost two decades with the National Ballet has survived, yet it's important to remember their considerable impact, particularly in the use of Canadian composers and designers. Franca, who also relied heavily on Strate's organizational skills, made him the company's first resident choreographer.

Grant Strate was a Western Canadian by birth, upbringing and temperament, but spent almost 30 years of his life in Toronto. For the remaining 35, he was based in Vancouver. The way he is remembered often reflects this regional divide.

For Torontonians, Strate's towering achievement was to lay the foundations of what is today an epicentre of dance creativity and research, York University's dance department. One of Strate's early faculty hires, Selma Odom, recalls his impact. "Knowing Grant at York in the 1970s was a life-changing experience, for me and many others. Grant had the courage to place responsibility in the hands of those who were very young."

It happened again when Strate left York to become director of Simon Fraser University's Centre for the Arts (1980-1989) and Contemporary Arts Summer Institute (1985-1995). Strate quickly immersed himself in the local dance scene, becoming a much-revered teacher and mentor. He was also a prime mover in the long and ultimately successful campaign behind Vancouver's purpose-built Scotiabank Dance Centre, a downtown hub for the city's dance scene.

Many aspects of his career straddled this regional divide and extended even beyond his homeland. Strate launched his now legendary series of National Choreographic Seminars at York. He continued them in the west. As a founding member in 1973 of the long defunct Dance in Canada Association, Strate's was the resonant voice that argued for recognition of regional differences within an overarching national framework. He also argued — battled is a more accurate term — for public funding support of non-Western dance forms, emerging companies and independent artists. Some saw this as divisive, especially when the privileged group of companies then generously patronized by the Canada Council for the Arts split off in an effort to keep new snouts out of the trough. But Strate was artistically and morally right, and his viewpoint ultimately prevailed.

Grant Strate was no angel. He had as typical a range of faults as any average mortal, but his prodigious gifts and essential generosity of spirit made them seem inconsequential. He could be very stubborn and tended toward powerful likes and dislikes; yet, his instincts were mostly spot on. Strate was a shrewd judge of character. He was not much for small talk and, despite his love of a good laugh, could appear austerely intellectual. He was notorious for provoking arguments, largely because he enjoyed the ensuing battle of wits.

Strate did not do vacations. His longtime partner, the late Earl Kraul (also a founding dancer with the National Ballet of Canada), once convinced him they should take an Inland Passage Alaskan cruise. Strate claimed that after three days he was "bored silly." Teaching in China or flying off for a World Dance Alliance meeting was much more Strate's idea of a holiday.

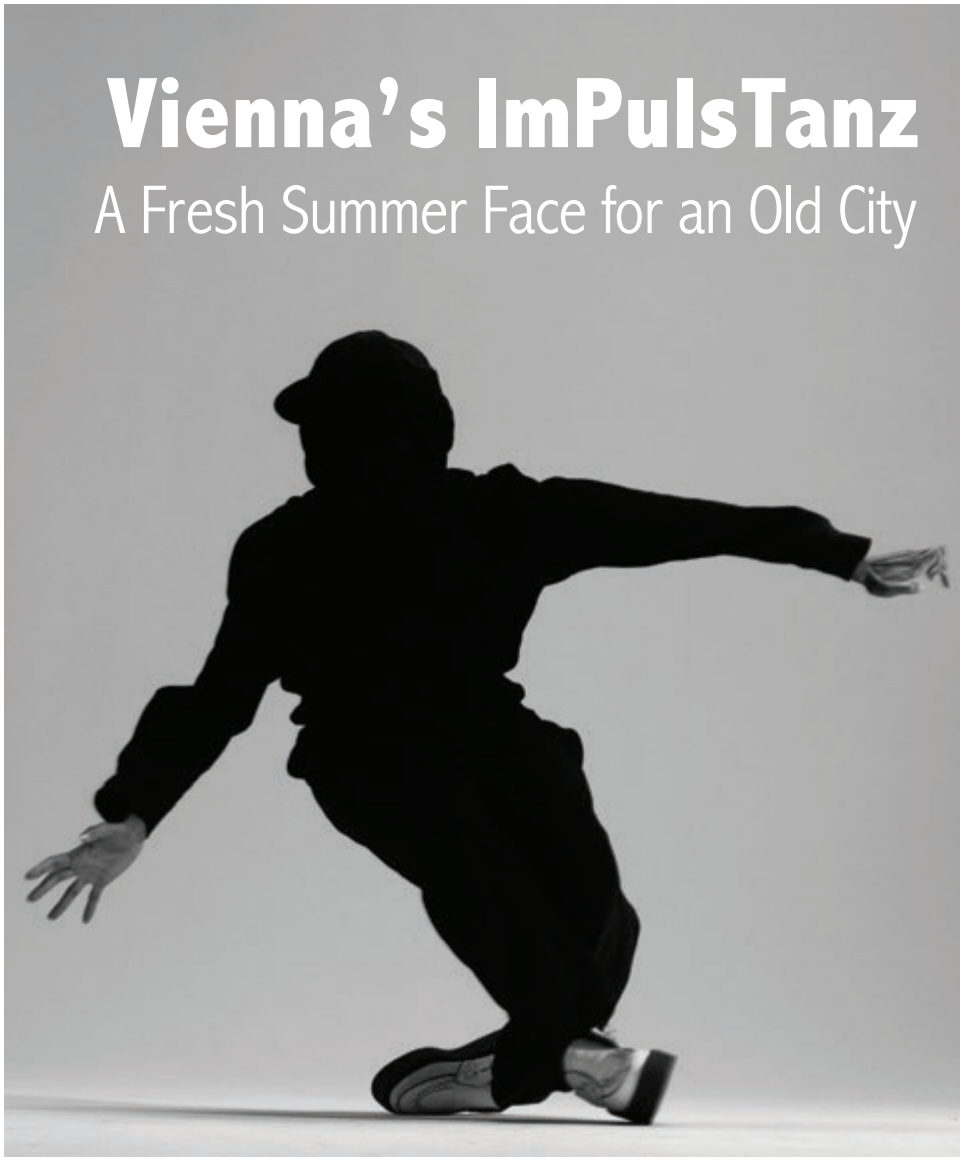
Then there were his notoriously potent martinis. Strate sometimes deployed these as a social lubricant, at other times to weaken opposition to his point of view. Martini purists naturally objected to his preference for vodka over gin, but Strate dismissed their concerns as beneath his dignity to debate.

What emerged clearly from Grant Strate's memorial service was the extent to which he profoundly and positively touched so many lives. He was greatly loved and is deeply mourned. His legacy will long endure. Knowing Grant, he'd probably be embarrassed by the idea. For all his achievements, in essence he was a humble man with a very kind heart. ▼

Vienna's ImPulsTanz

A Fresh Summer Face for an Old City

BY ROBIN J. MILLER



Studio shot of Dana Michel
Photo: Maxyme G. Delisle

Vienna, Austria — a little too caught up in the past and the comfortable, some might think: the home of Mozart and Klimt, the waltz and Wiener schnitzel. But for five weeks every summer, the city puts on a whole new face — vibrant, alive and just a little bit cheeky. Where else will you see hundreds of lithe young dancers whizzing across town on identical pink bicycles? Or thousands of lithe and not-so-lithe locals, many of whom have never danced a step in their lives, rushing to make a class in ballet or butoh, traditional African or hip-hop?

Over the past 32 years, ImPulsTanz – Vienna International Dance Festival has built itself into one of the largest and most important contemporary dance festivals in the world. It has done so not by making the festival a haven for the elite — the finest dancers, hottest choreographers and hippest audiences, although they are certainly there — but by making sure that everyone else can come and learn and have a great time, too.

"We wanted this festival to provide Vienna with a voice that it was missing," says Karl Regensburger, who co-founded ImPulsTanz with Brazilian choreographer Ismael Ivo in 1984 and currently serves as both artistic director and general manager. At first, the two men concentrated on dance workshops only. "We started small," he says, "with just six teachers giving 20 workshops over two weeks, and it turned out the timing was right. People here started to get excited about trying things with the body."

From the beginning, the founders were careful to include a range of disciplines at a variety of levels. "We wanted classes to be for 'normal' people, too," says Regensburger. In recent years, the festival has included more than 200 workshops, many open to beginner and intermediate dancers as well as professionals. Classes are held in 10 giant, light-filled studios within the Arsenal, a 19th-century former military complex that blends imposing Italian Renaissance architecture with fanciful Moorish decoration. More than 3,000 dancers take part, about half from Vienna and the rest from around the world.

Occasionally, a top-flight teacher will question the value of working with amateurs, only to discover, says workshop and research project director Rio Rutzinger, "that it's really very beautiful. You open a different world for them. You don't get that kind of growth with professionals."

Instead of staying within their usual areas of expertise, the professional dancers might find themselves exposed to

Salim Gauwloos workshop, ImPulsTanz
Photo: Nina Saurugg

"Merce Cunningham liked the workshop part of the festival so much, one year he invited all 80 teachers to have dinner with him, and told everyone how much he admired African dance."
— Karl Regensburger (photo right)

Photo: Franzi Kreis

kathak from India, samba from Brazil and house from Chicago. "They might never do a Bollywood show," says Rutzinger, "but love to do a Bollywood class." Regensburger adds: "Merce Cunningham liked the workshop part of the festival so much, one year he invited all 80 teachers to have dinner with him, and told everyone how much he admired African dance."

Performance became part of ImPulsTanz in 1988, featuring work from such dance luminaries as Canada's Marie Chouinard and Japan's Ko Murobushi. Since then, the programming focus has stayed on a blend of mainstream contemporary dance and more daring experimental work.

Last summer, the festival sold 99 per cent of all tickets available to 113 performances in 16 different spaces, ranging from 120 to 1,200 seats, around the city. That's perhaps to be expected with the headliners, who included Britain's Lloyd Newson and his DV8 Physical Theatre, which debuted *John* at the Akademietheater; the surprise is that the [8:tension] Young Choreographers' Series sold just as well. This series, added 14 years ago, includes radical pieces by emerging artists that in many places would attract only a small band of dedicated avant-gardists.

Christine Standfest works for ImPulsTanz as dramaturgical support — "My job is to watch and watch and watch pieces, to talk and talk and talk to artists, and to think of coherent ways to present them together" — and is also part of a group that selects the [8:tension] productions. "What we provide is a frame to introduce new artists," says Standfest, "and an invitation to our audiences to take risks. We've discovered there are many people who are super curious, who want to know what's going on, what's coming up next, and they create a buzz around the series."

Front and centre at every performance are many of the 65 young dancers attending ImPulsTanz on a five-week ImPulsTanz danceWEB scholarship that Canadian dancer/choreographer Dana Michel likens to being "thrown into a humongous vat of cold water. You have to say, 'Right, I'm ready to drink.'"

With tuition and accommodation covered, the danceWEB scholars are

July 16-August 16, 2015 Highlights

Three Viennese museums are venues for performances, installations and "performative interventions":

> At mumok (museum moderner kunst), the exhibition *My Body is the Event* will be the springboard for performance-based art focused on Vienna Actionism — a movement born in Austria in the 1960s dedicated to creating radical events or "happenings."

> The World Museum Vienna will host international artists presenting work connected to world ethnological themes, including territory and extremism.

> The contemporary art museum 21er Haus will showcase choreographers exploring "the idea of the body as an object of exposition."

Premiering in theatres around the city will be new work from Chris Haring and Liquid Loft, Vienna-based Japanese choreographer Akemi Takeya, and contemporary/street dance duo Florentina Holzinger and Vincent Riebeek.

Workshops from beginner to professional include African, Asian, contemporary and contemporary ballet, plus urban styles such as free running and parkour. Teachers will include Jermaine Browne, street jazz legend and teacher at New York's Broadway Dance Center, and Akram Khan dancers Kristina and Sadé Alleyne. ▼

supervised by internationally renowned artistic mentors. The "webbers" are expected to be on the move non-stop, participating in workshops and collaborating on research projects, where a small number of established choreographers are given the luxury of six hours a day with professional dancers (webbers and non-webbers) to investigate ideas. They also go to lectures, see as many performances as humanly possible ("You're always hopping on your pink bike and zooming to these crazy, palatial theatres," says Michel) and, of course, attend at least a few late-night parties in the lobby of the 274-year-old Burgtheater, which at any other time of the year is Austria's foremost bastion of classical drama.

While in Vienna for the first time in 2011, Michel took in more than 50 performances in addition to all-day classes with thousands of students from other places. "The level of teaching was extraordinary," she says. "I don't know where else this exists. It makes you look outside of where you usually are. It's overwhelming and you realize you don't know anything, but it's also nice to feel the largeness of the world."

A week-long intensive workshop with Bulgarian performance artist Ivo Dimchev led directly to the premiere in Montreal two years later of *Yellow Towel*, a 75-minute solo that takes as its starting point the cloth Michel used to wrap around her head as a young girl to see what it felt like to be blonde. The piece was born in Dimchev's class as a three-minute "nugget" of an idea that he encouraged her to develop. *Yellow Towel* has since led to a string of major awards and accolades — the *New York Times* called it "a bold production, in equal measure disturbing and illuminating" — as well as an invitation for Michel to return to ImPulsTanz as part of [8:tension] 2014 to perform.

"I didn't even know, when I saw the piece in New York," says Standfest, "that it originated at ImPulsTanz. I just knew that we should present it. She's a brilliant performer." So brilliant, in fact, Regensburger invented a new award at the end of last summer's festival just for Michel that included a cash prize plus a three-week residency in summer 2015. Michel now looks forward to returning to the festival she calls both "magic and surreal" and "a big, juicy hub where you're sure something interesting will happen."

Keeping that hub going is no simple task. ImPulsTanz receives the majority of its €6 million budget from public agencies, including the City of Vienna, the Republic of Austria and the European Union, with the rest coming from ticket sales, workshop fees and sponsorships. But with the pressures on all public agencies today, even ImPulsTanz cannot take its regular funders for granted. Owing to a surprise cutback by the city, the organizers are shifting the performance part of this year's festival to focus less on established international companies and more on emerging and home-grown talent. Says Regensburger, "It's always tricky. We are always fighting with the budget and trying to squeeze even more things in. It's a problem the whole cultural world faces, with fixed costs for staff, rent and theatre technicians."

Also tricky is keeping the balance between quantity and quality. Regensburger is determined to continue to invest in serious work while allowing room for such apparent eccentricities as workshops in contemporary pole dancing or West Coast waacking from the United States. "We don't want to lose our special atmosphere," he says, "because that's one of the strengths we have. It's why so many great artists choose to come here and why it's loved by the people who live here, too. It is *their* festival." ImPulsTanz, adds Rutzinger, "shows that contemporary dance means something to society." ▼

Tango
on the High Seas

Onboard classes with Sandra Naccache and Alex Richardson

by Victor Swoboda

"The first rule in Argentine tango is intention and connection with your partner. Everything has to be real."

Teaching dance to passengers aboard a cruise ship during rough seas can be quite an experience. "They're like a flock of birds," says Montreal's Alex Richardson. "As soon as a wave comes, everyone falls in perfect harmony. Sometimes it's like walking straight up a hill and straight down."

Ah, yes, dancing on the high seas! Notwithstanding rough weather, it's a romantic image replete with moonlit nights, champagne glasses and warm breezes wafting across the cheeks of a couple in soft embrace.

A number of travel agencies are making social dancing the main selling point of their cruise packages. Passengers pay an additional fee on top of their regular passage fare to get group dance classes during the day and to ensure evenings of dancing. For the past couple of years, Richardson and Sandra Naccache, both in their early 30s and dance partners for the last nine years, have regularly set sail to ports in South America, Alaska and the Mediterranean, among other places, giving passengers classes in ballroom dancing as well as in the couple's specialty, Argentine tango.

"Going on a cruise ship built to carry 5,000 people is surreal," says Richardson. "Everything is provided. Our bedroom is one floor away from our teaching studio. The breakfast room is one floor above. You don't want for anything."

But those who think teaching on cruise ships is a holiday lark should be forewarned. Like any professional engagement, it's work. "We get up at 7 or 8, go to the gym to work out, have breakfast, then give a two-hour group class," explains Naccache. "In the afternoon, members of our group can arrange to have one-hour private classes for which they pay us individually. In the evening, we dance with the group members from 8 until midnight."

However long the cruise — they last from one week to three — Richardson says it becomes a battle of energy. "If I wanted, I could teach from 8 a.m. to 5 p.m. with just a half-hour break. I have porridge in the morning and we drink energy drinks during the day. It becomes survival of the fittest."

The unlimited amount of food on board — six-course meals for dinner — is a temptation they resist. "You have to find a proper eating schedule because there's good food at your disposal 24/7," says Naccache. "I went to a nutritionist, so now I have a special diet aboard ship."

At the end of a 21-day South American cruise, both Richardson and Naccache were exhausted, in part because they agreed to all requests for private classes. One couple hired them for two hours every day. "We didn't refuse offers, but later we regretted it," recalls Naccache. "I was sick by the end. We were burned out." Now wiser, they limit the number of their private classes, especially when stopping at a destination they would like to see themselves.

Their clients, some 30 or 40 each trip, are experienced middle-aged or older dancers, some of whom participate in competitions. For those coming from smaller cities where there might be few high-quality teachers, a dance cruise trip offers a valuable opportunity for an intensive workshop. Couples usually make up half the group, while the other half is

Sandra Naccache and Alexander Richardson teaching aboard the Queen Mary 2
Photo: Ali Painter

largely single women who find a dance cruise a safe way for them to travel and to get to dance. Since there tends to be more women than men, the travel agency hires a few extra professional or semi-professional male dancers to ensure they have a partner.

The group always wants to see their teachers dance, of course, so Richardson and Naccache perform at least once every evening. "There's always a courtyard or ballroom overlooked by balconies. One ship had 17 floors! When Sandra and I dance together, the floor clears spontaneously and it becomes a show. By the end of it, there might be several hundred people watching from the balconies."

For many clients who know only ballroom dances, a trip with Richardson and Naccache becomes an introduction to tango. "The passengers know we're specialists in Argentine tango and take advantage of it," says Richardson. "We bring them into the world of tango, which could be outside their comfort zone, by using the vocabulary and teaching methods they're used to."

Richardson notes that even though tango and ballroom have similar roots as social dances, they have different instruction methods and philosophies. "The first rule in Argentine tango is intention and connection with your partner. Everything has to be real. In ballroom, beginners are often first taught a figure or step. Using tango's philosophy in ballroom is interesting because it deepens the connection." Naccache finds that ballroom dancers are often intimidated by tango's approach, but by the end of their cruise, some become tango devotees.

Richardson and Naccache draw on the tango lessons they've taken from experienced teachers in Buenos Aires, where they have lived for extended periods, and in New York, where they studied privately with the celebrated dancer Gabriel Missé, a fierce proponent of classical tango steps. Social tango, as opposed to choreographed tango, is above all an improvised dialogue between partners. Richardson and Naccache have reached a point at which each of them can "speak" and be confident that the other will "listen" and "reply."

"The best advice I had from teachers in Buenos Aires was about communication. I'm the leader, but my job is not to pick up and carry Sandra into the step. If I'm inviting her to go left, she may go right. It's my job then to follow her to the right. I suggest musical ideas, like a stop, but if she doesn't want to stop, she might do three quick steps on the spot and I'll go with her."

Like many dance couples, each of them brings a particular strength, which they exploit together. "Sandra has a great sense of musicality and interpretation that's quite different from mine. I'm thinking of the structure of the dance. She's listening and feeling the music. She'll say, 'Don't you feel the music like this?' And I'll respond, 'Yeah, but the structure of the choreography is leading to another accent.'"

As a consequence, before beginning a new choreography, the two will walk separately to the piece of music to see how each interprets the rhythm. "Then we discuss what is the highlight in the music, the signature uniqueness," says Richardson. "Generally, we'll take Sandra's feeling of the moment, and I'll structure a step to it or grab the parts I like and build from there."

The mutual respect they have while dancing carries through to all aspects of their professional and personal lives. Although at one time the two were romantically involved, their relationship for the past several years has been as best friends. They admit their close connection and frequent travels together — both on cruises and in other performance and teaching engagements — makes it difficult to pursue outside romantic relationships.

"Alex and I have the same aspirations and are willing to sacrifice everything to achieve them," says Naccache. "Many times, you have a fusion with someone, but it's temporary because the person doesn't have the same discipline or dedication or is not willing to give everything to tango. That's the one thing we saw in each other that other people don't usually have." ▼

Tango Transformations

A hero's journey

by Susana Domingues

Tango dancers worldwide abound. It's hard to say exactly what draws so many people to tango, particularly those from cultures more conservative than the Argentine one that gave it birth. Perhaps, for some, tango provides a safe place to engage in clearly defined male and female roles. Or perhaps tango's complex partnering and expressive possibilities are intriguing. Whatever the initial draw, many who do enter into this form of dance soon find themselves in the grips of an addiction, an obsession. Tango becomes a lifestyle, and a vehicle for personal growth, social interaction and often artistic expression. Yet there are those who might deem art a lofty notion for tango, a child of 19th-century Buenos Aires brothels.

You could say tango was born a teenager, with an instant sense of rebellion. It was completely contrary to Argentina's 1871 Civil Code and its morally defined roles for women, but absolutely relevant to the growing underclass of young immigrant men who vastly outnumbered the population of women at the time.

Blooming into the radiance of its golden age from the 1930s to 1950s, tango culture saw an immense proliferation of gifted composers, arrangers, poets, singers and instrumentalists, and the height of its popularity in Argentina's dance halls. This song of life from the Río de la Plata riverbed was driven by massive public appeal, and endowed the dancers of that period with a bounty of inspiring music and lyrics.

In the 1950s, an artist emerged at whose hands tango underwent a metamorphosis. Composer and bandoneonist Astor Piazzolla dramatically changed tango's instrumentation and took the music a large step forward in harmonic complexity and rhythmic structures. But Piazzolla's nuevo tango (new tango) was unpopular among purists, who referred to it as "tango for export" — not *real* tango.

While most Argentines of the day preferred Elvis Presley to Piazzolla, nuevo tango was discovering an international audience. Dancers Juan Carlos Copes and Maria Nieves toured with Piazzolla. The pair reached their height of fame in *Tango Argentino*, a musical review they created and performed in, which premiered in Paris in 1983 and hit Broadway in 1985. Perhaps in a desire to distance tango from its humble beginnings, the cast performed in formal wear. The dancers had arrived at a truly artistic scenario, which involved a concern with aesthetics, a privileged audience seated in the distance of a darkened theatre and critics who played a role in its survival and revival.

> ... tango was born a teenager, with an instant sense of rebellion.

Tango Argentino's musical review format was heavily copied through the 1990s, with choreographies that retold the same stories over and over: a woman invites a seduction, the couple embraces and begins dancing, she weakens to the seduction, she finally submits and succumbs.

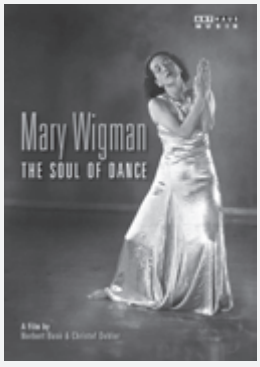
These productions inspired new communities of aspiring tango dancers throughout Europe, Asia and North America. The notion of authenticity arose alongside a theoretical battle of dance styles, mostly among non-Argentines. Often those whose dance was being labeled stage tango, nuevo tango, salon style or milonguero style, cried, "Don't limit me! I am guided by the music and the situation, not an identification with a style." Many of the critics asserted that improvised tango was more genuine than choreographed tango.

Today tango has transformed yet again with a new crop of talented young dancers. Inheritors of tango in all its historical manifestations, rooted in its tradition yet poised to be innovators, they perform with ease, grace, and musical and technical dynamism. Dancers such as Sebastian Arce and Mariana Montes, Sebastian Achaval and Roxana Suarez, and Ruben and Sabrina Veliz travel the world teaching and performing at tango festivals. Equally skilled at improvisation, they make their choreographies seem immediate and alive.

We also see a growing global tango culture. Walk into a milonga (tango hall) anywhere in the world, and it will have a common culture, where your audience is your fellow dancer seated in the chair you occupied before stepping onto the dance floor. Your peers watch and enjoy the parade of momentary inspirations, and challenge you to be better.

Tango has undergone a hero's journey of exploration and transformation. If popular culture disappears with time, and art is that which endures, then one can safely say that tango in its approximately century and a half of history is art. But more important than tango's ability to endure is its ability to relate to a group of individuals in a personal way. Tango remains a child of a cultural experience that succeeds in expressing: "There is beauty in me, therefore, there is beauty in life." ▼

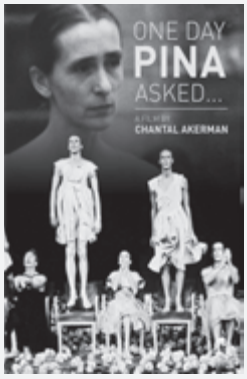
Mediawatch



MARY WIGMAN
— THE SOUL OF DANCE
by Norbert Busè and Christof Debler
52 minutes
www.arthaus-musik.com

SASHA WALTZ
— A PORTRAIT
by Brigitte Kramer
72 minutes
www.arthaus-musik.com

These two Arthaus Musik releases together highlight the historical developments of German modern dance from its early days in the first half of the 20th century, when now iconic Mary Wigman was establishing herself, to the present-day contemporary work of Sasha Waltz. Wigman's influence on German and American dance is detailed in *Mary Wigman — The Soul of Dance*, which focuses on her school, solo career and time in the United States. Enriched by an interview with Waltz, who grew up learning her techniques, the film emphasizes Wigman's impact on modern dance in its formative years. In *Sasha Waltz — A Portrait*, Waltz's company is showcased, as well as her choreography, featuring her interdisciplinary pieces in atypical performance spaces such as museums and outdoor arenas.
— REBECCA KARPUS



ONE DAY PINA ASKED...
by Chantal Akerman
57 minutes
www.icarusfilms.com

This 1983 film, recently re-released, explores Pina Bausch's Tanztheater Wuppertal, the groundbreaking German dance company that was partly inspired by the work of Mary Wigman student Kurt Jooss. Directed by high-profile Belgian feminist filmmaker Chantal Akerman, the film includes company performance, rehearsal and backstage scenes.
— RK

LAC
by Jean-Christophe Maillot
Les Ballets de Monte Carlo
93 minutes
www.opusarte.com

Jean-Christophe Maillot's *Lac* retains Tchaikovsky's score — freely shuffled around — and the traditional narrative, with some key changes. A filmed prologue recasts the ballet as a psycho-drama of lust and revenge, as Her Majesty the Night (the Rothbart figure) watches a very young Prince reject her own daughter in favour of a girl in white. The Prince's father and mother both have active dancing roles and are pivotal to the action, presiding over the hapless Prince in a harsh, predatory court. The swans, like Ekman's, are feral and fierce. *Lac* is packed with full-throttle dancing and quirky, occasionally over-the-top costumes. The White Swan pas de deux is a standout, full of playful tenderness, and there's a clever plot twist at the end. *Lac* is a sexy, provocative and dazzling piece of theatre, yet lacks the poetic grandeur and emotional impact of the original.
— HEATHER BRAY

A SWAN LAKE
by Alexander Ekman
Norwegian National Ballet
98 minutes
www.arthaus-musik.com

Sweden's Alexander Ekman said he aimed to do "something big and wild and different" when he created *A Swan Lake* in 2014, and he certainly delivers in inventiveness, ambition and chutzpah. Focused on the central idea of water, Ekman's interpretation of *Swan Lake* draws loosely on the original. The first act imagines the creation of the 1877 production and features an eccentric cast of characters dancing, shrieking and slamming doors, as a choreographer slowly arrives at the concept of linking ballet and swans. The second act is the highlight, as the entire stage is awash with water; the swans are black-helmeted, menacing creatures, and Ekman takes full advantage of the choreographic possibilities, with the dancers splashing, spraying and sliding to breathtaking visual effect. The wacky humour will not be to everyone's taste and the piece feels in need of editing, but there is much to enjoy; the staging and costumes are crazily imaginative and the commissioned score, which early on uses fragments of Tchaikovsky, is effective.
— HB

ROMEO AND JULIET
by Leonid Lavrovsky
Mariinsky Ballet
132 minutes
www.mariinskylabel.com

In contrast to the reinterpretations of a classic reviewed above, the Mariinsky Ballet's *Romeo and Juliet* is the real thing. This 2013 recording is of Leonid Lavrovsky's 1940 production, one of the first created to Prokofiev's tremendous score. Sadly, the ballet has not dated well, particularly in relation to some truly unfortunate costumes and sometimes hammy acting style. However, Diana Vishneva and Vladimir Shklyarov, in the title roles, give performances of emotional commitment and wonderful dancing. Vishneva makes Juliet's journey from carefree teen to grief-stricken woman absolutely believable, and Shklyarov is a youthfully ardent Romeo. His jumps are a joy to watch — hovering in the air, with a beautiful unforced line and the softest of landings.
— HB

ALICE'S ADVENTURES IN WONDERLAND
by Christopher Wheeldon
The Royal Ballet
120 minutes
www.opusarte.com

Christopher Wheeldon's *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland* was proclaimed a classic by some critics when it premiered in 2011, and by the evidence of this DVD recording it is indeed a triumph. Wheeldon chose his collaborators well: Joby Talbot's shimmering, filmic score is not only magical, but also highly danceable. The staging and designs are witty and brilliantly done, especially the gruesome kitchen scene with the Duchess, which is straight out of *Sweeney Todd*. There is plenty of dancing, too, especially for the men, and Wheeldon knows when to slow down the madcap action and provide space for the ballet to find its heart. The ballet follows the events of Lewis Carroll's book, but a cleverly constructed prologue and a surprise ending provide a cohesive narrative. Among many strong performances, Lauren Cuthbertson is a delightful Alice, Steven McRae a demonic tap-dancing Mad Hatter and actor Simon Russell Beale comes close to stealing the show as the Duchess.
— HB

A GOOD MADNESS: THE DANCE OF RACHEL BROWNE
Danielle Sturk, writer/director/producer
Oscar Fenoglio, cinematographer/editor/original music

The title of Danielle Sturk's film, *A Good Madness: The Dance of Rachel Browne*, is inspired by something Browne, the founder of Winnipeg Contemporary Dancers, said during an interview. She describes herself as driven by an insatiable appetite for dance, but it is, she says, "a good madness."

Sturk's lens reveals a turbulent life journey driven by determination, talent and a great love of dance. With the very first image of tape coiling onto a vintage reel-to-reel tape recorder, Sturk captures, illuminates and places Browne — who was born in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, in 1934, and died in her adopted country of Canada in 2012 — in a particular time in history.

One of the outstanding values of this 76-minute docu-dance is the care with which the Franco Manitoban filmmaker adapts some of Browne's best works for the film, shooting in site-specific locations, including *Mouvement* danced by Kristin Haight in a park in Winnipeg's French quarter. *Freddy*, set to Kurt Weill songs performed by Canadian soprano Teresa Stratas, was filmed in the city's iconic Fort Garry Hotel, complete with an emcee and audience dressed in period clothes, evoking a smoky 1930s German cabaret. Sporting a moustache, dancer Sharon B. Moore performs *Freddy* with vigour in this provocative solo that explores a broken but defiant character. It illustrates a side of Browne's creative genius that could be complicated, funny and cutting at the same time.

Sturk interviews Browne's three daughters, who describe the challenges of being raised by an often absent artist mother. Browne's deep feelings of guilt as professional demands battled her children's needs were not untypical in the sixties. Yet her daughters speak fondly of their mother, who, instead of bedtime stories, would dance her grandchildren to sleep.

Interviews with artists from coast to coast indicate the importance of Browne in the Canadian dance scene. They also recall more turbulent times in the history of the country's first modern dance company, Winnipeg Contemporary Dancers, including when Browne was fired from her role as founding artistic director by her board.

Stephanie Ballard talks about her early years as a dancer on tour with Winnipeg Contemporary Dancers. Browne was infamous for her ability to give detailed notes to dancers anywhere, anytime and any place, and Ballard recounts travelling in an old school bus while Browne moved from seat to seat giving notes to each and every company member.

Faye Thomson — a co-director of the Professional Program of the School of Contemporary Dancers, which Browne founded — speaks of Browne's feminist nature being evident in the way she lived her life and in her later works celebrating the beauty, strength and maturity of women. Browne herself tells us how, as a senior artist, she realized she had only so much time left, and chose to focus on new works made with and about women.

I was also interviewed in the film, having been mentored and supported by Ray (as Browne was known to her friends), first as a dancer in my twenties in Winnipeg, then, after moving to Victoria, British Columbia, as a choreographer. Ray and I shared a sympathy in how we saw, used and developed content for and about women. Through watching her work in the studio and being part of her creative process, I learned that dance can be created without the traditional trappings of gender. As a young woman in *Shout*, a feisty solo she created on me in the 1980s, I experienced for the first time what it is to be fully present, vulnerable and yet also powerful. Ray's movement for *Shout* was unadorned and kickass.

A Good Madness leaves us with an image of an artist — a strong feminist humanitarian — who was curious, able to laugh at herself, opinionated and always striving to embrace new ideas.

— CONSTANCE COOKE

Above: Sandy Dubrow in *Freddy* from the film *A Good Madness: The Dance of Rachel Browne*

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INSIDE ED

Encouraging Authentic Expression

by Jennifer Fournier

What does it mean to be expressive as a ballet dancer? How a person answers this question says something fundamental about what they believe ballet is.

In one view, what is expressed by the dancer is found in the work itself. The late Betty Oliphant, who co-founded Canada's National Ballet School, believed the best training resulted in a purity of style, allowing the dancer to reveal the innate character of ballet steps without mannerism and serving the choreographer's vision faithfully. These kinds of dancers are able to mould themselves to the work so that viewers see the steps and get a fairly unobstructed view of the choreographer's intent.

This approach is inherently humble. Here, dancers do not place themselves before the dance; they serve it. Ideally, learning a ballet then becomes a process of discovery where the dancer looks to the work, sometimes with the choreographer's explicit directions or more often intuitively, for the "key" that opens it up for them. They then use that key to make sense of what the choreographer wants dramatically or what the work requires technically.

There is a competing view of what it means for a dancer to be truly expressive. This approach starts with the dancer rather than the work. In this view, the dancer has a distinctive physicality, point of view and personality. Rather than moulding themselves to the style of the work, these dancers give their own unique performance of it. One might say that the dance serves the dancer in this approach.

In the 1980s, I watched Alexandra Danilova teach at the School of American Ballet and, to me, she exemplified this type of training. Danilova created an atmosphere where the dancers were encouraged to present their personalities. Dancers who meet this more individualistic definition of expressivity shape the dance to suit them, not the other way around.

These are not new ideas, and I am neither arguing that one approach is better than the other, nor that they are mutually exclusive. Indeed, the most powerful performances are often those where both come into play, and the dancer reveals an essential aspect of themself while remaining true to the spirit of the work.

The challenge is that the second approach requires from the dancer a projection of individuality and an assertion of ego that is typically at odds with the deep conservatism of much of the ballet I see today. As more ballets slip into the hands of trusts and coaches after the passing of their creators, the first approach, which would appear to honour choreographers to a larger extent, has become more popular. Increasingly, the idea of faithful recreation of a work is being used to impose one particular interpretation. When they set or teach a ballet, too many coaches and stagers are not encouraging a spirit of discovery in dancers that would develop their own expressivity. This imposition also has the unfortunate side effect of making dancers more concerned about delivering an historically accurate and coach-sanctioned interpretation, rather than with giving their personal and authoritative reading of the work.

In too many cases, coaches have assumed power at the expense of dancers with the result that audiences are denied the thrill of dance's inherently autobiographical and ephemeral nature. Dancers must be encouraged to find their own distinctive voices, confident in the knowledge that there is not one best way, but many different ways to dance steps, understand characters and respond to the music. It is the authenticity, not correctness, of an interpretation that makes dancing truly expressive. ▼

Jennifer Fournier is a former principal dancer of the National Ballet of Canada and the Suzanne Farrell Ballet.

Betty Oliphant teaching ballet at Canada's National Ballet School, c. 1960s
Photo: Courtesy of Canada's National Ballet School

Global REPORTS

Vancouver

by Kaija Pepper

Louise Lecavalier is a true diva of dance, a small powerhouse who blazes across the stage and brings audiences to their feet. She performs in such a frank manner it looks tossed off, though the richly textured array of force and momentum she embodies is the result of a lifetime of dedication. Lecavalier, punk darling of the eighties and nineties, is now 57 and a mother of twin teenagers, but in *So Blue* — performed here in January at the PuSh Festival — the Montreal artist is still so darn cool, wearing sports pants and hoody, with an angular, blonde haircut.

So Blue, which Lecavalier choreographed, is a duet with Frédéric Tavernini, who is onstage partnering her for about half the time. A calm bear of a man, he was too sensible, perhaps, to dance for a whole hour in high gear, as Lecavalier does. The show, which has been seen all over (reviewed at its 2013 premiere in *Dance International* by Linde Howe-Beck), is a little unbalanced structurally, a little repetitive, and so forth and so on — but the audience at the Wong Experimental Theatre roared its approval, and I was happy to add my roar, too.

A few nights later, there was more roaring, this time at the sold-out Queen Elizabeth Theatre, filled from the orchestra to the upper gods for a group of flamboyant Russian-styled ballerinas and their gallant partners. Les Ballets Trockadero de Monte Carlo, the New York company of 15 men, presented a warm-hearted, well-danced (grand jetés, fouettés and all) satire on the foibles and conventions of classical ballet.

The Trocks were founded in 1974; then, men dancing en travesti in tutus and pointe shoes carried shock value. Today, not so much. The Trocks, however, have more going for them than mere cross-dressing. Olga Supphosova, who "made her first public appearance in a KGB lineup," Nina Immobilashvili, "the Great Terror of the international ballet world" and Sergey Legupski, one of five Legupski Brothers, are just three of the funny, very human characters created by the international artists of the company (Robert Carter, Alberto Pretto and Giovanni Goffredo in the roles above).

A highlight of Chutzpah! festival at the Rothstein Theatre was Los Angeles' BODYTRAFFIC, who brought a mixed repertory that included Kyle Abraham's *Kollide*. The New York-based Abraham is popular these days, and *Kollide* (2013) shows why: his movement, for five dancers, is subtle, sensual and musical, building its own logic of twists and curves.

Also at Chutzpah!, *Glory*, by Vancouver's Shay Kuebler, featured a group of six playing out action movie clichés. Glory was glimpsed, but quietly, in a few moments when Kuebler simply danced, unburdened with story. His compact body spun and lunged with ease and elegance in a relaxed vocabulary influenced by hip-hop and martial arts.

Yet another fest — the Vancouver International Dance Festival — brought its annual gift: free pre-show shows. Benjamin Kamino (a curator with Toronto's Dancemakers) presented his provocative solo, *Nudity. Desire,* first seen here in 2011. In this iteration, Kamino lounged afterward in the Roundhouse exhibition hall, fully nude, fully comfortable, somehow innocent and edgy at the same time.

Another free show, *Tao Te* by Hungarian Ferenc Fehér, was an absurdist encounter between two men in dark suits (Fehér and Ákos Dózsa), who gobbled their picnic before engaging in choreographic skips, hops and falls in relationship to each other, or not, with apparent passive or aggressive intention.

On the Roundhouse mainstage, Montreal's Benoît Lachambre presented his *Snakeskins*, a secretive, jokey "fake solo," with the often masked Lachambre supported onstage by performer Daniele Albanese (masked throughout) and musician Hahn Rowe. The dark, muscular piece featured a hard body that rather tediously jerked and convulsed. Yet the evening felt redeemed by the whimsical ending: Lachambre fluttered and swayed while a stagehand entered and began to shut things down, and, finally, the audience shuffled out, which seemed what Lachambre was directing us to do, though he was still dancing.

Headlining the international festival, Japan's Dairakudakan brought 22 white-painted bodies to the upscale Playhouse for *Mushi no Hoshi — Space Insect*. The sci-fi horror story was choreographed in 2014 by artistic director Akaji Maro, who studied under Tatsumi Hijikata, a founder of butoh. The troupe presented an old-school gender-based division of labour: the men were bald, cast as the aggressive insects (at one point, their heads were covered by upside down kettles, creating blind, long-snouted faces); the women, their hair in buns or covered with short, girlish wigs, were the victims, including one Sacrificed Girl.

A quick preview to end: in *Vital Few*, a work-in-progress by Vancouver's up-and-coming 605 Collective, all eight dancers stood strong and individual within the ensemble, including choreographers Lisa Gelley and Josh Martin. The opening — in silence — was concise, subtle and highly musical, boding well for the premiere at next year's festival. ▼

Les Ballets Trockadero de Monte Carlo in *Swan Lake*
Photo: Sascha Vaughn

Winnipeg

by Holly Harris

The Royal Winnipeg Ballet continued its diamond anniversary season with one of the world's most beloved classical ballets, *Swan Lake*, its first production since 2010 of Marius Petipa/Lev Ivanov's ghostly ballet blanc, in a version originally staged by Galina Yordanova in 1987. The March performances featured company soloist Sophia Lee in her debut as Odette/Odile, as well as new principal Liang Xing, formerly with the National Ballet of China, as Prince Siegfried. The lithe Xing arrived in the Prairie city last year, performing as a guest artist.

The demanding dual role of Odette/Odile could arguably be the zenith of any ballerina's career. That the charismatic Lee, 24, has been given the opportunity at this relatively early stage of life attests to her star power. With every slight head quiver and flutter of her fluid arms, Lee crafted an achingly vulnerable, troubled swan too shy to gaze upon her hunter Prince.

Her emotional trajectory included a breathtaking White Swan Pas de Deux performed with Xing during which you could hear the proverbial pin drop. Its seductive counterpart, the Black Swan Pas de Deux — including its famous 32 fouettés — saw the chameleonic dancer morph into the cunning Odile, with a few shaky landings quickly forgiven for her compelling artistry.

As a danseur noble, Xing matched Lee step for regal step, his exquisitely lyrical lines infusing his role with natural elegance. The two shared palpable onstage chemistry, their trust evident during their sky-high lifts.

Soloist Yosuke Mino reprised his 2010 role as the Jester, popping like a champagne cork while springing across the stage. Second soloist Eric Nipp infused his Rothbart with rugged athleticism, lording his power over the two lovers.

Elizabeth Lamont, Sarah Davey and Stephan Possin deserve special mention for their tightly honed pas de trois. The corps de ballet as the flock of swan maidens also proved especially strong, with their whirling white tutus magically catching light during the lake scenes' tableaux.

The Royal Winnipeg Ballet has a growing track record of incorporating guest troupes into its productions, with Winnipeg's Polish Dance Ensemble SPK Iskry (translated as "sparks") performing the boot-stomping Mazurka during Act III's divertissement. By mining the province's rich heritage of ethnic diversity, the Royal Winnipeg Ballet has created a savvy way of drawing new audience members who may not otherwise attend classical dance, potentially creating new balletomanes for the future.

The lavish 150-minute story ballet set to Tchaikovsky's lushly romantic score also featured the Winnipeg Symphony Orchestra led by RWB music director Tadeusz Biernacki. Peter Farmer's opulent sets and costumes ranged from richly brocaded robes and jackets to 28 brand-new, sparkling white tutus. The tulle confections replaced the company's 25-year-old costumes, meticulously rebuilt after its fundraising campaign Tutus in Bloom raised more than $60,000 for the ambitious project that lasted one year.

Also celebrating an auspicious anniversary this year is the RWB School Professional Division's 25-year-old annual First Steps Choreography Competition. Founded at the behest of students in 1990 by a former faculty member, choreographer and educator Josée Garant, the event provides an opportunity for aspiring dancemakers to test their mettle. This year's weeklong February competition, held at the Royal Winnipeg Ballet's newly renovated Founders' Studio (now with a professional stage area and lighting), showcased 14 eclectic works ranging from classical ballet to hot jazz. With a total of 10 awards, the top prize went to Level 6 student Nicolas Noguera's *Game Number 13*, a classically based ensemble work for five dancers performed on pointe, inspired by Yann Martel's novel *Beatrice and Virgil*.

Jurors included choreographers and former Royal Winnipeg Ballet School alumni Mark Godden and Jorden Morris, as well as Vancouver-based independent dance artist Heather Myers, and was chaired by the now Miami-based Garant.

NAfro Dance Productions presented a new production of *Pudya,* a full-length work choreographed by founding artistic director Casimiro Nhussi in 2009. Inspired by Africa's Makonde people's traditional ceremony of communicating with ancestors, the theatrically charged show at the Gas Station Arts Centre February 28 to March 1 featured vibrant guest dancers, Toronto-based Sale Almirante Alberto and Montreal's Izzy Bangs, as well as NAfro's live drumming band in which Nhussi also performs.

The 12-year-old company's shows have grown stronger since the ambitious, three-day Moving Inspirations festival that marked its first decade in 2012. Known for a broad range of stylistic influences — NAfro productions are a melting pot of contemporary and African dance, including eclectic musical scores blending traditional drums with electronic soundscapes — this company seems to have discovered a firmer footing as an increasingly important player in the country's dance community. Seeing Bangs' acrobatic handsprings and gravity-defying leaps that capped its latest show bore testament to the spirit of renewal and confidence now defining Nhussi's troupe. ▼

Adrienne Bot and Shae-Lynn Martin in Philippe Larouche's *Blink and Miss*, RWB School Professional Division's First Steps Choreography Competition
Photo: Vince Pahkala

Toronto

by Michael Crabb

Toronto's Dancemakers has been around since 1974, but it has evolved to the extent that today's troupe bears little resemblance to its ancestor. It began as a co-operative venture, a one-off showcase for a group mostly comprised of York University dance department alumni. Its debut was successful enough to warrant additional appearances and in short order Dancemakers became the new kid on a very small block of Canadian contemporary companies. By nature it was a modern dance repertory troupe offering a mix of new work, often by emerging talents, plus acquisitions from the international dance supermarket.

Co-operative ventures have a way of unravelling, and Dancemakers moved to the more traditional model of an artistic director-led organization, although the position was mostly shared until Carol Anderson assumed sole directorship in 1985. Anderson choreographed for the troupe, but her works never defined its aesthetic. That changed when, after her departure, Dancemakers' board appointed Bill James, on the assumption that the troupe would be the platform for his specific choreographic vision. He didn't last long, but Serge Bennathan, who succeeded James in 1990, did.

In many ways, Bennathan's 16-year sojourn, during which the stamp of his choreography very much defined its identity, was a golden age for Dancemakers. But, as often happens, the artistic sap gradually ebbed and by the time Bennathan resigned in 2006, there were even rumours the company might call it a day. Instead it called Michael Trent.

His approach became increasingly experimental and, from playing annual seasons at Harbourfront Centre, Toronto's prestigious venue for contemporary dance, Trent's troupe retreated to its small-capacity studio theatre in a converted booze factory. It became the joke among the older generation that Dancemakers was the last place you'd go to see actual dancing. It all became very intellectual and hip, and often tedious.

As granting agencies circled, Trent attempted to fashion a survival plan that would see Dancemakers become something not dissimilar to Ottawa's former Le Groupe Dance Lab, which came to a messy end in 2009. Then the board effectively, and not very elegantly, ousted Trent a year ago and, in yet another attempt at survival by adaptation, embraced the principles of Trent's "dance incubation" production model but now under the leadership of executive director Robert Sauvey and two co-curators: Emi Forster and former Dancemakers performer/choreographer Benjamin Kamino.

The idea, so long as the funding holds, is to offer three selected dance artists the chance to experiment and choreograph during multi-year staggered residencies. The emphasis is on exploration not product, although there will be showings of work and sessions involving audience feedback. The first two resident artists are Dana Michel and Zoja Smutny.

Given the emphasis on innovation, it was disconcerting to find the initial offerings redolent of the kind of performance art/dance installation fare fashionable among the avant garde decades ago. That's not to say Michel's Toronto premiere of an earlier work called *1976* wasn't worth watching. She's an extraordinary performer and her personally intense characterization of a woman in the midst of an identity crisis was gripping. Smutny's *Recent Future*, performed with Dancemakers company member Simon Portugal, seemed mainly concerned with exploring the artist-audience interface. Genitalia were amply visible through fishnet hose and there was much crawling about and gazing into people's eyes.

A week later Michel presented *1976, have several*, a re-imagined version of her solo for a cast of four, about which the less said the better.

These are early days for the revamped Dancemakers. One hopes the company is given the chance to prove the worth of its new artistic mandate before the jury retires to consider its verdict.

It's no secret in the ballet business — and in these days of diminishing public grants big ballet is very much a business — that mixed bills are a hard sell. To fill a theatre you need ballets with magnetic titles. Was it not Balanchine who decades ago quipped that all ballets should be called *Swan Lake* so people would come?

This doubtlessly explains why this past winter the National Ballet of Canada had trouble meeting its sales revenue target for seven performances of a made-in-heaven mixed bill, but felt confident in following it with a 15-show run of Christopher Wheeldon's *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland*, the spectacular, family-friendly dance entertainment's third revival in less than four years.

The mixed bill covered a wide gamut, from Balanchine's 1956 *Allegro Brillante*, a company premiere, to Wayne McGregor's 2006 *Chroma,* in which the dancers sometimes look like insects who've been sprayed with something lethally toxic. Sandwiched between these polar extremities were a revival of James Kudelka's popular Johnny Cash ballet, *The Man in Black*, and Wheeldon's short but irresistibly sweet *Carousel (A Dance)*, another company premiere.

There were glowing reviews in the major dailies. Apparently, there was positive social media buzz, too. Yet people did not come; at least, not enough of them. It makes one wonder how long the art of ballet can be sustained when companies feel compelled to gear their programming toward audiences who are basically just looking for a fun night out. ▼

Jillian Vanstone with Artists of the National Ballet of Canada in Christopher Wheeldon's *Carousel (A Dance)*
Photo: Karolina Kuras

Montreal

by Linde Howe-Beck

The choreography Sylvain Émard chose to celebrate his company's 25th anniversary with at home in Montreal was dark, desperate and penetrating. Created two years ago in France, *Ce n'est pas la fin du monde* is an all-male work about entrapment, fear and the inability to escape hard-wired behaviours.

Noted particularly for the emotional force of his own solo roles, Émard is also a prolific choreographer of group works for his company, Sylvain Émard Danse. His most outstanding talent may be creating raw and complicated plotless dances for male interpreters performing repetitive layers of simple, vivid gestures to show internal struggle.

Ce n'est pas la fin du monde is typical Émard. It's a tour de force for seven cardiovascularly superb and internationally experienced dancers in their prime (Adam Barruch, Dylan Crossman, Mark Medrano, Laurence Ramsay, Manuel Roque, Neil Sochasky and Georges-Nicolas Tremblay). In late January at the Agora de la danse, they vigorously explored concerns about masculinity in a world of changing values and mores. Result? The playful-sounding title was exposed as cruel commentary since, from start to finish, the piece showed men struggling with the realization that traditional male roles were no longer needed and they had no idea how to adapt. It looked like the end of their world.

Also endowed with the acuity of a visual artist, like many Montreal choreographers Émard makes set and lighting design full partners to dance. *Ce n'est pas la fin du monde* takes place beneath a low-slung sculpture of box-like crates by designer Richard Lacroix through which André Rioux's lights filter beautifully, creating black-and-white patterns on the floor below. The environment looked welcoming at first, but soon its hovering position suggested threat. The massive sculpture hung ominously low as if at any moment it could drop and squash the frantic men below.

The dancers were unrelentingly active, spewing testosterone in overlapping challenges of muscle and mayhem. From stick-slender to burly, tall or short, they tested their mettle against each other (or against the fear of whatever it was that propelled them to confront tradition) in a ceaseless questioning ritual pursued the only way they knew — with hereditary machismo.

Their upside-down lifts, animalistic prowls, spins and tearing leaps, which appeared to grow spontaneously out of the moment, reoccurred over and over in new combinations leading to the same impasse: old behaviours were useless.

A favourite movement, one Émard has used in other works, was a striking visual metaphor for *Ce n'est pas la fin du monde:* the men galloped forward without seeing because each was blinded by an arm in front of his eyes.

Yet even though they charged about abruptly, there was a curious suggestion of smoothness, almost softness, to their actions. As natural adversaries, the men seemed united in their predicament and often supported each other gently. Volatile lifts suddenly dissolved as bodies dripped to the floor, men reached out and embraced each other when extreme physical machinations drove them to the edge of despair. But if they realized this ability to offer comfort might be a clue to changing, they never let on.

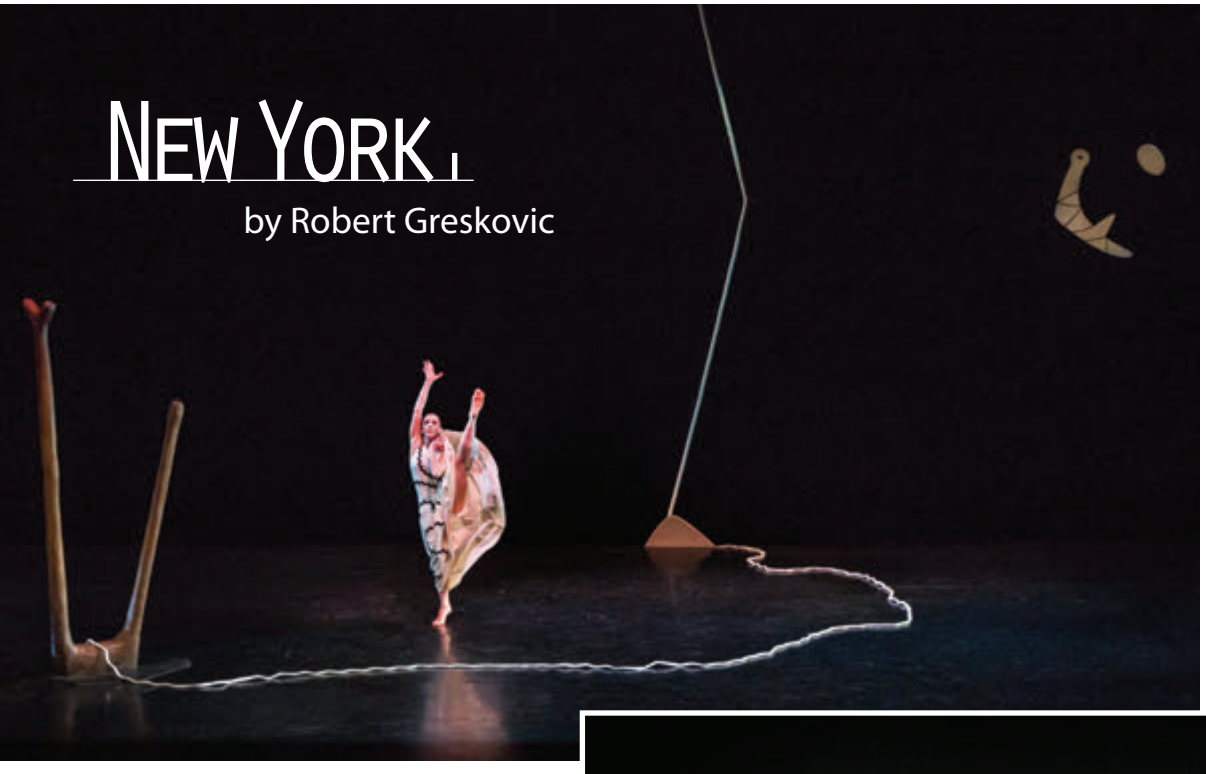
Watching *Ce n'est pas la fin du monde* was a sad, unsettling experience. As usual, Émard established his gestural vocabulary early on, stirring it through the duration of the piece. Likewise his dynamics were defined and recycled. The work stretched evenly and heavily across the hour as the spectator realized there would be no resolution to the men's problem. Strive as they might, they would not or could not mutate. They seemed destined to repeat themselves forever, imprisoned by their inability to change.

Ever a deep and thoughtful choreographer, Sylvain Émard — who received the 1996 Jean A. Chalmers Award in recognition of his body of work — has created more than 30 dances for his company and toured frequently throughout North America and Europe. In 2009, he began choreographing a joyous series of line dances called *Le Grand Continental* for thousands of amateur dancers across Canada, the United States and Mexico. More than 75,000 people so far have watched these outdoor creations. ▼

Justin Gionet and Georges-Nicolas Tremblay in Sylvain Émard's *Ce n'est pas la fin du monde*
Photo: Valerie Simmons

New York

by Robert Greskovic



Blakeley White-McGuire in Martha Graham's *Errand into the Maze*

Martha Graham Dance Company in Martha Graham's *Steps in the Street*

Photos: Brigid Pierce

As I file this report, Paul Taylor, former dancer and longtime leading American choreographer, is opening a season under a new banner. For the more than four decades I have been following Taylor, his troupe was called the Paul Taylor Dance Company. This season will proceed with a changed name: Paul Taylor's American Modern Dance. This reflects a shift of focus by the troupe from an all-Taylor repertory to one that provides a place for specially chosen, current modern dance groups on select programs. This premiere season, works by Doris Humphrey and Shen Wei will take to the stage as performed by Limón Dance Company and Shen Wei Dance Arts respectively.

Meanwhile, as this new phase plays out, France's Compagnie CNDC d'Angers, under the direction of former Merce Cunningham dancer and assistant choreographer Robert Swinston, is in town with a Cunningham *Event*, that is, an admixture of segments from Cunningham's dances strung together into a whole, new arrangement. The Angers performances make for rare offerings of Cunningham works hereabouts nowadays, since the company that Cunningham founded and ran in New York City until his death in 2009, and which closed in 2011, left the large repertory of his dances to be staged by groups other than the very one once almost exclusively connected to it.

I note these changing aspects of dance in New York to indicate the altered landscape for the art form largely thought to have been greatly formulated and promulgated in the United States. Last month, the Martha Graham Dance Company, now under the direction of former Graham dancer Janet Eilber (who has been in place since 2005), played two weeks at the intimate Joyce Theater, where the Angers troupe subsequently appeared. Eilber's seasons come with thematic titles, this time Shape&Design, and with introductions delivered by the director herself providing background and anecdotal insights into the works on offer.

The Shape&Design repertory included 12 works by Graham and three recent creations commissioned from contemporary choreographers who were asked to keep in mind Graham's aesthetic, however broadly interpreted.

Additionally, the season showed six études, or what the company has called since first presenting them in 2007, *Lamentation Variations*, which reflect specially choreographed dances inspired by a 1940's film of Graham performing part of her 1930 solo of the same name. Of the longer recent creations, none offered much as memorable dance theatre. The latest, *The Snow Falls in the Winter*, is a dance-theatre work with credit for choreography, sound design and costumes by Annie-B Parson, with co-direction by Paul Lazar. The 24-minute result, noted as taking inspiration from Ionesco's 1951 absurdist play, *The Lesson*, provided the Graham dancers — today an especially impressive ensemble — with opportunities to act and to animate a bare-bones presentation of a fractured working rehearsal suggesting the characters and expressions in Ionesco's depiction of a student, a teacher and some related individuals. While it had moments of wit, the staging amounted to little more than an extended sketch.

Parson's work managed, however, to approximate more affecting theatre than the mostly empty and often melodramatic displays that make up Nacho Duato's gloomy 2013 *Rust*, said to explore the horrors of torture, or of Adonis Foniadakis' churning and little more than decorative 2014 *Echo*, which takes as its theme the Greek myth of Narcissus and Echo.

Of the *Lamentation Variations* I was able to catch, only Larry Keigwin's full company effort to Chopin, with its compelling presentation of small-scale gestures and delicate physical touches, managed to make for a study that accumulated a through line leading to an effective punch-line conclusion.

As a pointed example of the run's look at shape and design in Graham's canon, Eilber commissioned architect Frank Gehry to provide stage decoration for Graham's 1936 *Steps in the Street*, an excerpt from *Chronicle*. The result was a fascinating, ghostly, white-on-black Rorschach-test-like graphic design that hovered by way of subtle animation, sometimes a little distractingly, behind Graham's often angular, stark and driven dance for 12 women.

Of the other Graham works on view, Eilber's specially arranged suite of dances from *Letter to the World* (1940) came as the most recent of the company's efforts to revive further works from its Graham legacy. The 20-minute excerpting of the hour-long dance glimpsed Graham's fascinating and often compelling view into the world of American poet Emily Dickinson, which has not been seen here for 27 years. The suite's title, *At Summer's Full*, is taken from a phrase in a Dickinson poem.

Part of Eilber's commentary reminded viewers that, in 2012, superstorm Sandy damaged or destroyed a number of Graham's stage props and costumes when it hit their storage area. The original designs for *Letter* — set by Arch Lauterer, costumes by Edythe Gilfond — were among these casualties, so for this suite, trim and mostly black costuming was provided by BodyWrappers. One of Lauterer's set pieces, a curious, asymmetrical bench, was, however, evident with a fresh coat of white paint. Hunter Johnson's serviceable score was heard on tape (as was all the music), and Graham's sometimes springy and sometimes seemingly haunted choreographic actions provided a partial look at *Letter*'s inner workings. Here, the choreography for Graham herself in the role of One Who Dances got spread among the cast's four women. None of Dickinson's poetry was recited, as happens in the full work by a performer called One Who Speaks.

Happily, some striking, spare designs of Isamu Noguchi were recently fully restored. They framed a sterling presentation of Graham's 1947 *Errand into the Maze*. The performances I saw by Blakeley White-McGuire, in Graham's original role, and Abdiel Jacobsen as the dance's fearsome antagonist, effectively rendered their roles as related to the legend of the Minotaur and the Labyrinth that inspired Graham's dancemaking. Each proved effectively dramatic without sinking to melodramatic efforts that have sometimes, since Graham's death, cheapened the effect of her dance theatre. ▼

San Francisco

by Allan Ulrich

January traditionally means new beginnings, and the San Francisco dance scene abounded in novelty in the year's early months. On January 15, the glorious Wendy Whelan relaunched her national *Restless Creature* tour, featuring four new duets commissioned by the former New York City Ballet principal from Alejandro Cerrudo, Joshua Beamish, Kyle Abraham and Brian Brooks, who also partnered the lady in their creations. It was a treat to witness Whelan, who has apparently recovered from the injuries that had sidelined the tour, introduced at Jacob's Pillow Festival in 2013. These performances marked Whelan's Bay Area debut.

The evening added up to a kind of dance laboratory for gifted artists of a younger generation who have no compunction about mingling classical and modern vocabularies. Whelan is fearless in going where the choreographer leads her; she seems to have lost none of her speed, flexibility and gusto over the decades, and the 47-year-old ballerina was nothing less than astonishing. In fact, age seems to have erased that brittle quality some observers have noticed occasionally in her New York City Ballet performances. Whelan's thirst for the stage, with its possibilities and risks, is still the wonder of the dance world.

The arrangement of the four duets may have added up to a bit of autobiography. As the evening progressed, it appeared Whelan was gradually transitioning from the ballet arena to another place. In the opening, *Ego et Tu* (2013), she appeared in slippers and a short white skirt you might expect to find on a Balanchine dancer. Partner Cerrudo (from Hubbard Street Dance Chicago) kept their duet mostly vertical; tricky extensions and waving arms caught the inevitability of the Philip Glass score. Beamish's *Conditional Sentences* (completed in 2015) diverted with its wittily misaligned couple who reach for a partner and never connect until the end. This was classy, sophisticated stuff, employing the languages of ballet and hip hop, set to Bach's keyboard *Partita No. 2*.

Whelan descended to the floor for much of Abraham's *The Serpent and the Snake* (2013). The MacArthur Fellow got down with his partner, and they coupled and separated in a wide range of dynamics, exploring each other's bodies and sensibilities.

Brooks' *First Fall* (2012) seemed a natural summing up. The pair enters from different sides of the stage and they seek and find mutual support. Whelan does indeed fall, Brooks protects her, and she truly seems to arrive at a new place.

San Francisco Ballet provided little novelty in the 2015 season, thanks, mostly, to its three-week Paris season last summer, which devoured essential rehearsal time. But, at least, we did get two premieres, both creations that originated within the company. The first, *Manifesto*, arrived February 24, thanks to Myles Thatcher, a 24-year-old member of the corps who was creating his initial piece for the mainstage subscription series.

Thatcher has created several dances for the school's showcase concerts and he worked with Alexei Ratmansky in last year's Rolex Mentor and Protégé Arts Initiative. *Manifesto* plundered movements from Bach — from the *Goldberg Variations* and *A Musical Offering*, to be precise — for a 30-minute abstraction made for three couples and a six-member corps, all swathed in Mark Zappone's brownish costumes and Mary Louise Geiger's obscure lighting.

Manifesto is a remarkable, if not totally successful creation. Thatcher proves highly inventive at the phrase level, permitting neither audience nor dancers a moment to breathe. And he fashions group patterns with flair. Bach's formal structures provide a carpet for all those unisons and canons Thatcher relishes, and he savours working with Bach's rhythmic figurations (here, in orchestrations by Matthew Naughtin). You should tire of those arms flung in unison or those small ensembles rushing around, but he propels them with irresistible verve.

Where *Manifesto* leaves us wanting is in the duets, which often look like canonic studies. The superbly extended Jennifer Stahl, partnered by Sean Orza, almost made a case for the first coupling. Thatcher still hasn't jettisoned the mannerisms of youth. Some of us viewers tire very easily of watching squads of dancers seated on a gloomy stage with their backs to us. If this work ultimately lacks a direction, Thatcher is talented and has plenty of time to mature.

Despite the rapturous reception accorded *Manifesto*, the experience to remember these months was the February 26 revival of Jerome Robbins' *Dances at a Gathering*, absent from the War Memorial Opera House for 12 years. The company performed it satisfactorily then, but this time around, in the staging by Jean-Pierre Frohlich and Jenifer Ringer Fayette, the first cast brought a delectable intimacy to these sundry Chopin piano works. A couple of dancers had appeared in the last revival, but the casting was mostly new. Maria Kochetkova's lyrical woman in pink, Mathilde Froustey's temptress in yellow and Lorena Feijoo's flirt in green led the women. The male standouts — Joseph Walsh's boy in brown and Carlo Di Lanno's guy in green — are new company recruits and both have glorified every ballet in which they appeared this year. ▼

Norika Matsuyama and Steven Morse of San Francisco Ballet in Myles Thatcher's *Manifesto*
Photo: Erik Tomasson

London

by Kathrine Sorley Walker

Winter in London is not, dancewise, a particularly creative season, and the larger companies relied on popular classics to entice audiences into their theatres. Families from out of town, faced with the expense of rail fares, restaurant meals and high-priced performances, will only book for familiar productions. As a result, old stagings of *Swan Lake* were danced by the Royal Ballet at Covent Garden (the Anthony Dowell/Yolanda Sonnabend version) and English National Ballet at the London Coliseum (the Derek Deane/Peter Farmer version).

The Royal Ballet *Swan Lake* featured an impeccable Odette-Odile in Marianela Núñez, excellently partnered by Carlos Acosta. Núñez, who has had a stellar career since graduating from the Royal Ballet School in 1992, also danced Tatiana in John Cranko's always enjoyable *Onegin*. This deeply emotional and sensitively conceived role was impressively interpreted by its creator Marcia Haydée, and later by Lynn Seymour, and although Núñez dances it effectively, she fails to bring the drama to its fullest life.

Cranko, a prolific and inventive choreographer, is sadly overlooked these days. Certainly Birmingham Royal Ballet has the delicious *Pineapple Poll* in its repertoire, but many other works would be good to see in revival. *Onegin* is a finely balanced three-acter, with clear-cut narrative and characterizations. This time, it offered a rewarding debut by Vadim Muntagirov as Lensky, who was equally impressive in the carefree early stages and the tragic duel.

Muntagirov (from Chelyabrinsk in the Ural Mountains) graduated from the Royal Ballet School in 2008. Inexplicably overlooked for company membership, he was snapped up in 2009 by Wayne Eagling for English National Ballet, where he established his authority as a principal dancer and also a notable partnership with the fine prima ballerina Daria Klimentová. He has now joined the Royal Ballet and is a valuable acquisition as a virtuoso dancer and versatile actor.

As the Royal Ballet gained Muntagirov from English National Ballet, so English National Ballet has gained the lovely Alina Cojocaru from the Royal Ballet. At first, her talents were not seen to advantage in the leading roles of *Swan Lake* or *The Nutcracker*. Fortunately, she has been better served in English National Ballet's staging of William Forsythe's *In the Middle, Somewhat Elevated,* in a program at Sadler's Wells.

Three British companies featured at Sadler's Wells recently, including Matthew Bourne's New Adventures. Bourne has revived, and revised, his 2005 *Edward Scissorhands* (music by Terry Davies, designs by Lez Brotherston). This quirky, jokey, strip-cartoon-style production was admirably performed by a company led by Dominic North in an engaging portrait of the unfortunate Edward.

Balletboyz, the company jointly directed by Michael Nunn and William Trevitt, brought *Young Men or How the War turned Boys into Men* to the Wells. This tackled First World War trench warfare in scenes with titles like Shellshock, Gag Gas Gas and Battlefield Landscape. Although there were some powerful solos and ensembles, there was insufficient variety in the choreography by Iván Pérez (a Spaniard based in the Netherlands).

Infinitely refreshing and appealing were the works by Richard Alston included in the 20th anniversary program of the Richard Alston Dance Company at the Wells. *Rejoice in the Lamb* (2014), based on religious verse by the 18th-century English poet Christopher Smart set to music by Benjamin Britten, was eloquently and rhapsodically united with dance by Alston, who is one of the most musically gifted of choreographers. His other work, a premiere, *Nomadic*, drew on a very different type of accompaniment from the Shukar Collective of percussion gypsy music. Two works by Martin Lawrance were *Burning*, an impassioned dance setting of Liszt's *Dante Sonata*, and *Madcap*, to music by Julia Wolfe.

The 2014 Critics' Circle (Dance Section) Awards were presented at The Place in January. Choreographers gaining awards were Akram Khan (modern) and Christopher Wheeldon (classical). Top dancers were Natalia Osipova and Xander Parish (classical) and Wendy Houston and Jonathan Goddard (modern). The De Valois Award for Outstanding Achievement went to Carlos Acosta.

Among this winter's obituaries one deserves particular mention: John Chesworth, OBE, who died in November 2014, aged 84. His remarkable contribution to British dance began with the old classical Ballet Rambert when he danced in a range of works by Ashton and Tudor, as well as in the classics. When that company made its radical change to modern dance in 1966, he turned to avant-garde choreography and later moved toward the directorship. He became the company's artistic director from 1974 to 1980, when he brought forward Alston, Siobhan Davies, Christopher Bruce and Glen Tetley. From 1985 until 2003, he was founder-director of the National Youth Dance Company. In a tribute, current Rambert director Mark Baldwin wrote that Chesworth "was enormously charismatic and had a beautiful speaking voice ..." ▼

Nicholas Bodych and Richard Alston Dance Company in Richard Alston's *Rejoice in the Lamb*
Photo: Chris Nash

Paris

by François Fargue

With no official "dubbing" ceremony at the Paris Opera Ballet for welcoming a new director, Benjamin Millepied has been primarily behind the scenes (notwithstanding his profuse media coverage) until the January press conference announcing the 2015-2016 season.

Millepied sat in his signature crisp white shirt and close-fitting dark suit, next to new general director Stéphane Lissner, against four huge posters showing dawn-to-dusk forest scenes, each bearing one of the four words that constitute the upcoming season's motto: Vibrer, Oser, Frémir, Désirer, that is, to feel, to dare, to shiver and to desire, all followed by an enigmatic question mark.

A composed tea-drinking Millepied announced an appetizing season, starting mid-September with Balanchine's *Theme and Variations* and a yet unnamed creation of his own, not to mention the traditional défilé (the parade of the corps and étoiles) with a new score by Wagner.

Classics next season include *Giselle*, Nureyev's *La Bayadère* and *Romeo and Juliet*, as well as a *Nutcracker* that will be a joint creation by five choreographers (Sidi Larbi Cherkaoui, Édouard Locke, Arthur Pita, Liam Scarlett and Millepied): an oddity to look forward to. Also worth anticipating is Tamara Rojo's English National Ballet in *Le Corsaire*.

Other guests include Batsheva Dance Company. There are also some seven new creations planned by the likes of McGregor, Justin Peck and two arch representatives of French non-dance, Jérôme Bel, who created the exquisite *Véronique Doisneau* in 2006 for Paris Opera Ballet, and Boris Charmatz, who will create something for the Garnier's public areas.

Some enchanting news is the return of William Forsythe, who will be a resident choreographer in the years to come. Works by Merce Cunningham will also in time take pride of place, said Millepied (who incidentally declared he once considered leaving the New York City Ballet to join Cunningham's company). There will also be a new piece by Maguy Marin.

Besides admitting his desire to surprise the public, Millepied insisted this program was designed to allow the greatest number of dancers to achieve their potential regardless of rank. While praising the company as one of the best in the world, he has hinted in interviews that an increased competitive spirit would not be unwelcome in a company where dancers are safe civil servants.

In that spirit, a few sujets were given a chance to take on lead roles in the restaging of Nureyev's no-frills *Swan Lake* in March. Some, like Héloïse Bourdon, have benefited from the fact that the bona fide étoiles were injured. Partnered by étoile Josua Hoffalt, who is the epitome of elegance and clarity in the classical style combined with a cool and refined nonchalance, Bourdon's stupendous balances and faultless performance was acclaimed by the audience and won over the critics, too.

A thin and seemingly frail dancer, Bourdon showed great steely strength throughout; she must have worked hard to get those arms so right. While she may not be one of the diva-like Swan princesses, her gritty determination to shuffle off those eternal feathers and be a woman again is an interesting dramatic contrast with Nureyev's conception of the prince as a feckless dreamer who fails to save her from Rothbart. As Rothbart, here both the prince's mentor and an evil wizard in disguise, étoile Karl Paquette hit just the right Machiavellian chord and danced with bravado.

On the contemporary scene, Philippe Découflé is one of the few who can fill Théâtre National de Chaillot for a whole month. He is also one who trots out the same formula each time. Familiarity breeds success, and Découflé has become opium to the people, while still garnering praise from even the more highbrow dance police. Each show is a renewed celebration of diversity of race, gender and type of dance. It is cabaret-meets-ballet-meets-hip-hop-meets-circus and whatever else crosses his hyperactive mind. It is tricks and puns played out amidst changing décor and state-of-the art video projection. It is mindless non sequitur entertainment.

Découflé's latest opus, *Contact*, was publicized as a musical if only because there is a two-person band playing live onstage. Nosfell and Pierre Le Bourgeois play and sing their own songs and could have stood on their own without all the nonsensical circus going on around them.

As I write, I hear Laura Hecquet has been made an étoile at the Paris Opera following her performance as Odette-Odile. The news will surely come as a surprise to most. Hecquet, 31, was once a young hopeful at the company, but had somehow been superseded by other new recruits. No doubt she was a little surprised herself. It is in the style of previous director Brigitte Lefèvre to name étoiles past their 30s, but one would have thought Millepied would choose someone younger as his first étoile. But the night is still young. Good luck to the new star, who still has a good 10 years to shine. ▼

Héloïse Bourdon and Josua Hoffalt in Paris Opera Ballet's *Swan Lake*
Photo: Ann Ray

Copenhagen

by Anne-Marie Elmby

A curtain decorated with a huge abstraction of a pair of white swan wings met audience members when they entered the auditorium of Operaen in March for the Royal Danish Ballet's brand-new, two-act *Swan Lake*. As the music began, the wings fluttered and we were taken through a maze of video-projected lattice girders into a gloomy funeral scene. The king has died, and Prince Siegfried must prove himself worthy and find a bride.

Artistic director Nikolaj Hübbe and vice-artistic director Silja Schandorff (former principal and the ultimate Odette-Odile) wanted to rethink the ballet, in which both have danced (in Peter Martins' 1996 version). Their basis is still Marius Petipa and Lev Ivanov's version, but with additional choreography that blends well with the rest. As a tribute to Erik Bruhn, they included the male adagio solo in Act I, which he choreographed for his own 1960 version.

Von Rothbart is here an influential minister at the court, who with his magic intervention orchestrates the intrigue around Prince Siegfried. He is seconded by two stern courtier couples, who lay weighty hands on the prince's shoulders.

Surprisingly, Prince Siegfried appears starry-eyed, as if hypnotized and quite unaware of the deception forming around him. As in traditional versions, he immediately falls in love with Odette, the unobtainable ideal of a white swan princess. When he swears fidelity to the wrong swan, the fortissimo thunder of the orchestra terrifies him and he wakes up to reality. However, love does not conquer evil, and Prince Siegfried's lack of both clear-sightedness and judgment of character becomes his dark destiny: he must marry Von Rothbart's daughter Odile. This dramaturgical twist did not affect one's enjoyment of the striking choreography, though it made the ballet less a fairy tale about love and more a story of Von Rothbart's sinister triumph.

On opening night, J'aime Crandall as Odette with her shy attitude and sad looks hardly dared give in to Alban Lendorf's loving prince, as if she had a premonition he would fail her. Lendorf was brilliant both as a caring partner and in his virtuoso variations.

The following evening Ulrik Birkkjær's expressive skills permeated his portrayal of a soulful Prince Siegfried, who was so infatuated with Holly Jean Dorger's innocent Odette he never doubted the identity of her smiling black-costumed counterpart. Crandall and Dorger were equally able to honour technical challenges with fine lines and musicality, and their clear-cut techniques suited their smiling and alluring Odiles. Both attained their most moving moments when reunited with the repentant prince after his fatal mistake.

Hübbe and Schandorff's strategy seems to be to challenge young talents with leading parts, often with a more experienced partner. Corps dancer Sebastian Haynes does have a special gift, which marked his harmonious and personal phrasing in Prince Siegfried's demanding solos. His honest portrayal of the smitten prince, as he gently embraced principal Susanne Grinder's emotional Odette, gave way to utter desperation at her loss.

The company is blessed with a string of male dancers with soaring jumps, and in the role of the jester, Tim Matiakis, Alexander Bozinoff and Liam Redhead all had a chance to fly, often in symmetry with Benno.

To explore new choreographic talent, first year corps dancer Oliver Starpov and principal Gregory Dean (who danced the prince in a later cast) were given the rare chance to create the dances for the presentation of the foreign princesses to the prince. Dean's Hungarian princess offered cool elegance with her train of four ladies, and his Neapolitan princess displayed southern joie de vivre in a sprightly pas de trois darting between two keen gentlemen. Starpov's Russian princess was encircled and lifted by seven bare-chested men in swirling red skirts. His Spanish princess danced a bullfight-inspired pas de trois with two gentlemen with banderillas (barbed sticks used in bullfighting) stuck on their jackets.

Mia Stensgaard's costumes were in Renaissance style; a grand brocade dress, worn by Mette Bødtcher's white-faced queen, was especially stunning. Throughout, the bird theme became more prominent with feathers added on several costumes.

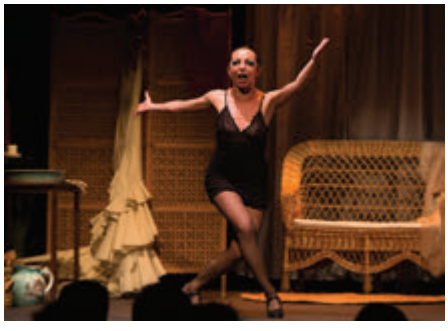
In the impressive lighting design by Finnish Mikki Kunttu, white rays beam from varying angles in the grey and black universe between geometric lattice girders. Lowered from the borders, the rays created changing symmetric patterns, which recurred in video projections on the backdrop and floor. The huge swan wings from the drop curtain reappeared on an intense blue background when the corps of 28 swans swarmed onstage.

Three more casts were planned for later, sold-out shows, meaning each cast got to dance only a couple of performances. Hopefully, the dancers will get the chance to grow into their characters next season. ▼

Alban Lendorf as Prince Siegfried (centre), Jón Axel Fransson as Von Rothbart (far right) and Royal Danish Ballet in Hübbe and Schandorff's *Swan Lake*
Photo: Costin Radu

Jerez de la Frontera

by Justine Bayod Espoz



Jerez de la Frontera put on its flamenco finery once again to usher in the 19th edition of the Jerez Festival from February 20 to March 7. The annual celebration of Spanish dance has weathered several years of economic crisis, but not unscathed. The number of performances has decreased, and so has attendance. The drop in visitors from abroad was particularly noticeable this year, a shift due in part to the large amount of programming overlap with last year's Seville Biennial.

Those who did not make it to Jerez missed a number of exceptional performances, especially those produced and presented by women. This year's festival reveled in feminine beauty and charm regardless of shape, size or age. Flamenco has always celebrated female strength and the poise of maturity, but this woman-positive vibe resonated more intensely than ever before. It was refreshing to watch the restraint and confidence of senior flamenco legend Manuela Carrasco one night, the raging strength and vivacity of the diminutive Olga Pericet the next, and the thick, supple curves and sensuality of Pastora Galvan toward the festival's end.

Three performances exemplified the feminine voice within Spain's contemporary flamenco scene. Luisa Palicio's *Sevilla* was by far the most balanced and elegant production among the young performers, making her a shoo-in as the winner of this year's Revelation Prize, awarded to the festival's most promising up-and-coming artist. Palicio is one of the newest representatives of the style of flamenco dance known as the Seville School. Although born in Estepona, from adolescence on she trained at the prestigious Fundación Cristina Heeren in Seville, studying under the masters of the Seville School where she is now a teacher herself.

Sevilla starts out slightly clichéd as a stark white spotlight illuminates Palicio, clad in a simple black dress against a black-curtain backdrop. She dances competently to the music of Seville's famous Holy Week, yet the choreography lacks originality. Then a deep hoarse voice explodes from the darkness. The voice is

Above left: Luisa Palicio in *Sevilla*

Right 1 & 2: Concha Jareño in *El Baúl de los Flamencos (The Flamenco Trunk)*

Right 3 & 4: Rosario Toledo in *ADN (DNA)*

Photos: Javier Fergo

decidedly masculine, but it issues from a small woman. Singer Ana Gómez is the first surprise in an evening full of unexpectedly beautiful moments with nods to different time periods and styles of dance.

Palicio deftly works the mantón (Spanish shawl) and in her final dance maintains such control of the bata de cola (long train) on her turquoise dress that it seems an extension of her own lithe figure. Gómez's robust singing is complemented by the falsetto voice of Sebastián Cruz, creating a phenomenal gender-bending musical experience. Guest artist Javier Barón, Palicio's teacher, counters her delicacy with a joyous, quick-footed duet and solo. *Sevilla* is a layered and refined work that revels in the glory of Seville and the flamenco that sprung from and continues to evolve in its historic neighbourhoods.

Dancer Rosario Toledo is a celebrated staple at the Jerez Festival, and her show this year was the strongest to date. Toledo explains that in *ADN* (*DNA*) she asks, "Who am I? And what is my hallmark? What is genuine in me? What makes me unique?" *ADN* is a personal and honest work that seems to present a day in the life of Toledo. It's tremendously comical, but also moving, deftly weaving feelings of joy and defeat.

The production opens on Toledo sitting in her dressing room, testing poses that strain to appear sultry, when her cell phone rings. She's overjoyed to speak to a lover whose voice we cannot hear; as she explains that she's about to perform, her bliss turns to heartbreak, and with her first sobs of grief she's pulled out of her dressing room and onstage. In the throes of sorrow, she plasters a spurious grin on her face and dances alegrias, flamenco's most jubilant style, literally called "happiness." We follow Toledo on and off stage; we see her changing between numbers and going out after the show. *ADN* is successful because it is a personal journey that resonates with the audience. We see a raw and exposed Toledo, but also a tough, triumphant woman, who dances through the pain and finds strength and resolution in her work.

In 2009, dancer Concha Jareño was at the Jerez Festival with *Algo*, for which she was that year's Revelation Prize. Jareño's long-awaited return was made on the festival's main stage with the premiere of her latest work, *El Baúl de los Flamencos* (*The Flamenco Trunk*). This exploration of the props, adornments and costuming that define flamenco lived up to every expectation. From the commonly used castanets, fan, mantón and bata de cola to the more obscure finger cymbals, ribbons and wide-brimmed hat, Jareño's show takes the audience on a trip through time, with stops in a variety of locations, from the royal court to sun-drenched fields to the bullring. *El Baúl* is flamenco pageantry at its finest. Mastering the use of the accoutrements featured takes decades, and Jereño and dancer Adrian Santana are indeed young masters whose technique and artistic flare make this production the type of masterpiece the Jerez Festival exists to present. ▼

Oslo

by Fredrik Rütter

One of the best-known Norwegian painters of all time must be Edvard Munch (1863-1944). Although his style changed over the years — he started out with a period of realism, touched anti-naturalism and continued on to symbolism — he became known as one of the best within the expressionist movement.

It would be surprising then if no choreographers in Norway had been inspired to use Munch's pictures as a backdrop, but it is fewer than one would think. The Norwegian National Ballet has had two such productions in the repertoire in its 55 years of existence. The first, *Summernight,* was commissioned by Sonia Arova in the mid-sixties: she hired Amsterdam-born Job Sanders, who used several Munch paintings to make a short ballet.

Then, in 1969, a full-length production called *Towards the Sun* was commissioned by the Bergen International Festival. Norwegian dancers working in different companies came together for this production. *The Sun* is one of Munch's most famous paintings (along with *The Scream*), covering a whole wall in the big concert hall at the University of Oslo. *Towards the Sun* covered Munch's life from birth to death, and many of his paintings were projected on the backdrop. This version, by Norwegian choreographers Edith Roger and Barthold Halle, was a hit, and was later televised and taken into the repertoire of Norwegian National Ballet.

So when modern dance company Carte Blanche recently announced it had commissioned a ballet inspired by Edvard Munch, expectations were high. The ballet *Edvard* is the last one that director Bruno Heynderickx planned before leaving the company. He gave the commission to Spanish choreographer Marcos Morau, who had never worked in Norway before, but had previously created a ballet inspired by Picasso.

Those who looked forward to seeing a stage filled with strong colours such as Munch used in his paintings might have been disappointed; Morau used biography as inspiration: the period when Munch had a nervous breakdown in 1908, when too much alcohol and hard living landed him in an asylum. Munch wrote diaries, and Morau uses fragments from these, read by a dancer; however, it is a complicated text, and there are very few dancers that read well.

The scenography is sterile: a hospital room with five beds, and everything in grey. There are moments of clever, innovative dancing, but, more often than not, all the movements are cut short before they are finished and no lines are completed. The language of movement is extremely staccato, and Morau mostly operates with two or three dancers moving together. The expression is very introverted. Without the program note explaining that the spoken text came from Munch, nothing in the production gave the audience any hint that the piece itself had to do with him. It could have been about any artist, anywhere.

In February 2015, Tanztheater Wuppertal Pina Bausch was back in Oslo with *Masurca Fogo* (1998); the last time the company toured here was with *Vollmond* (2006). *Masurca Fogo* (Fiery Mazurka) is one of Bausch's creations done in collaboration with a European capitol: Lisbon, Portugal, and its colonies, for Expo 98. To research the piece, Bausch and the company lived for a long period in Lisbon, to get to know the city and its people. *Masurca Fogo* is put together with a number of vignettes, short stories about love and dreams, capturing the ambience of life, music, dance, personal relationships and nature. The set is a rocky beach placed far back on the stage, which is framed by huge white walls, and the dancers enter and disappear climbing the rocks.

Some of the reactions overheard expressed pleasure at seeing mature grown-up dancers onstage. It is true, some of the dancers have been with the company for decades, and they know the game.

Every seat was sold out, and it shall be interesting to see how long Lutz Förster, the artistic director today, can keep on travelling the world performing the work of Bausch (who died in 2009). So far it seems there is no danger that it will come to an end.

On a different note, choreographer Hege Haagensrud, who specializes in creating productions for children, presented *The Jury*, designed for a participatory audience of about six years of age. And the Inclusive Dance Company presented *Stjernestøv* (*Stardust*), for children as young as one, which involves travelling to the stars in a spaceship created from highchairs, a whimsical touch. As an adult member of the audience, it was easy to be obsessed with watching the small ones instead of the actual performance. ▼

Caroline Eckly and company artists of Carte Blanche in Marcos Moreau's *Edvard*
Photo: Helge Hansen

Singapore

by Malcolm Tay

Huayi – Chinese Festival of the Arts, which presented the latest offering by Cloud Gate Dance Theatre of Taiwan at the Esplanade Theatre in February, coincided with the Lunar New Year. This traditional holiday marking the coming of spring provided a fitting occasion for the company's performance of *Rice*, artistic director Lin Hwai-min's tribute to a staple food and to the natural wheel of life. Lin was inspired by the organic paddy fields in eastern Taiwan's rural township of Chihshang, where he and the dancers had gone to join in the harvest while cinematographer Chang Hao-jan took footage of the lush landscape and cultivation process. From this came a full-evening work that held a mirror to the inexorable cycle of death and rebirth.

Rice premiered in Taipei in 2013 to celebrate the company's fourth decade, a testament to how far Cloud Gate has come as Taiwan's first professional dance group. Its dancers, trained in diverse traditions including calligraphy and meditation, manifest the jagged eloquence of Martha Graham — whose movement technique Lin has studied in New York — as well as the coiling energies and raw attack of Chinese martial arts. Rather than project toward the audience, the dancers draw viewers into the dialogue of effort and breath within their bodies. They have a style and focus they can indeed call their own.

Framed by projections of Chang's video footage, the performers suggested people at work and the interplay of natural forces. The women in the opening section repeatedly rose on their toes before thumping their heels onto the ground, as if tilling the land to raise crops. Dancers snaking across the stage with arms spread evoked the rippling of wind through tall grass. Later, nine men traded blows with supple wooden poles and slammed the poles onto the floor, their aggression echoing the flames burning the stubs of harvested plants to prepare for the next season.

Some of the more languid parts of *Rice* felt less compelling than others. The trembling dancers in one section paled in comparison to the duet between Huang Pei-hua and Tsai Ming-yuan, their bodies entwined like mating grasshoppers. The score, too, was hardly seamless in its mix of Western opera arias and folk songs in the Hakka dialect, yet just hearing the latter was a gift. Lin rescued these dulcet tunes from today's brassy arrangements and allowed them to shine unaccompanied, a striking reminder of how they once drifted across the fields through the voices of toiling farmers.

Propelled by Chang's close-ups of paddies and panoramas of mountains peaking against the sky, *Rice* showed how video design can enlarge the theatrical scope of dance onstage. This creative kinship between dance and design served as the subject of an exhibition held by the Arts Fission Company, which highlighted aspects of design in various works from its repertoire. Part of Arts Fission's 20th-anniversary events, the exhibition was housed at the National Design Centre (a revamped conservation building that retains architectural traces of its convent history), where the company also premiered two site-based productions.

In *The Homecoming*, a musing on the past and the present, questing group passages — created by the Arts Fission dancers under artistic director Angela Liong's guidance — crisscrossed with guest appearances by former members Bobbi Chen and Scarlet Yu, and by a student ensemble performing ex-assistant director Elysa Wendi's loose retake on an old company piece. *Future Feed* mulled over the cultures and intake of food in a similar format; Liong's ode to rice intersected with contributions from two collaborators, Javanese court dancer Sukarji Sriman's mystic figure of the harvest and Belgium-based Compagnie Irene K's enigmatic pondering on the potato. Both shows happened in the atrium and other spaces throughout the building, but never quite inhabited those areas convincingly.

The Singapore Fringe Festival features smaller dance acts and this year's program had the Asian premiere of *Grand Singe* (*Great Ape*) by Montreal-based French choreographer Nicolas Cantin. Staged at the Esplanade Theatre Studio, it relied more on the charisma of its cast than on the steps to convey the little incidents and follies that can accumulate between a couple. Ellen Furey and Mathieu Campeau eyed each other in varying states of nudity. He sat beside her; she moved away, but he followed her. She stood next to him as he blew up one balloon after another until it burst, making her scream each time. By the end they held hands as the lights dimmed. Would they be all right? ▼

Cloud Gate Dance Theatre of Taiwan in Lin Hwai-min's *Rice*
Photo: Lin Chen-Hsiang

Melbourne

by Jordan Beth Vincent

Dance Massive took centre stage in Melbourne's autumn dance calendar this March. The biannual festival has grown exponentially in its investigation into contemporary dance performance and practice since the inaugural festival in 2009. With events, showings, performances and a national dance forum, Dance Massive has become an anticipated fortnight for lovers of contemporary dance from across the country to congregate in Melbourne. It offers a much-needed opportunity to bridge the extensive distance between Australia's capital cities and to take the pulse of the art form.

Despite the diversity of artists, who are predominantly Melbourne-based, there were two common themes in Dance Massive 2015: the use of light — natural, theatrical and cinematic — and dust. The fascination with dust began with Chunky Move's new work, *Depth of Field*. Choreographer and artistic director Anouk van Dijk brought the dancers outside to a forgotten expanse of land that borders the Malthouse Theatre on one side and the University of Melbourne's arts campus on the other. From a bank of raked seating, audience members had a view of the gravelly thoroughfare between the two areas, plus the freeway entrance and apartment buildings in the background.

Dancers James Vu Anh Pham, Tara Jade Samaya and Niharika Senapati looked like something out of a post-apocalyptic film. Dropping to the ground, they began inscribing the circles of van Dijk's codified movement technique known as Countertechnique. With each slide and scrape against the ground, clouds of dust rose in a responding trace.

Van Dijk's production ended with a strong sense of community. In one remarkable moment, the entire cast dropped to the ground in unison, and passers-by — on bikes, on foot, carrying bags of groceries or with dogs on leashes — were revealed to be part of the performance.

The dramaturgical potential of dust was also explored in Melanie Lane's *Merge*. Performed by four dancers (including Lane), the tossing of a single handful of white debris into the air was a signal of chaos in a controlled and tightly wound choreographic environment. It was a singular but significant moment in a work that seeks to challenge the relationship between humans and what Lane refers to as the "material world."

In *Stampede the Stampede*, a solo performed and choreographed by Tim Darbyshire, rubble becomes a way to illustrate the human body under stress. Created in collaboration with sound designers Madeleine Flynn and Tim Humphrey, and set and lighting designers Jenny Hector and Bosco Shaw, *Stampede the Stampede* is a conceptual work — less about movement than about the relationship between the human body and the elements it comes into contact with.

For instance, Darbyshire did a headstand atop a wooden box, which had an enormous speaker inside. On top of the box, a plywood sheet was loaded with dirt and rocks. As the volume of the music rose, the aural vibrations caused an increasing reaction in the dirt. Pumping

Alisdair Macindoe and Kyle Page of Lucy Guerin Inc. in Lucy Guerin's *Motion Picture*
Photo: Sarah Walker

sound from the speaker was augmented by the noise of pebbles striking the floor, slowly cascading off their plywood platform. It took a long time — and a number of resting periods for Darbyshire — for all the dirt to fall.

Stampede the Stampede also featured light. In the first instance, flashing lights created silhouette shadows of Darbyshire against white screens. In the last, he hung from a harness over a light mounted just below him. In both scenes, and in spite of direct light illuminating his body, Darbyshire's face was obscured, captured in some more meaningful way, perhaps, through his shadow.

Interdisciplinary collaborations between dancers and lighting designers are nothing new. However, Dance Massive 2015's program offered a number of interesting variations, including *Depth of Field's* outdoor environment, in which the setting sun was crucial to the visual dramaturgy. Light in the form of film was found in Atlanta Eke's *Body of Work*, in which Eke used live-feed video footage to create multiple iterations of her figure in one space, and also in Sue Healey's *On View*, which had dancers performing with videos of themselves.

The most explicit use of video was in Lucy Guerin's *Motion Picture*, a work that finds its length, timing, dynamic and movement vocabulary from a feature-length film. The 1950 film noir classic, *D.O.A.*, was screened in its entirety just behind the seating bank. The dancers had a clear view of the film, and the audience was also able to turn around and watch. This decision to lay bare the choreographic inspiration, and to acknowledge the audience might want to experience both the dance performance and its inspiration, was a bold choice.

At the beginning, the relationship between dancers and film was very close, with the dancers mimicking the dialogue and onscreen gestures. As *Motion Picture* progressed, the relationship became increasingly abstract and images of static — a kind of electronic dust — were projected onto the stage, making the dancers harder and harder to see.

Dust obscures, light illuminates — perhaps it is not surprising that so many of Dance Massive's productions drew on these themes. ▼

Niharika Senapati, Tara Jade Samaya and James Vu Anh Pham in Chunky Move's *Depth of Field* by Anouk van Dijk
Photo: Jeff Busby

Stuttgart Ballet

Goecke, Volpi, Cherkaoui / *Stravinsky Today*

In the Stravinsky three-part program presented by Stuttgart Ballet in April, the dancers looked fluent in all three eccentric choreographic visions, but the sometimes dislocating movement didn't always serve the music as well as less idiosyncratic productions.

That said, Germany's Marco Goecke was at home finding a dark, driven side of Stravinsky's score, *The Song of the Nightingale*, for his own piece of the same name, created for Leipzig Ballet in 2009. There were no romantic images here. Anything suggesting Hans Christian Andersen's fairy tale about the brave little singing bird was expunged in favour of militaristic struts, quirky hand fluttering and physical tics. Bodies sometimes scrunched down, hands quivering in the air, feet pounding in a peculiar prance that suggested avian images of a darker destructive kind. Movement matched the beat of Stravinsky's exciting score superbly. Occasional moments of lyric beauty offered contrast, as if flight released the dancers from earthly bonds.

Always there was a sense of darkness. Dancers appeared from an upstage abyss, later returning there to melt into blackness. Rain fell, cold and brutal, suggesting the hostility of some threatened rocky environment. Sometimes there was a silent scream, then gasping sounds. Dancers moved with hands locked, tugging their arms in wide circular sweeps that suggested hard flying against the wind.

Demis Volpi is a young Argentine-born choreographer who has created works that challenge our expectations of ballet. His 2013 piece, *Krabat*, for instance, is a satisfying, full-length work that adheres to storytelling, yet takes flight in new balletic directions. It was reasonable then to expect his *Soldier's Tale*, given its premiere here, to be a work of power and invention. Unfortunately, the piece lacked focus, delivering coarse moments of comedy juxtaposed against sadness and loss.

A travelling troupe appeared with requisite theatre trunks ready to perform a show. They put on the ill-fitting costumes of a motley theatre band. Canons popped from steamer trunks painted in garish cartoon style. Before long it became apparent the choreography didn't match the music. There was little passion or power. That may have been the intention, given this is a rag-tag troupe of players, but that doesn't make what they did interesting.

The flaccid marching and stomping was dull. The female dancers began unpacking cardboard cutouts of household articles: cups, plates and teapots. We were weary of this long before they were finished and anyway, what was the point? It wasn't until we got to the crux of the matter, and the young soldier (a handsome Martí Fernandez Paixa) sold his violin to the devil (a riveting Alicia Amatriain), that things began to heat up. By this point, though, it was too late.

In the ballet, the selling of the violin is an act of betrayal, a selling of the soul, a giving away of artistic freedom. It ought to be a powerful moment. It wasn't. Well, at least not powerful enough. It's not Amatriain's fault. She danced her heart out. But what she was given to dance didn't quite make us sit forward in fear and recognition. Still, it was a stunning performance by this dance actress who is one of the best of her time.

High hopes were pinned on Flemish-Moroccan Sidi Larbi Cherkaoui's new reimagining of *The Firebird*. And there were amazing moments in the ballet's ebb and flow. There was, in fact, so much motion here you needed to distance yourself from its energetic whirl.

A whirlwind of arm wafting, large balletic steps and filmy material fluttering through space like clouds in a storm made this *Firebird* reminiscent of a 1940s Vincente Minnelli musical; the Damnation of Faust scene from *The Band Wagon* comes instantly to mind. Sections of a black pyramid-like structure opened and closed, whirling across the stage so the interior mirror portions reflected everything grander and larger than life. Dancers jeté like popcorn. They strutted, bounced and generally created a flurry of motion, but to what end?

The pyramid, it seems, was meant to be an erupting volcano. At its first opening a gorgeous creature in red slid through a crack, like some spirit of the latest advertisement for Lubin perfume. The whole production, in fact, looked like an ad for something exotic from a Paris fashion house.

I just think Fokine did it better. When white chicken feathers rained down from the fly gallery — or was that meant to be volcanic ash? — I laughed, though. I loved the silliness of it all.

No one could fault the 16 dancers. They created dervish motion, and looked like a million bucks in Tim Van Steenbergen's striking costumes.

— GARY SMITH

Heather MacIsaac and Roland Havlica in Marco Goecke's *Le Chant du Rossignol*
Photo: Bernd Weissbrod

Mourad Merzouki etc. / *Käfig Brasil*

There are some pieces of dance or film or theatre — even literature — that are simply critic-proof; they are just so exciting and so much fun, no one cares (often, not even the critics) that they have obvious flaws. Compagnie Käfig's *Käfig Brasil* is one such piece. In the company's first Canadian stop of an extensive North American tour this past March in Victoria, British Columbia, the French/Brazilian company delivered a one-hour explosion of personality that defied any real analysis of technique or thematic coherence.

Compagnie Käfig (Käfig means "cage" in both German and Arabic) was created by Algerian-born Frenchman Mourad Merzouki in 1996. A hip-hop dancer who also trained in martial arts and as a circus acrobat, Merzouki believed hip-hop could be transformed into something that could hold its own on a concert stage, equal to other dance forms. There is no doubt he has succeeded. Over the past 18 years, Merzouki has created 23 acclaimed productions, and his company gives an average of 150 performances a year around the world.

Merzouki likes working with ever-changing groups of dancers. In 2006, a colleague suggested the choreographer create a piece for 11 young men from the favelas of Rio de Janiero. Then in their teens and early 20s, the men were self-taught hip-hoppers also steeped in capoeira, a 400-year-old Brazilian martial art that, like hip-hop, emphasizes speed, acrobatics and athleticism. Merzouki set two pieces on the Brazilians, in 2008 and 2010, then, in 2012, he invited four other choreographers — Anthony Egea, Céline Lefèvre, Octávio Nassur and Denis Plassard — to collaborate with him and the dancers on a third: *Käfig Brasil*.

There is always a danger with group choreographies that in the absence of a single, central, artistic vision, the seams — the transitions from one choreographer or one idea to another — will show. That definitely does happen here. For example, the production starts with an idea it never returns to: the lights in the theatre gradually go down as an aria by Antonio Vivaldi starts playing. It feels like we are in for an evening of classical ballet, but it quickly becomes clear we're not. It's an oddly jarring and purposeless beginning, and there are other awkward transitions in mood and style throughout, as well as a lack of technique, particularly in the feet and backs, when the dancers attempt contemporary dance movement. But who cares?

Flaws and all, *Käfig Brasil* is an exhilarating 60-minute ride on a fast machine. Once the Vivaldi fades away, the piece really begins with dancer José Amilton Rodrigues Junior playing the Brazilian berimbau, a single-stringed percussion instrument known as the "soul of capoeira." Other berimbaus sit on the stage in lines, visibly tying these dancers to their country and its heritage. From there, though, things start to get a little crazy, in a good, if not particularly Brazilian, way.

The choreography flashes from hip-hop aggression and capoeira-style combat, to out-and-out slapstick (two dancers talking to each other while upside down) and back again, then surprises with emotional solos that would not feel out of place in a Martha Graham studio. The pace never lets up, driven by a fast-changing score of mostly electronica by groups such as Âme, the Lushlife Project and deadmou5, but the humour and the occasional touch of pathos give depth to a form where straightforward grandstanding is the default mode. This is indeed street dance for the concert stage, both varied and compelling.

While each of the nine dancers (it should have been 11, but one was injured and another never made it on the tour owing to work permit problems) is dressed similarly, in full nerdy attire — flood pants with bright socks, dress shirts with too-short ties — each has his own singular style. Some, like Wanderlino Martins Neves, are terrific hip-hoppers. Neves has an electrifying presence and his tumbling and head spins are fast and precise. Others have their own strengths. Geovane Fidelis da Conceiçao, for example, with his solid, square body and softly waving Afro, seems almost out of place as a hip-hopper, yet in a segment where he crouches in front of a floodlight and moves his arms to create shadows on the back wall, his gentle presence is mesmerizing.

By far the most riveting part comes near the end, when the company dances, shirts off, nerds no more but rather ripped, athletic young men, in unison like at a rave. It's groovy and hypnotic, but slightly frightening, too, as the men open their mouths as if to scream, dancing all the while. The driving beat and the dancers' commitment to their movement drove the audience to its feet, cheering.

— ROBIN J. MILLER

Compagnie Käfig in *Käfig Brasil*
Photo: Michel Cavalca

George Balanchine / *Ballo della Regina, Symphony in Three Movements, Serenade*

On both nights that I saw Miami City Ballet during its four-performance run at Vancouver's Queen Elizabeth Theatre in February, the audience applauded when the curtain rose on *Serenade*. It was the closing ballet on a three-part program, so this was not a welcoming gesture, though the company has never before appeared here. There is something about that stage full of women in pale blue tulle that is always quietly shattering, whether you are seeing the ballet for the first time or the 40th. We know the history: Balanchine's first ballet in America, made in 1934 on a ragbag of dancers, the epitome of the great choreographer as craftsman, assembling based on what he had to work with on a given day. A musical exercise designed to teach students what it meant to be performers, and in so doing to reveal Tchaikovsky's music in an untried way, *Serenade* addressed issues of democracy and gender as no ballet before it had.

More than 80 years later, *Serenade* continues to teach audiences what ballet can do, stripped of all its trappings. But it takes the right company to reveal this, and Miami City Ballet — directed for the past two years by Lourdes Lopez, a Miami-born former principal dancer with New York City Ballet and a direct link back to Balanchine — proved up to the task.

Miami City Ballet is not full of dancers with contemporary ballet bodies. By this I mean the gigantic extensions, articulated feet and stretched-out proportions that have become the aesthetic boilerplate we expect in ballet these days. Miami City Ballet's dancers are for the most part smaller and squarer, without the extravagant physical attributes that are the first thing our eyes have been taught to look for. But, my god, can these people move. They exploded onto the stage in the opening ballet, *Ballo della Regina,* dashing through this small jewel box of a dance with a forward-propelled urgency that became the through-line and take away of these appearances.

No matter that the sparkling precision demanded by the work could not be fully delivered by either of the principal women I saw, Nathalia Arja and Tricia Albertson. The fact is that no one, since its originator Merrill Ashley in 1978, has been able to show these killingly difficult steps fully at the speed for which they were written.

But on attack alone, the company delivered. Because it is pastel pretty, danced in pink and turquoise chiffon dresses with rhinestone earrings to Verdi selections from the opera *Don Carlos*, it is easy to dismiss this ballet as the stage version of a meringue. But it is so much more than that, with its devilish torso switchbacks, its surprising embellishments, its visual jokes, like the ballerina lowering her bent leg from attitude to kneeling, not smoothly, but in three freeze frames on the way down. The pas de deux has lightning quick changes of mood and tempo within a formal framework, and the central solo is a wonder, with its diamond-shaped pas de chats, its fiendish hops on pointe, and pirouettes where the working leg shoots out unexpectedly, like a crazy arrow.

The dancers showed all of this. They also showed the still unsettling architecture of *Symphony in Three Movements*, in which Balanchine unleashes 32 dancers to Stravinsky's 1945 war symphony. Made in 1972 for the fabled New York City Ballet Stravinsky Festival, the monumental opening and closing diagonal of *Symphony*, with dancers in white leotards reaching into forever, remains startling. Like all three works on the program, *Symphony* takes place in a wide open space, in which bodies in motion are plainly in view against a plain blue background (a convention now entirely out of fashion, which, ironically, looks fresh all over again). The corps is in white, the demi-soloists are in black, and the soloists and principals are in coral and pink. The men wear classic black and white practice gear; they slice through the air like switchblades. There's nothing but the music and the steps, which unfurl in a disconcerting combination of play and menace.

Again, it was all about the ensemble, even though there is a central, enigmatic pas de deux of flicking wrists and inclined heads and unlikely torsal twistings. What was notable was the onward thrusting commitment every dancer brought to the task, and how much, by the end, we accepted that these women, with their skimpy costumes and flippy ponytails, were in fact members of a sort of army of the collective unconscious, stretching to infinity.

Which brings us back to *Serenade*. The dancers of Miami City Ballet made it both down to earth and heavenly, as it was intended, with an air of tragedy about it. A ballet about ballet, it is also about the sisterhood of women, full of tender classroom steps and friends who, when needed, surround one of their heartbroken own in a rush of pale blue.

— DEBORAH MEYERS

Miami City Ballet in George Balanchine's *Serenade*
Photo: Danielle Azoulay

Tero Saarinen / *Kullervo*

Tero Saarinen's *Kullervo* provides a whole new take on the figure of Kullervo from *The Kalevala*, the Finnish national epic. Saarinen's elaborate production, premiered by the Finnish National Ballet in Helsinki in February, fearlessly examines expansive national themes, combining interpretive dance, operatic expression and vocal symphony, placing them all on an equal footing.

The music is Jean Sibelius' powerful *Kullervo* (1892), an early breakthrough work by Finland's national composer, scored for soprano, baritone, male-voice choir and orchestra; the presentation of Saarinen's *Kullervo* was part of Sibelius' 150th anniversary celebrations. The work represents a natural extension of the choreographer's career: the intense fusion of movement and music has always been of central importance in his oeuvre, which now encompasses more than 40 works. This extravagant multidisciplinary production featured three solo dancers and an ensemble of 24 taken from both the Finnish National Ballet's corps and the Tero Saarinen Company, as well as two operatic soloists and a 63-piece male-voice choir, formed from the combined forces of the Finnish National Opera Chorus and the Helsinki Philharmonic Chorus.

Originating in the stories of *The Kalevala*, based on Finnish oral folk poetry collected by Elias Lönnrot in a project begun in 1828, the tragic figure of Kullervo is born under malignant circumstances. He repeatedly goes off to war, inadvertently seduces his own sister, loses his family and, like his sister, eventually takes his own life. For Saarinen, the figure of Kullervo is universal. He finds similar themes in Sophocles' *Electra* and in contemporary life. "New Kullervos are born every day, whether in Syria or the Ukraine, places where there is no hope in sight," Saarinen said in an interview a few weeks before the premiere. "Why do people's minds become clouded with thoughts of revenge?"

In this modern take on the Kullervo legend, Saarinen examines the cycle of revenge and the ways in which history repeats itself. The notion of cyclical repetition can be seen in the dancers' movements (which amalgamate elements from contemporary dance and ballet), in the overall structure of the work and its visual features, and in Sibelius' music. This ambitious work paints a picture of beginnings and ends, acceptance and denial, life and death. Though many of Saarinen's earlier choreographies have contained narrative elements, *Kullervo* has the most linear narrative structure.

Kullervo opens with a minimalist movement language, including rhythmic stamping on the ground that progresses in repetitive unison. Samuli Poutanen, étoile with Finnish National Ballet, brought depth and primitive energy to his great interpretation of Kullervo, elements which become all the more intense as the tragic story unfolds. Soloist Terhi Räsänen as Kullervo's sister and Tero Saarinen Company dancer David Scarantino as the tirelessly loyal friend Kimmo — a character borrowed from Aleksis Kivi's 19th-century play *Kullervo* — were also convincing in their skilful interpretations of the companions-in-misfortune. Opera soloists Johanna Rusanen-Kartano and Jaakko Kortekangas perpetuated the characters' tragic fates in their own powerful interpretations, always following the dancing protagonists' actions.

Events in the story eventually go into a tailspin when the dancing crowds begin moving on the rotating floor designed by Mikki Kunttu. The spectacular whirls and seas of lights created by Kunttu (Saarinen's trusted lighting designer), the rising and falling nets that serve as a screen across the stage and Erika Turunen's stylish costumes seem at once fresh and familiar.

One of the most beautiful and affecting scenes features a group of female dancers, the augurs of the ultimate tragedy, in loose white dresses on the rotating floor, bathed in brightening light. Here, typical of Saarinen's gestural vocabulary, the diagonal backwards rotation of the women's hands is slowed down so much that everything seems left momentarily hanging in the air, the better to tell a universal story of the experience of suffering.

Saarinen's simultaneously romantic, robust and sensual movement language requires performers to break free of clearly controlled forms and lines, and to move toward a rougher, more potent form of personal interpretation. At the premiere, the movements of the dancing choir seemed rather too unified, though the shape of their gestures will doubtless deepen with subsequent performances.

In the world of the modern Kullervos, there is a sense that young men are constantly following the wrong path, but are powerless to make different choices. The singing choir, moving eloquently alongside the protagonists, constantly commenting and reflecting on the unfolding story, seems to be talking also to the audience — to anyone of us — in a touching way. What are the repercussions of our choices? Can we learn from our mistakes and alter the course of our lives?

— HANNELE JYRKKÄ

Samuli Poutanen and Terhi Räsänen of Finnish National Ballet in Tero Saarinen's *Kullervo*
Photo: Sakari Viika

Samory Ba etc. / *Vertical Influences*

During a particularly cold evening in late February, in the depths of east-end Ottawa, the audience for the Canadian premiere of Patin Libre's *Vertical Influences* found its way to the refrigerated Minto Skating Centre. The hour-plus show, part of the National Arts Centre's prestigious dance season, was commissioned by London's Dance Umbrella and co-produced by the NAC and Paris' Théâtre de la Ville, with research support from London's Sadler's Wells Theatre.

The novelty of the unusual setting was clearly stimulating, judging by the jovial energy in the crowd. We were directed to sit on benches, knees to neck, four rows deep and a quarter kilometre long. "At least we're sitting on the home side," jests a gent behind me — HOME is written large on the wall across from us; presumably those to our far right are in the AWAY zone.

The arena's neon lights finally dim, and a blue light bathes the stage area as the five performers of Montreal-based Patin Libre take the ice in front of us. They circle around each other in a roving pack, until one lone wolf splits off. It's Jasmin Boivin, also the group's musician/composer, who breaks into his trademark revolving footwork, a freestyle done in hockey skates, reminiscent of house dancing. His rhythmic style fits his electronic score perfectly, and despite the relative lack of spectacular tricks, Boivin is exciting to watch.

So begins *Influences,* the first of two medium-length works that make up the double bill of *Vertical Influences*; the second is *Vertical*. In both halves, the co-creators and performers of Le Patin Libre — Samory Ba, Boivin, Taylor Dilley, Alexandre Hamel and Pascale Jodoin — play a fine line between cliché skating figures and serious choreographic research. *Vertical Influences* delves into the essence of the glide, finding various ways to tease out that moment of purity, and the floating and undulating magic they make look so easy. The work is much more musical than their previous piece, *Patineurs Anonymes,* which was "weirdly narrative" (in their own words). *Vertical Influences* is more responsive to the rhythmic pulse of the music, keeping the focus choreographic, rather than on storytelling.

In *Influences,* the skaters explore tensions between individual and group identity. They each have solo moments where they express their unique styles and sensibilities, but they ebb and flow in and out of the group sections without creating jarring or self-conscious breaks.

In *Vertical,* we are confronted with an altered perspective. During intermission, the audience is moved from the width-side bleachers to risers sitting directly on the ice in the HOME zone. Now, we are much closer to the ice, looking at the Olympic-sized expanse from one end. The skaters are dressed in "city clothes" in soothing white, grey and mustard tones (the mismatched clothes of *Influences* were less satisfactory). They play with the space, with the distance, with the proximity of the audience and, of course, with the simple beauty of the glide. They make rhythm by dragging their skates in undulating dips. They cut up the ice to such an extent that they make snow. Dilley skates by at one point, dragging a hand on the ice like it's water and making it spray. In *Vertical* I could see a frozen pond, I could feel the open sky; there were moments in it that were that peaceful, that evocative.

There were also moments of well-placed humour. In *Vertical*, Ba solos in silence, providing his own accompaniment in a spare body percussion, with liberal use of his heel blade picking into the ice creating a surprising rasping sound. I try to notice how Boivin's use of hockey skates, laced low and loose, rather than the figure skates with toe picks that allow the others to jump and spin, might set him apart from the others. But I get distracted by the continual flow of action — the piece is shaped in such a way that his handicap (a lack of figure skating training) is integrated seamlessly.

I wonder how much dramaturge Ruth Little pushed them toward the evolution evident in this work. Little, brought on during their creation residencies at Sadler's Wells, is an award-winning dramaturge who works with Akram Khan Company, among others. In any case, Le Patin Libre has moved beyond novelty and has undoubtedly matured in artistry. The show ends to the sound of gloved hands clapping.

Le Patin Libre has built a strong following in France, England, Scotland and Germany. Until now, they have had to self-present in Canada. With *Vertical Influences* as its calling card, Le Patin Libre has a strong chance of taking its unique brand of contemporary ice dancing across the country. Ironically, conquering the world beyond Canada has begun much sooner.

— LYS STEVENS

Patin Libre in *Vertical Influences*
Photo: Alice Clarke

Houston Ballet

Stanton Welch / *Romeo and Juliet*

When the pas de deux are so sweet, the cast of characters so engaging and the design so fetching, there is every reason to welcome another *Romeo and Juliet* to ballet's Shakespearean canon. Stanton Welch has given Houston Ballet a passion-filled, action-packed journey into doomed, young love.

Welch, an Australian who has been at the helm in Houston since 2003, has set his three-act *Romeo and Juliet* to the well-known Prokofiev score. Countless versions have been danced to the motif-rich orchestral composition (played live here by Houston Ballet Orchestra, conducted by Ermanno Florio). Familiarity brings with it some tension: given the evocative music, it's hard not to remember a favourite version from the past and, inevitably, compare it with the present. Yet Welch's ballet, which premiered at the end of February at Houston's Wortham Theater Center, deserves to be experienced on its own merits.

Importantly, Welch has choreographed several luscious pas de deux for the leading couple. Opening night's Romeo (Connor Walsh) and Juliet (Karina Gonzalez) created a compelling physical attraction that clearly had to run its course. From the moment they spotted each other in the ballroom, the two seemed to breathe as one; there was an inevitability to their coming together that was lovely to witness. In the balcony pas de deux, Walsh tossed Gonzalez into the air and around his body like she was water: liquid, light, elemental. The musicality of their dance seemed like a natural expression of their open, joyous delight in each other's presence.

Sara Webb and Jared Matthews, second cast leads, were equally love-tossed, but it was as Rosaline that Webb really shone. Welch has developed this minor cameo of the woman for whom Romeo first pines into a full-bodied character, given substance by Webb's etched line and sophisticated polish.

The third cast Juliet, Melody Mennite, had her own kind of magic during the balcony pas de deux; ardently supported by Romeo (Ian Casady), her trusting, voluptuous abandon vividly portrayed a young girl's sexual awakening.

Welch has thickened the ballet's plot not just with Rosaline, but also by introducing the House of Escalus, following Shakespeare's play, to which both Mercutio and Count Paris belong. The difficulty for viewers is that Mercutio now straddles the Montague and Capulet camps, making him less firmly aligned with Romeo. Though poignantly danced by all three casts (Matthews, Charles-Louis Yoshiyama and Walsh), Mercutio had disappointingly few steps during his long death scene, when for much of the time he is either tended to by the women or held upright by the men.

If Welch was sparing here, elsewhere there is lively choreography for the men, as when Romeo's two friends — Benvolio and, a new character in the ballet version, Balthazar — mince about with saucy hips and rubber legs, poking fun at Tybalt. Derek Dunn as Balthazar (in all three casts) was spot on every time with his pirouettes and bravado. There is also a great sense of sweep and musical detail in Welch's ensembles.

The three families are colour coded; Roberta Guidi di Bagno has designed a distinctive palette of blues (for the House of Montague), reds (Capulet) and bronzes (Escalus). If that sounds simplistic, the overall design is anything but. Di Bagno, an Italian with 39 years of work around the world behind her, has created sumptuous costumes, with ribbons, masks and long, flowing dresses. One disconcerting note was the glitter in the brown robes of the clergy, including down-to-earth Friar Lawrence; was there a subtext here about religious decadence? If so, it wasn't evident in the ballet itself. As well, Juliet's sparkly, sugar-pink ball gown had a synthetic, brittle sheen.

Di Bagno also designed the sets, a splendid collection of flats, huge Renaissance-styled tapestries and silk curtains. A shifting array of interiors and exteriors form onstage within moments.

Welch gives some young ragamuffins their own dance in the carnival scene, adding generational breadth to his *Romeo and Juliet* that unfortunately missed the older end of the spectrum. The Nurse in her pointe shoes was noticeably of the same generation as Juliet, in all three casts (though Barbara Bears, retired from the company in 2009, was a little older, providing a hint of welcome maturity). Still, it was good to see this Nurse wasn't an ancient doddering fool, as she is often portrayed; Welch has choreographed a strong comic character that just needs to lose her pointe shoes (the essence of youthful energy) and be cast more realistically (are there no character dancers looking for work?).

Houston Ballet's new *Romeo and Juliet* should have a long life, giving time for the company's excellent corps to grow into featured roles, for Welch to fine-tune and for Texans to become familiar with the ballet's wealth of details in terms of character and design.

— KAIJA PEPPER

Karina Gonzalez and Artists of Houston Ballet in Stanton Welch's *Romeo and Juliet*
Photo: Amitava Sarkar

Scissor Dance

Cesar Manuel Jumpa

Peru's scissor dance comes from the south Andean region. Most dance forms from this area are practised by the whole community, but the scissor dance is traditionally done only by certain men who learn it at an early age from an older master. These dancers compete against each other on special occasions, as part of both Christian and traditional Andean religious rites, and are judged on their dexterity, boldness and charisma.

In the last couple of decades, the appearance of women scissor dancers represents special characteristics of Andean culture: constant change and adaptation, and keeping traditions alive and relevant by the act of defying some aspect of them. Today's scissor dance for men and women represents a culture that refuses to be frozen in time as a museum object, choosing instead to stay moving.

The dancer in the photo, known as Torbellina (in English, Female Twister), is 18 years old and travels all around Peru performing.

— CESAR MANUEL JUMPA

Cesar Manuel Jumpa is a documentary photographer and writer. This image, part of a bigger series featuring the scissor dance, was shot in a studio session at home in Lima, using both continuous lighting and flashing strobes. "By representing the motion and colourful nature of the dance through photography," explains Jumpa, "I try to add something of myself to my ancestors' tradition." Connect at instagram.com/chapualqo

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PEACE ONE DAY

ONE DAY ONE DANCE

DANCING AROUND THE WORLD ON PEACE DAY, 21 SEPTEMBER

ONE DAY ONE DANCE is Peace One Day's global dance initiative, which uses dance to promote peace and unity on Peace Day.

The initative aims to see dance events happening *all over the world* celebrating Peace Day, it is an inclusive call to action open to **everyone**, *professional dancers or people with little to no experience, children and adults, groups or individuals.*

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Gillian Murphy and Marcelo Gomes, American Ballet Theatre. Photo: Gene Schiavone

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