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There are many ways to enjoy a magazine, in print and across a range of digital devices. After reading *Dance International* on my iPad, I became a fan of our compact, easy access and inexpensive digital edition. **Yes! For those of you who are reading this in hard copy: we have joined the Kobo electronic newsstand at kobo.com.**

Adding digital to our readers' options is an important step for *Dance International's* sustainability. Like many projects in the arts, our quarterly publication is a labour of love. We are published by the non-profit Vancouver Ballet Society, which has a 68-year history of supporting classical and contemporary dance in British Columbia and, since 1976 through the magazine, around the world. We're all in this — board and staff members, and writers, too — because we care about dance. We believe *Dance International* contributes to the kind of thoughtful, informed dialogue that helps ground and develop any creative enterprise. Plus, we think it's fun to read and to look at, too.

The Winter issue was assembled with the same rigour and love as always. If you enjoy our lively stories and crisp layouts on everything from the illustrious Royal Winnipeg Ballet (our cover story) to an update on the street-savvy form of krump (a featured Dance Note), please consider supporting us in the long-term by taking out a subscription — digital or hard copy — if you haven't already. It saves you money, it ensures you won't miss a single issue and it shows us — and our funders and donors, too — that dance and *Dance International* matter.

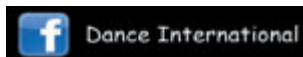
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Royal Winnipeg Ballet corps de ballet
dancer Yoshiko Kamikusa
Photo: David Cooper



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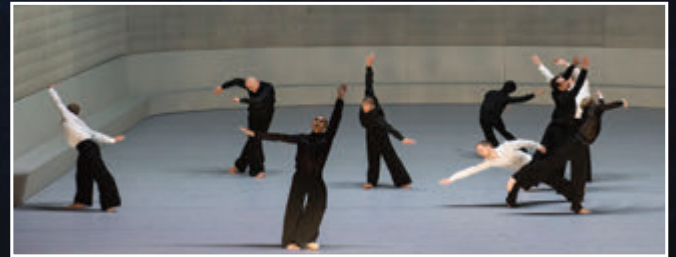
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THE TWISTS AND TURNS OF LIFE AND ART



CHOREOGRAPHER AND
ARTISTIC DIRECTOR STIJN CELIS

BY VICTOR SWOBODA



In 2002, Les Grands Ballets Canadiens de Montréal staged the premiere of *Noces*, a work of dark beauty and mythic resonance by a then little-known, young, Belgian choreographer, Stijn Celis. Chiselled to perfection — there's not an extraneous step in the entire 30 minutes — Celis' *Noces* drew on the same Stravinsky score that inspired Bronislava Nijinska in 1923 to create her groundbreaking *Les Noces*, a 20th-century icon. Reflections of Nijinska's choreography flicker in Celis' version, both as an homage to the earlier choreographer and as a sign of the Belgian's awareness of the past on which his own art is based.

In the decade that followed, Celis' career blossomed, most prominently in Europe in works for major companies like Cullberg Ballet, Nederlands Dans Theater and Wiesbaden Ballet. Les Grands artistic director Gradimir Pankov commissioned other works, including a *Cinderella* retelling called *The Lost Shoe*, then *The Rite of Spring* and, in 2014, a strong double bill, *Orpheus' Gaze* and *Transfigured Night* [reviewed in *Dance International* in Fall 2014]. Earlier, as head of Geneva Ballet in the 1990s, Pankov had encouraged Celis, a company dancer, at annual choreographic workshops; his confidence in Celis' talent has clearly paid off.

Although born in 1964 in Belgium, Celis spent his first seven years in Zaire. "My first aesthetic experiences were in Africa — the landscape, the vegetation, the contrast between the Western enclave and the African world," Celis recalls. "We lived just outside Kinshasa in a white community. I remember seeing the city and the way the Congolese lived in poverty."

The family's return to a French-speaking part of Belgium was tough on young Celis, a child who was withdrawn and spoke no French. Diagnosed with learning problems, he studied for one year at a school for the disabled. "Very interesting experience," says Celis quietly.

In Brussels, the family changed residences almost every year, which for Celis meant changing schools. "It was very hard for a child. I was quite isolated," he says.

Sensitive, isolated children often find a stable emotional outlet in art. In Celis' case, it was drawing and painting. He also became fascinated by the dancing, music and sets he saw in old Hollywood movie musicals shown on Belgian afternoon TV.

Dance studies entered his life at 14, when a friend noted that he had a good physique for jazz ballet. Within a year, he was in a professional dance program, and two years later entered the Royal Ballet School in Antwerp. His mother, who had been worried about her son's poor academic marks in regular school, encouraged his focus on dance.



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“She saw dance as a way to get me on the right track.” The better he became as a dancer, the more his mother saw the value of dance in his life, and she became very proud. “But she was scared at the beginning because I changed completely and became a little foreign to her. We had to reassess our relationship after that.”

Celis’ mother indirectly became the inspiration for his third creation for Cullberg Ballet, *Sore Core* (2004).

“It was about female hysteria, very radical and loud,” says Celis. “More of a specialist piece. German art institutions were interested in it.” Celis’ large- and small-scale works are, however, generally accessible to a wider audience.

Celis first danced for the Royal Ballet of Flanders, led then by Valery Panov, the dancer who famously left the Soviet Union in 1974. “I had no big technique, but I loved to perform,” recalls Celis. “The repertoire was mainly Panov’s works. I did my first international tour and felt the importance of the group. I had a new ‘family.’”

Obliged by Belgian law to do military service, Celis was permitted to take dance class during the day, but had to sleep in the barracks. To fit in with the others, Celis imitated their machismo. “It was a big act, really a challenge. I didn’t speak much about myself because what I was doing was too precious. But I made friends and slowly we began talking about who we were.”

When Panov left, Celis went on an audition tour. Uwe Scholz of Zurich Ballet hired him, which marked the start of a long professional association with Switzerland. In Zurich, Celis danced in

moving house, a huge ladder and construction to the ceiling, with a bridge. Dancers hung suspended. One dancer waited through the whole piece in a box before popping out at the end with an accordion. It was the first time that I’d worked with set and lighting designers.”

The critics’ response was negative, with adverse comparisons to the Ek piece also on the program. *Ubiloz Vanilla* nonetheless stayed in Cullberg Ballet’s repertoire for two years. But Ek’s comments left wounds. “I held a grudge and blamed him for putting me and another young choreographer on the same program with him. The other choreographer stopped creating.”

That year, 1997, Celis had other causes to suffer. He broke his foot and his father died unexpectedly. Celis returned to Brussels to be with his mother. His artistic life also took a major turn. “I applied for a new program [in stage design] at the Hogeschool voor Dramatische Kunsten in Antwerp based only on my portfolio since I had no degree. It was a big learning curve.”

Celis graduated with the highest distinction. He then asked his professor, Jan Verzweyvel, who designed for the Antwerp Opera, for a job as his assistant. Celis’ start was inauspicious. “At the first staff meeting, I had to take everyone’s order for sandwiches,” he laughs.

For two years, Celis did not dance, but helped to design sets for theatre and opera productions, often intellectual shows like Susan Sontag’s *Alice in Bed*. “I moved up slowly, but felt I lacked some technical computer skills.”

THERE WAS NO COMPROMISE WITH *Noces*. STRAVINSKY’S MUSIC, CELIS RECALLS, BROUGHT OUT HIS INNER SELF. “I WANTED *Noces* TO BE RAW, TRIBAL. A COMMUNITY RITUAL.”



Scholz’s works, and memorably as Tybalt in Cranko’s *Romeo and Juliet*. Then, during a one-year stint with Bern Ballet in 1985, Celis took a life-changing summer workshop in Florence with the Martha Graham modern dance company.

“I was really fascinated. It was intensive and changed my body completely. The Graham dancers taught us pieces of her repertoire. I was ballet, ballet, but after the workshop, I really changed my posture and attitude.”

Graham, near the end of her long life, gave Celis a memorable word of advice. “She said: ‘You have to be hungry to dance.’”

Celis decided to develop his contemporary dance skills and for a short while danced for Contemporary Dance Zurich. Then came the career-changing move to Geneva Ballet under Pankov. “I heard it had an interesting repertoire. My first performance was in a Paulo Ribeiro work. There was also Ohad Naharin’s piece with chairs, *Axioma*.”

For his fourth annual Geneva workshop production, Celis created *The top of my head is not the top of the world*, in which he danced wearing a mask of the French comic book character, Tintin. Swedish choreographer Mats Ek praised the work, a peerless compliment for a budding choreographer. “[His praise] made me think I could do something.”

If an established figure’s praise is stimulating, their negative comments can be devastating. Ek later criticized *Ubiloz Vanilla*, a work for 10 Cullberg Ballet dancers that Celis created at Ek’s request to open a dance festival in Amsterdam. “I already had big aspirations,” recalls Celis. “The 30-minute work had a

He was asked to design the sets and choreograph in a classical ballet style for Wiesbaden Ballet and its star performer, Dmitrii Simkin (whose son, Daniil, dances with American Ballet Theatre). “It was a successful production, but I wasn’t happy with it. I’d come from a top-notch design world and here I had to be kitschy. I decided I’d never compromise to that degree again.”

There was no compromise with *Noces*. Stravinsky’s music, Celis recalls, brought out his inner self. “I wanted *Noces* to be raw, tribal. A community ritual.”

Celis is sometimes asked whether he feels affinity with avant-garde Belgians of his generation like Anne Teresa De Keersmaeker, Wim Vandekeybus and Jan Fabre. A European company presenting his work once tried to capitalize on Belgium’s infamy as an avant-garde hotbed by advertising a piece by Celis as coming “from the Belgian.” “I’m happy to be an observer of the Belgian scene without necessarily having to take into consideration the edge that comes with it.”

Despite his success and a reputation that brings dance companies knocking at his door, Celis — relentlessly self-questioning — has come to see himself as a choreographer only in the past few years.

In September, Celis began a three-year contract as artistic director of Saarbrücken Ballet, based in a city on Germany’s border with France. He’s already served as artistic director of Bern Ballet (2004–2007). “Artistic direction is a broadening of one’s competence, creating in a bigger context. Facilitating and helping dancers. I like that a lot.” ▼

PORTRAITS OF A COMPANY



Above: Royal Winnipeg Ballet in *Giselle*
Photo: Courtesy of Royal Winnipeg Ballet

Top right: Royal Winnipeg Ballet in *Swan Lake*
(1953) with Eva von Gencsy and Arnold Spohr
Photo: Phillips-Gutkin

Bottom right: (L-R) Liang Xing, Yosuke Mino, Dmitri Dvogozelets, Alanna McAdie and Sophia Lee in *Going Home Star — Truth and Reconciliation*
Photo: Samanta Katz



THE ROYAL WINNIPEG BALLET AT

75



BY HOLLY HARRIS

The Royal Winnipeg Ballet is Canada's oldest troupe

and North America's longest continuously operating ballet company. Founded in 1939 as the Winnipeg Ballet Club by two Englishwomen, Gweneth Lloyd and Betty Farrally, it became known as the Winnipeg Ballet two years later. The company received its British royal charter in 1953, embarking on its inaugural North American tour the following year.

Since 1996, the 26-dancer troupe has been led by André Lewis. The repertoire still features the same popular mix of traditional and new they have always danced. There is *Swan Lake*, *The Sleeping Beauty* and *Romeo and Juliet*, as well as contemporary commissions, ranging from Mark Godden's dark and sexy *Dracula* to Shaun Hounsell's high-tech *Wonderland*. Lewis has also commissioned issue-based ballets: *The Handmaid's Tale*, set to Margaret Atwood's dystopian novel and choreographed by Lila York, and Godden's *Going Home Star — Truth and Reconciliation*, which premiered in October. To celebrate the company's milestone 75th anniversary, Holly Harris presents a series of portraits of the Royal Winnipeg Ballet today.

André Lewis Artistic Director



Photo: Réjean Brandt Photography



André Lewis and company
in *Romeo and Juliet* (1981)

Photo: David Cooper

André Lewis has serendipity to thank for giving him his life's work. After completing the Royal Winnipeg Ballet School's Summer Session in 1975, Lewis was Australia-bound with his dancer girlfriend who wished to return to her native country. When she abruptly decided to go back to Ottawa, Lewis returned to the Prairie city to begin formal training at the RWB School Professional Division. "It was never part of the plan to stay in Winnipeg," says Lewis, 59, now in his 20th year at the company's helm.

The Quebec-born dancer joined the Royal Winnipeg Ballet after graduating in 1979 and was promoted to principal in 1987. His acclaimed signature roles included Gunther in *The Nutcracker*, Mercutio in *Romeo and Juliet* and Jaimie Paul in *The Ecstasy of Rita Joe*. Lewis retired from the stage in 1990, although, notably, made a rare appearance in James Kudelka's *The Four Seasons* last July where he performed in Winter during the company's annual Ballet in the Park al fresco shows.

"I've learned so much with this company," Lewis says. He recalls Saskatchewan-born Arnold Spohr, who became artistic

director in 1958, and established the troupe as a worldwide touring company during his 30-year term. "Arnold always said, 'Never stop learning.'"

One of Lewis' innovations has been to establish a relationship with choreographer and RWB School alumnus Peter Quanz. His company, Q Dance, is made up of Royal Winnipeg Ballet dancers who also perform in the smaller troupe's productions, which are now included as part of the Royal Winnipeg Ballet's season.

Lewis plans to lead the company until age 65. He then hopes to coach, as well as continue serving as a jury member for national and international events. Closer to home, he'll also watch his two children grow. His wife, former Royal Winnipeg Ballet first soloist Caroline Gruber, is a guest ballet master with the company.

"I would like to make ballet a relevant art form for the entire general public, so that everyone wants to come," Lewis says, when asked about his vision. "I want to make people say, 'The RWB means something to me.'"

Johnny W. Chang

Senior Ballet Master

Johnny W. Chang (Zhang Wei-Qiang) arrived at the Royal Winnipeg Ballet in 1992, invited by then artistic director John Meehan to partner principal dancer Laura Graham in *Swan Lake*. “I was immediately struck by Johnny’s elegance and spectacular elevation,” Meehan says. “A danseur noble, he was exactly what we needed at the time in the company.”

During his tenure as a dancer, Chang was featured in lead roles in full-length classical ballets and in shorter works by Antony Tudor, Jerome Robbins, George Balanchine, Rudi van Dantzig and Frederick Ashton.

Chang really cut his creative teeth with his darkly dramatic portrayal of the title character in Godden’s *Dracula* in 1998. “I had always wanted to try something different so I could grow as an artist,” the former principal dancer says, accustomed to portraying regal princes with the National Ballet of China. “When I first spoke with Mark about the role, he told me he wanted a sexy, elegant Dracula who is strong and powerful. That’s what attracted me most.”

The bloodthirsty ballet based on Bram Stoker’s gothic horror story has become a signature work for the RWB. Chang, 54, chose it for his farewell performances during the company’s tour of China in 2004.

After retiring, he became senior ballet master. Fluent in English, Mandarin Chinese and Japanese, Chang has also set ballets on Seoul Ballet Theatre, Hong Kong Ballet, Slovak National Ballet Theatre and Greek National Ballet Theatre.

Chang is well positioned to speak to the company’s time-honoured tradition of cultural diversity.

“Ballet doesn’t belong to any single country,” he states. “Having international dancers who can bring their cultures to the RWB makes us stronger. Every ballet is different, and you need all those different dancers.”



Johnny W. Chang, rehearsing with dancer from the National Ballet of China
Photo: Si Ting Hong



Johnny W. Chang and Tara Birtwhistle in Mark Godden’s *Dracula*
Photo: David Cooper



Tara Birtwhistle

Ballet Master

For two decades, Tara Birtwhistle lit up stages with her ability to delve into the heart of her characters. “The roles that I liked best were acting and character roles,” the former principal dancer says. “I never approached dance from a technical point of view, but always created the character through movement.” These included Juliet in Rudi van Dantzig’s *Romeo and Juliet*, the Stepmother in Val Caniparoli’s *Cinderella* and the Queen of Hearts in Hounsell’s *Wonderland*. For her farewell performance in 2011, Birtwhistle chose the gritty title role in Norbert Vesak’s *The Ecstasy of Rita Joe*.

Born in Vancouver, Birtwhistle, 42, was accepted to the RWB School Professional Division in 1986, inspired by seeing the company perform in her hometown at Expo 86. The young dancer joined the corps de ballet in 1991, and was promoted to principal dancer in 2000. She was eager to follow in her dance heroes’ footsteps, including prima ballerina assoluta Evelyn Hart. Hart was the first Canadian to receive the Gold Medal at the International Competition in Varna, Bulgaria, for her performance of Vesak’s *Belong* pas de deux in 1980, when her unexpected win captured the imagination of the world.

While attending her first Summer Dance program at the Banff Centre in 1993, Birtwhistle met choreographer Brian Macdonald, founder of Banff’s Professional Dance Program, and a contributor of a dozen ballets to the RWB’s repertoire between 1958 and 1970. “Tara always had a terrific instinct, which came out of both the music and choreography right from the beginning,” Macdonald says. “She made the choreography dramatic, and therefore made herself dramatic. It wasn’t through mannerism, but through her musicality. She heard everything that was going on in the music, which is a wonderful instinct for a dancer to have.”

Birtwhistle speaks reverentially of the late Arnold Spohr, who coached her in the company and also during her training at the school. “What I remember most was his love for dance,” she recalls. “In his later years, he still came to all our shows and would still correct.”

Now raising her two young children with her husband, first soloist Dmitri Dovgoselets, Birtwhistle is keenly aware of her responsibility as one of the company’s senior artists. “We’re the tradition keepers,” she says. “Especially today when everything’s so instant. We have to make sure that ballet is still a process. There has to be the passing down of the knowledge and the stories.”

Above: Tara Birtwhistle and the Royal Winnipeg Ballet in Mauricio Wainrot’s *Carmina Burana*
Photo: Bruce Monk

Yosuke Mino

First Soloist

“The RWB has shaped me into a dancer who can connect the dots — onstage or offstage,” says Yosuke Mino, 34. “They’ve always accepted me the way I am. They’ve let me surf their wave and that has helped me to grow.”

Born in Kanazawa, Japan, Mino began training at the RWB School’s Summer Session after seeing an ad in a Japanese dance magazine. He was accepted to the Professional Division in 1998, and joined the company as an apprentice in 2002. After one year with Boston Ballet, Mino returned to the Prairie company, where he was promoted to first soloist in 2006.

Mino has received accolades for his Jester in *Swan Lake*, Bluebird in *The Sleeping Beauty* and Mercutio in *Romeo and Juliet*. He also enjoys performing contemporary works such as Itzik Galili’s heart-stopping *Hikarizatto*, which the company performed at the 2010 Vancouver Winter Olympic Games Cultural Olympiad.

Mino credits teacher David Moroni for helping him develop his powerhouse athleticism. “You think you’re tired, but your body still has something left,” he says of Moroni’s notoriously grueling classes. “I learned how to have an iron will and push until the end.”

Mino has served as muse for many choreographers who have worked with the company. He premiered the title role in Jordan Morris’ *Peter Pan*, Toulouse-Lautrec in Morris’ *Moulin Rouge – The Ballet*, the White Rabbit in Hounsell’s *Wonderland* and Papageno in Godden’s *The Magic Flute*. Twyla Tharp cast him as the sinister King of the Underworld for the Canadian premiere of *The Princess & The Goblin* in 2012.

“I’m enjoying exploring the other side of myself as an artist,” he says of his character-based roles. “As I get older, it’s harder to do all the technical stuff that I used to do, so I really like roles where I can reach out to the audience emotionally.”

Mino has also been choreographing a growing body of work. *KOJI* garnered second prize at Stuttgart’s Internationales Solo Tanz Theater Festival in 2011, later performed at home by Q Dance, for whom he continues to choreograph.

“Yosuke is an artist in the purest sense — one who creates simply out of desire to discover something hidden in himself,” artistic director Peter Quanz praises his former classmate. “His choreography ripples with minute explosions of energy, shifts of focus and a play of detail that is immediately engaging. Instinctively, Yosuke offers a direct window into his joyous love of movement.”



Sophia Lee

First Soloist

Sophia Lee, 23, epitomizes the heart and soul of the Royal Winnipeg Ballet: fresh, vibrant, versatile, wildly charismatic and with a fierce drive to constantly push herself to grow as an artist. She was acclaimed by the *Ottawa Citizen* in 2013 for her “lovely port de bras and serene hauteur” as the Lilac Fairy in *The Sleeping Beauty*, while CBC’s Robert Enright hailed Lee for her “sensuous precision” after making her Royal Winnipeg Ballet debut as *First* — as in “first victim” — in Godden’s *Svengali* in 2011.

Born in South Korea, Lee began formal dance training at the RWB School Professional Division at 16. After graduating in 2010, Lee joined the company as an aspirant before vaulting over the next rank of apprentice to join the corps de ballet in 2011. She was promoted to first soloist in 2013.

“Every ballet I’ve danced excites me,” she says. “We do so many different things. I would never have received so many opportunities and so much stage experience in a larger company. And even if you know something will be hard physically or mentally, you learn from everything that you do, and it becomes another coin in your pocket.”

One of those “coins” has been working with Quanz and Q Dance in several works, including his *Pomme* in 2013, in which she was buried in 200 pounds of Granny Smith apples.

Lee lists former principals Tara Birtwhistle, Vanessa Lawson, Laura Graham and Evelyn Hart as her heroes. She’s ready to learn from those who have gone before, including real-life partner, Mino.

“I have a lot of respect for older dancers because they have something we can’t have — experience,” she says. “Dancing is not something that comes quickly. What I also learn from them is perseverance and patience.”



Left: Yosuke Mino in Mark Godden’s *Dracula*
Photo: David Cooper

Above: Sophia Lee in Twyla Tharp’s *The Princess & The Goblin*
Photo: Bruce Monk

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Going Home Star

Going Home Star — *Truth and Reconciliation* is based on Canada's troubled history of government-sanctioned residential schools. More than 150,000 First Nations, Métis and Inuit children were forcibly taken from their families to be indoctrinated into white culture through federally run schools. The Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada was established to seek answers, resulting in a formal apology by the Canadian government in June 2008 as a first step toward healing.

For the 2014 production, André Lewis commissioned Montreal-based, Texan-born choreographer and former company soloist Mark Godden. "What I love about Mark," Lewis says, "is that he plucks from both the classical and the contemporary to tell a story."

Tina Keeper, a former Member of Parliament and TV star of CBC's *North of 60* series, served as an associate producer and "guide" for the production. With her own family impacted by residential schools, Keeper's involvement adds a stamp of authenticity to this ballet, which was first envisioned 10 years ago by late Cree elder/activist Mary Richard with Lewis.

Keeper remembers seeing *The Ecstasy of Rita Joe*, both the George Ryga play and the Royal Winnipeg Ballet production based on it. She says its bleak tale of an aboriginal woman spiralling downward on inner city streets is still as relevant today as it was when created in the seventies, noting Canada's still growing number of murdered and missing aboriginal women.

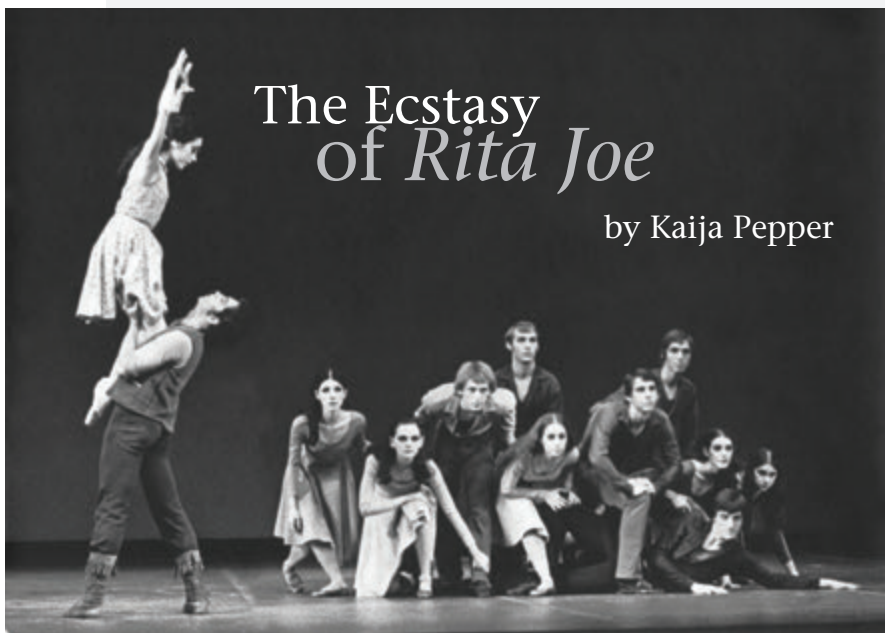
"Obviously this work stands on the shoulders of *Rita Joe*," says Godden, who once performed in that ballet. "I'm not trying to make something better, but as an artist and individual living in Canada, I was moved hearing the stories told by the residential school survivors. I wanted to share the burden."

Is a centuries-old, European-based art form capable of depicting aboriginal culture? "Absolutely!" Keeper says. "Ballet can tell any story. It's such a beautiful art form. And when you layer in the voices and sounds and rhythms of our musicians, it becomes haunting and uplifting."

She recounts attending a Truth and Reconciliation national event held last March in Edmonton with Lewis. During the final ceremony, participants and residential school survivors laid gifts inside a traditional, carved bentwood box as a gesture of reconciliation. Keeper and Lewis placed pointe shoes with leather moccasins tucked inside. ▼

The Ecstasy of Rita Joe

by Kaija Pepper



“We are intelligent people living in an age of startling accomplishment. Just days ago we launched yet another trip to the moon. A society that can accomplish feats of this magnitude surely can find the courage to help the Indian in his struggle for survival.”

These hopeful words by Chief David Courchene, president of the Manitoba Indian Brotherhood, were part of his program statement for the Royal Winnipeg Ballet production of *The Ecstasy of Rita Joe*, choreographed by Norbert Vesak, and based on the play of the same name by George Ryga. The Brotherhood, a lobby group under Courchene's leadership since 1968, had made the unusual move of commissioning a ballet to mark the 1971 centenary of the signing of Treaties One and Two between the Indians of Manitoba and representatives of the Crown.

Given the troubled history of European colonization to which the Brotherhood wanted to draw attention, it was not inappropriate that the commission resulted in a work driven by a realistic, hard-hitting plot about a young native woman who has moved to the city, where she finds loneliness, prostitution, rape and, ultimately, death.

When I watched the 1974 CBC film of the ballet on DVD in 2011, at first all I could see were the pointe shoes, and the incongruity of having a First Nations character dance her oppression in these iconic symbols of a European high-art tradition. Then I remembered what it was like in the seventies, when the dance boom was at its height, Russian dancer Rudolf Nureyev was an established ballet star and fellow defector Mikhail Baryshnikov rapidly became one (Nureyev escaped to the West in 1961 in Paris, Baryshnikov in 1974 in Toronto). Non-balletomanes might have criticized it as elitist, but for many, ballet — including the women's pointe shoes, a key technical tool of the form — was a powerful symbol of culture, accomplishment and beauty. I watched the DVD again, and now, witnessing an “Indian girl” dance her troubled story centre stage while wearing those pink pointe shoes presented a paradox that was deeply moving.

This excerpt is from The Manitoba Indian Brotherhood Commissions a Ballet: The Ecstasy of Rita Joe, published in Renegade Bodies: Canadian Dance in the 1970s, edited by Allana C. Lindgren and Kaija Pepper, Dance Collection Danse Press/Presse, 2012. It is reprinted with the permission of the author and publisher, and has been edited for Dance International. ▼



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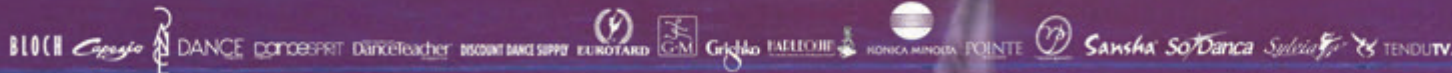
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Filling the White Box



Sarah Slipper and Northwest Dance Project's new works

by A.L. Adams

“S how me ‘round’ anger.”

“Lift him over your shoulder like a sack of potatoes.”

“You peak in unison, then fall independently.”

It’s early June at Northwest Dance Project in Portland, Oregon, and choreographer Tracey Durbin — a petite, spirited presence in an off-the-shoulder top and unlaced duck-boots — is honing her piece *Atash*, created in 2012 for 10 of the company’s dancers, preparing it for a remount. The nimble, sweaty dancers nod vigorously, absorbing her every word, then shake out and try the combination again. Offstage, the “company mascot,” an English bulldog named Hank, wriggles back and forth on the carpet. The company’s artistic director, Sarah Slipper, watches calmly.

“This is not ‘the Sarah Slipper Company,’” Slipper is fond of saying. In fact, whenever she’s asked about her vision, she quickly shifts the spotlight back to her company’s collective accomplishments and her dancers’ individual achievements. For instance, Andrea Parsons and Franco Nieto received the Princess Grace Award for dance in 2010 and 2012, respectively, which recognizes emerging artists.

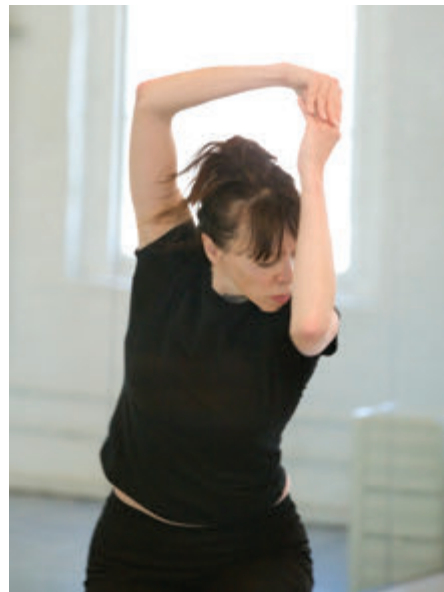
And — this makes Slipper most proud — the company has staged more than 160 new works over the 10 seasons it has been in existence, luring top-calibre choreographers from around the world to Portland to develop work with them. That is an unprecedented number of new works in general, but it’s especially impressive for a company of Northwest Dance Project’s size. Some of these have been award winners: Ihsan Rustem’s *State of Matter* won the 2011 Sadler’s Wells Global Dance Contest and a place in London’s Cultural Olympiad. Slipper’s own *A Fine Balance* won 2006’s Benoit de la Danse.

“Most companies prefer to buy work that’s already been staged elsewhere, that they know will please an audience. No company surrenders to the vision of visiting choreographers as much as we do,” Slipper enthusiastically asserts. “That’s our secret: we give them total freedom.”

Here in the studio, Durbin’s *Atash* is finding its feet. The piece begins with a Hebrew translation of W. H. Auden’s poem *Stop All the Clocks*. “Put out all the stars ...” quotes Ching Ching Wong as they break to discuss the poem’s mood. Durbin invites dancers to lean on each other, to explore “not overt sexiness, but sensuality, whatever that means.” When they stumble upon a gesture the choreographer loves, it stays.

“The dancers usually have a huge input into the process,” says Slipper, “and the finer you slice a piece, the more the dancers become involved. They get to engage in a conversation with the choreographer about what it’s like to dance the movements they’ve devised.”

Later, Carla Mann rehearses *How the Light Gets In*, which will premiere alongside Durbin’s piece. In one oft-repeated combination, the ensemble stands straight forward, then collapses to one side, like marionettes with their strings abruptly cut. One dancer falls the “wrong” way ... but Mann approves. Fall that way every time, she tells him.



Sarah Slipper
Photo: Blaine Truitt Covert

Mann also asks the dancers for “actorly” touches like speech and small gestures that — independent of the broader flow of choreography — suggest social relationships between the dancers. A dancer stands still and recites a monologue as the rest cross in front and behind. When they’re at the sides of the stage while others are dancing, dancers perform subtle vignettes in character. Two pair off and hold hands, others lean on a wall or gaze out the windows.

“Often, the last thing you can ask dancers to do is act,” Slipper notes. “But our dancers are willing to go on that journey.”

A Vancouver, British Columbia, native, Slipper traces her insatiable taste for new works back to her ballerina days with the Royal Winnipeg Ballet, where she made her professional debut after training at London’s Royal Ballet School. As an eager young dancer known as someone who “ate up the stage,” she remembers standing in awe of the company’s then director Arnold Spohr for his fearless spirit of exploration. “He was famous for going around the world and bringing in new choreographic voices,” she explains. For example, Spohr was the first to invite Nederlands Dans Theater luminary Jiri Kylián to North America. Slipper spent 12 years with the Winnipeg company, first in the corps and eventually as a principal dancer. When she retired, she took a pause.

“I had been like a racehorse with blinders on,” she says of her early career. “When I stopped dancing professionally, I got into rock and roll, into theatre, which ripped me open to taking risk again, to being vulnerable. It felt very new, very raw.”

Rather than jump right back into the dance world, she completed a BA degree in theatre at the University of Winnipeg, then a conservatory intensive in acting at Oxford. But then, in 1996, the ballet world pulled her back. Alberta Ballet offered her a post as its ballet master, and she took it, going on to the same role at Oregon Ballet Theatre.

As a ballet master, Slipper found she enjoyed the authority and freedom of teaching and decision-making, which she parlayed into a stint of freelance choreography work. Then, in 2004, she founded Northwest Dance Project with help from her life partner Scott Lewis, a music journalist who would later become the company’s executive director. The pair work 12-hour days at the studio so the company can flourish and grow.

“We really don’t take breaks,” Lewis reports. “We’ll be there when the dancers warm up for rehearsal, and they’ll leave and come back to teach a class, and we’ll *still* be there. This is not a job; it’s our lives.”

Slipper, who’s enjoyed an “injury-free career,” almost superstitiously swears that constant training helps prevent injury, while breaks beget breaks ... and sprains and strains. Hence the company performs a year-round roster of local shows and is gradually increasing its touring schedule. Last March, they toured British Columbia and Alberta (“a homecoming of sorts,” Slipper says). Next February, they’ll visit Germany.

Meanwhile, new works may be thrilling to produce, but they’re not easy to promote because they lack the name recognition of a *Sleeping Beauty* or *Swan Lake*. Slipper and Lewis, however, have found a workaround, branding Northwest Dance Project’s recurring seasonal showcases with memorable titles that audiences can associate with prior shows. While the works may change, the season stays comfortably consistent. Their season kickoff, for instance, is always called NEW NOW WOW!, and features premieres. The winter offering, In Good Company, is always a dancer-choreographed smorgasbord. Spring brings a Director’s Choice showcase and then there’s Summer Splendors, the showcase Mann and Durbin have been scrambling to get ready for.

Northwest Dance Project also manages plenty of outreach, hosting a full roster of classes from beginner to advanced, from ballet to hip-hop to contemporary jazz. Many courses are taught (or taken) by company members, allowing local fans direct access to the dancers they admire onstage, and helping dancers maintain their diverse movement specialties.

Any downtime is filled by two massive and unique talent searches: the LAUNCH project selects 40 dancers from a worldwide pool, and Pretty Creatives does the same with two emerging choreographers. Both projects culminate when the choreographers work with the 40 dancers in an 18-hour intensive and present the new work they’ve made at an informal studio showcase.

The constant search for emerging dance talents literally keeps Slipper up at night, viewing videos and vetting applications, but she knows these discoveries keep Northwest Dance Project’s curatorial voice vital. She makes an effort to tune out hype and choose “what hits her eye,” but sometimes both coincide. The company wasn’t particularly looking to chase the Gaga technique trend, for instance, until online video from Danielle Agami, a Los Angeles-based choreographer and Gaga devotee, struck them emotionally and they invited Agami to participate in LAUNCH.

But, for now, as we return to the studio in mid-June, Summer Splendors is about to unfold. The small, sunlit studio has been swept bare and set with chairs. The practice space becomes the stage by mere declaration; it’s not raised, there are no wings, the windows at street level attract curious in-lookers during the show. Dancers wear neutral khaki-and-white clothes and socks.

Mann’s *How the Light Gets In* opens the program, Durbin’s *Atash* closes, and in between are Yin Yue’s *Before Dawn* and Gregory Dolbashian’s *This is Embracing*. The order is appropriate; *Light* has a freshness and *Atash* a touch of gritty fatigue. Yet Slipper says, “We don’t even try to craft a program to have a ‘dramatic centerpiece,’ or an ‘upbeat closer.’ We trust each choreographer to bring a unique feel, texture, voice, and that’s all we ask.”

The pieces in Summer Splendors uphold many contemporary trends: quick-slow cadences and taut pauses, gender-neutral roles, gender-equal lifts and holds, more attention paid to the individual or the group than to pairs. Whenever a dancer solos, we glimpse his or her singular energy: Wong’s contained strength, Patrick Kilbane’s fluid grace, Lindsey Matheis’ emotional intensity, Parsons’ surreal isolation and extension, Nieto’s explosive energy. Drawing from a fluent, varied vocabulary of styles, dancers swoop forward and floor-roll like capoeira; they swivel and kick from crouched pelvises and guts like martial arts. They snap and clap to folk counter-rhythms and leap from firm-rooted hip-hop heels into the graceful, lithe lines of ballet.

It is Slipper who has created a space for these compelling talents — with plans to furnish an even better one. Northwest Dance Project is working to secure a “forever home” close to the Willamette River with at least double the former practice space and better facilities for both dancers and administration. But in keeping with the NWDP aesthetic, the new studio will still be a “white box,” without wings or backstage. “It’s a blank canvas,” says Slipper, “ready to be filled with creativity.” ▼

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Two Dancers (Deux danseurs) by Henri Matisse
Gouache on paper, cut and pasted, notebook papers, pencil and thumbtacks
© 2014 Succession H. Matisse/Artists Rights Society (ARS) New York

Matisse at MOMA

Henri Matisse: The Cut-Outs is at the Museum of Modern Art in New York to February 8, 2015. These works were created in the late 1940s, when the artist turned increasingly to cut paper as his primary medium in what MOMA calls the “brilliant final chapter in Matisse’s long career.”

This stage curtain design is for the symphonic ballet *Rouge et noir* (1939) by Léonide Massine, to music by Shostakovich, danced by the Ballet Russe de Monte Carlo. It was one of two ballets, both by Massine, for which Matisse designed sets and costumes.

The National Film Board of Canada’s *CODA* premiered at the Toronto International Film Festival in October. It was co-directed by Denis Poulin and choreographer Martine Époque, who are the founders and directors of Montreal’s LARTEch, a creative laboratory dedicated to “technochoreography,” the art of digital motion-capture dance.

With motion capture and particle processing, Poulin and Époque create virtual dancers free of their morphological appearance and provide a contemporary reinterpretation of Stravinsky’s *Rite of Spring*. They imagine a dance in which humans become dynamic footprints, carrying the motor signature of each one of the real dancers at the source of their movements.

CODA



Production still from *CODA*
Photo: © FAKE Studio and the National Film Board of Canada



“This is not a trend. I repeat: this is not a trend,” says Lil C in the documentary film *Rize*, which follows the creation of krump, an urban dance style developed by a group of teenagers in Los Angeles. Lil C was correct. Since krump’s start in the early 2000s, this athletic art form, with its strong sense of culture and community, has grown to gain an international following.

Ceasare “Tight Eyez” Willis and Jo’Artis “BIG Mijo” Ratti, widely considered the co-founders of krump, both started dancing through a style termed clowning, in which they performed hip-hop moves with their faces painted like circus clowns, and entertained at children’s parties and public events. The two found their personal style too rugged and raw to continue clowning, and hence krump was born. Participants come to krump, with its foundation of chest pops, jabs, arm swings and stomps, to express strong emotions: anger, sadness, frustration. For many, krumping became an alternative to street violence, but though it may look aggressive, it mostly gives dancers a feeling of release and calmness.

“When you look at old krump, it is reckless, it is shaky, it looks spastic. But the dance has evolved,” explains Amadeus “Primal” Marquez, owner of Toronto’s Northbuck crew. Over time, krump has become more polished and structured in its foundations, creating a stronger look for the form. Dancers are able to map out what is acceptable, what isn’t acceptable, where their posture is supposed to be, and even the way they should plant their feet. As Primal says, “It turned from a street style to a dance style.” New krumpers carry the foundations of krump, but also add in their own personal styles and movement qualities.

Krump has travelled the world, including Japan, France, Mexico and Korea. In Canada, Northbuck started an after-school program called Krumping Out Crime that teaches at-risk youth the expressive dance form while opening up mentorship possibilities. Montreal boasts one of the only all-female krump crews, led by Valérie “Taminator” Chartier, called Buck Swans. A worldwide crew and movement titled Wonder Women Krump connects female krumpers to build a community and empower women. Since 2008, Germany has held the European Buck Session — the world’s largest krump competition — in which crews battle each other to claim the title of Krump World Champion. They are invited back the following year to defend their title. Prizes for the event reach 2,000 euros. This competition has been growing quickly, doubling in its second year to more than 900 viewers and 300 battlers.

At this year’s European Buck Session in Dusseldorf in September, apart from the main competition, there was a workshop from 2013 World Champion, Ruin, as well as dance workshops and history lectures from BIG Mijo and Tight Eyez. The male and female 2014 Krump World Champions were both from France’s Madrootz crew. The crew holds some of the pioneers of the French krump movement, including the winners, Sista G and Grichka (who also held the men’s title in 2012). Battles with teams made up of five people representing their own country also take place. This year, and for the past three years, the winner was Team Germany.

— DEANNE KEARNEY



Joan Benesh 1920-2014

Joan Benesh, co-founder of the Benesh Institute, the international centre for Benesh Movement Notation (BMN), has passed away.

BMN is a written system that was devised by Joan Benesh and her husband, Rudolf, in the fifties for recording human movement, which is used by dance companies and organizations all over the world.

Born in Liverpool in 1920, Joan Benesh studied at the Studio School of Dance and Drama, later studying ballet with Lydia Sokolova. During the war she danced in the commercial theatre before joining the Royal Opera Company in 1950 and the Sadler’s Wells Royal Ballet the following year. In 1957, she joined the staff of the Royal Ballet School before founding the Institute in 1962. She retired as principal in 1976.

“Joan Benesh, with her husband Rudolf, revolutionized the way dance and all other forms of movement can be notated, analysed, and reproduced,” says Sir Peter Wright, president of the Benesh Institute. “Joan gave her life to this work which thousands of choreographers, dancers, teachers, and sportsmen and women have benefited from; I certainly have and will always remember her for her dedication and tireless energy as she successfully fought for ‘Benesh Notation.’”

More than 1,750 BMN scores have been written and are used in research, teaching dances from the repertoire and for analysing movement. The set exercises and dances in the RAD syllabi are published in BMN as this enables teachers to study the work in a common language and in more detail than is possible from word notes or videos alone.

Above: Joan and Rudolf Benesh (1972)
Photo: Helen Seymer

The Art of Design

Natalia Goncharova
and the turning point
of *Le Coq d'or*

by Karen Barr



When the hammer fell at Christie's Impressionist and Modern Art Evening Sale in London, 2007, Russian artist Natalia Goncharova and *Picking Apples*, her 1909 oil painting, had just made history. Closing at \$9.8 million, the painting obtained what was then the highest auction price for any work by a female artist. The very next year, again at Christie's in London, Goncharova's *Les fleurs* (*The Flowers*), an oil painting from 1912, fetched \$10.8 million. In 2010, three times charmed and at the same auction house, *Espagnole*, painted in oil in 1916, brought in \$10.2 million. All this has helped make Goncharova one of the most important Russian artists ever.

The artist, who was born in the village of Negaevo in 1881 and studied at the Moscow Institute of Painting, Sculpture and Architecture, started to exhibit her paintings in 1904. Two years later, she participated in Serge Diaghilev's exhibition of Russian art in Paris. Her 1913 one-woman show in Moscow, when she was in her early 20s, featured more than 750 of her works.

The turning point in Goncharova's career came with an invitation from Diaghilev to work with the Ballets Russes, and she left for Paris to design sets and costumes for *Le Coq d'or* (*The Golden Cockerel*), the ballet she is most recognized for. From that point on, she would abandon painting almost entirely for work in theatrical design.

Le Coq d'or tells the story of King Dodon and the magical Golden Cockerel that is able to alert him to danger. The ballet premiered in Paris in 1914 and still fascinates us a century later. It was based on the opera by Nikolai Rimsky-Korsakov, which in its turn was based on a poem by Pushkin. Rimsky-Korsakov's opera premiered in Moscow in 1909; thought to be mocking the Imperial family, it was banned from the stage. Diaghilev's version had opera singers positioned at the side of the stage, while dancers were featured in the centre. Michel Fokine was choreographer, and principal dancers included Tamara Karsavina (Queen of Shemakhan), Alexis Bulgakov (King Dodon) and Enrico Cecchetti (the Astrologer).

To open, Diaghilev had the curtain rise in the dark, so when the stage was suddenly lit the audience was hit with a jolt of colour. Set in Goncharova's modernistic world, yet managing to rely on traditional Russian spaces, her backdrops featured geometric buildings and Russian onion domes. Everything glowed in bright red, hot pink and vibrant yellow. Costumes boldly matched the sets, providing depth to the visuals in what was essentially moving art.



Above: Costume for the Coq d'or in the Ballets Russes production of *Le Coq d'or* England, London, 1937; based on original design 1914
© Natal'ya Goncharova Estate/Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York/ADAGP, Paris
Photo: © 2014 Museum Associates/LACMA (Los Angeles County Museum of Art)

Centre: Natalia Goncharova, designer; Barbara Karinska, costumier
Costume for King Dodon © 1937 from the Ballets Russes' production of
Le Coq d'or. National Gallery of Australia, Canberra, purchased in 1973

Everything glowed in bright red, hot pink and vibrant yellow. Costumes boldly matched the sets, providing depth to the visuals in what was essentially moving art.

Diaghilev's production would, like the ballet's story, have a tragic end. The Rimsky-Korsakov family sued him, claiming the production was in violation of the composer's original conception due to its unconventional staging. Further performances were prohibited. Within the next decade all the costumes were ruined or lost.

In 1937, more than two decades later, Goncharova had the opportunity to redevelop the costumes for a production by Colonel de Basil's Ballet Russe de Monte Carlo. *Le Coq d'or* now became a standalone ballet, eliminating its association with opera singers. Fokine revised and added to the choreography. Nicholas Tcherepnin, a pupil of Rimsky-Korsakov, adapted the original score. Goncharova kept her original designs, but lightened the fabric's weight, enabling the dancers to fully engage in the intensified choreography. Principal dancers included Tatiana Riabouchinska (title role), Irina Baronova (Queen of Shemakhan) and Marc Platoff (King Dodon).

The costumier was Barbara Karinska (later in a glorious partnership with George Balanchine), who made more than 150 costumes designed by Goncharova for this ballet.

Today, many of the costumes from the Ballet Russe de Monte Carlo production are at the National Gallery of Australia. This includes King Dodon's robe and mantle, both of which rely heavily on appliqué, embroidery and rich fabrics. Large flowers in deep red velvet and gold lamé are appliquéd on to his floor-length robe. Over this is a red velvet mantle, with elephantine sleeves reaching to the floor, to which real ermine tails hang. While wearing the entire ensemble it is probable the King did more posing than actual dancing, appropriate since his character is quite dandified and prone to sleep.

The peasant women costumes, held in both the National Gallery of Australia and the Los Angeles County Museum of Art, are in simple cotton or linen, and have large, bold patterns of bright yellows, oranges and greens. Some have traditional white blouses on which light orange fabric has been appliquéd with dark orange wool to give the appearance of embroidery, large enough for the audience to see, without thousands of tiny stitches.

The Golden Cockerel costume, held in Los Angeles, features a gold lamé bodice, with sheer gold metallic mesh bloomers. To conform to the era's requirements for modesty, full yellow silk tights were worn underneath. The feathers for both the wings and tail are of matte and shiny gilded leather sewn to a base of net, and a pill style gold hat completes the costume.

The title character did not have a costume in the original ballet production: it was an artificial golden bird perched on a rope. How different bringing the bird to life though dance would have been for the audience of the new *Coq d'or*.

Le Coq d'or was reconstructed in 2013 by former Bolshoi Ballet star Andris Liepa and Georgiy Isaakyan, the artistic director of Natalia Sats Moscow State Opera and Ballet Theatre. It was based on Diaghilev's original production and welcomed back opera singers. Liepa worked with a drawing for Goncharova's backdrop curtain, which he had recreated, all hand-painted. ▼



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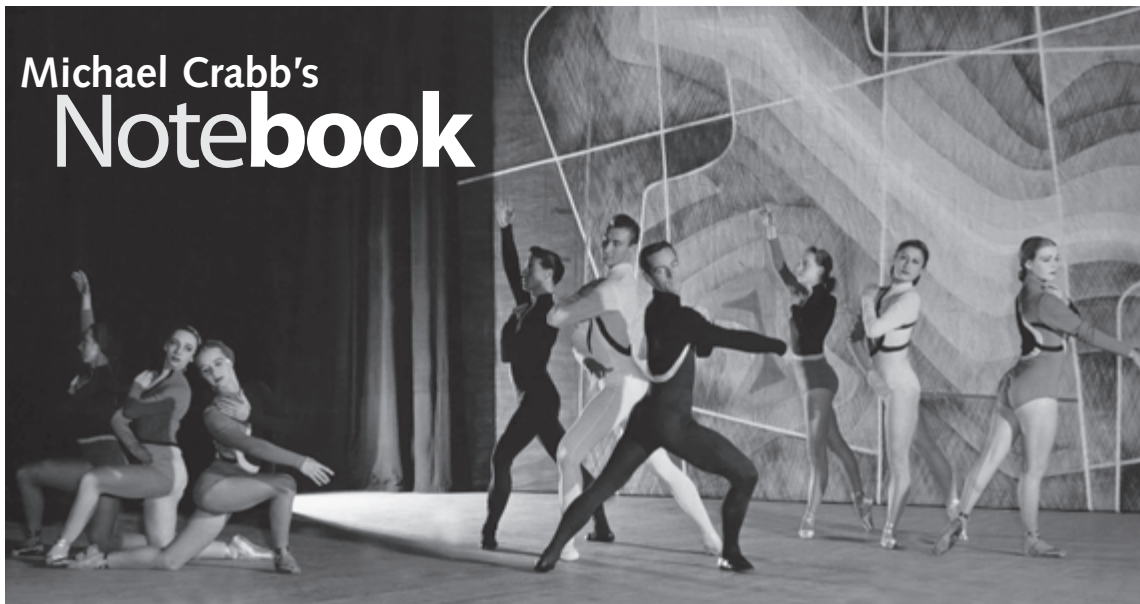
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Michael Crabb's Notebook



Left: Sheila Killough, Lillian Lewis, Viola Busday, Victor Duret, Arnold Spohr, Bill McGrath, Sheila Henderson, Eva von Gency and Kay Bird in Spohr's *Intermède* (1951)

Right: Royal Winnipeg Ballet in Gweneth Lloyd's *The Wise Virgins* (1942)

Photos: Phillips-Gutkin and Associates Ltd. Courtesy of RWB Archives



Our obsession with marking the passing years is thoroughly understandable. It seems convenient to count them off as they go along so we have a rough idea of how many are left. As humans we know our days on this planet are finite. Modern medicine can keep the Grim Reaper at bay for only so long. The trip to that “undiscover’d country from whose bourn no traveller returns” looms ever closer with each passing day — except, disconcertingly, the more days that have passed, the faster the trip seems to approach. It explains why there’s a big emotional difference between marking, say, a 10th birthday and a 75th.

This, of course, is rather different when it comes to marking institutional anniversaries, particularly those of that precarious species, the performing arts organization. The survival rate of fledgling arts companies remains almost as

dismal as that of newly launched restaurants. As an arts organization, if you’ve made it far enough to celebrate even a 10th anniversary, there’s every reason to breathe a huge sigh of relief — and pray the grants keep coming.

However, at some point — for inexplicable reasons 25th anniversaries and their multiples are considered particularly auspicious — the sighs of relief give way to hearty self-congratulations, the theory being that the longer an arts organization has been around, the greater the prospect of its extended survival.

By this logic — although its money managers might take a more cautious view — the Royal Winnipeg Ballet has every reason to break out the champagne, as it will at a gala next April, to celebrate an extraordinary 75 years of gutsy existence in a city few would have thought of as a promising place to build a ballet troupe.

The Royal Winnipeg Ballet is now among the oldest performing arts organizations in the country; certainly, if you include its first decade of pre-professional life, Canada’s longest-operating ballet troupe. It’s so old, in fact, that come next April there will not be too many people around who can claim they saw what was then the Winnipeg Ballet Club’s debut performance in 1939.

Until they took flight, founding figures Gweneth Lloyd and Betty Farrally personified the Royal Winnipeg Ballet; Lloyd was largely responsible for its early repertoire. But they left quite early on and the troupe stumbled. Then Arnold Spohr returned to his alma mater in 1958 to begin an extraordinary three decades as artistic director, which, in retrospect, we can see nicely coincided with a great international upsurge in the popularity of ballet.

Even now, people still speak of the Spohr years as a golden age, but it was the times as much as the man who made them golden. Still, because of his long tenure and the force of his larger-than-life personality, Spohr also came to personify the Royal Winnipeg Ballet. Indeed, at times Spohr found it hard to imagine the company existing without his presence — even when his successors were doing a creditable job of proving it could.

At a certain point, however, a performing arts organization evolves into a sacred trust, something that transcends the personalities of those who animate its structure. It's doubtful whether current Royal Winnipeg Ballet artistic director André Lewis has a strong desire to personify the company. This is partly a reflection of his naturally modest personality, but also of Lewis' acute awareness of his essentially custodial and curatorial role.

Much as Karen Kain at the National Ballet of Canada (who also moved from school to stage to studio) sees her role as distinctly different from that of founder Celia Franca, so Lewis recognizes that his job is to ensure that the artistic traditions that have given the Royal Winnipeg Ballet its unique "Prairie freshness" — its exuberant performing persona, its eclectic repertoire, its eagerness to entertain — remain vital enough that the company has a solid shot at marking its centenary in another 25 years.

It's nowadays a common lament among ballet company veterans that the young generation of dancers have a diminished sense of the footsteps that have been trod before them. Caught up in a bubble of their own careers, for them the past is irrelevant. The old always grumble about the young and one hopes this despondent assessment is unfounded. Even so, the other remarkable difference between human and institutional age is the process of automatic renewal that's inherent in the latter.

When the curtain rose in October on the opening production of the Royal Winnipeg Ballet's 75th-anniversary season, the stage was populated by dancers some of whose grandparents were not even born when the company began. In one sense, even as the company ages in institutional terms, in appearance it remains forever young. The dancers you see onstage are not weighed down by the company's venerable past. They see a future of infinite possibility. ▼

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Laura Selenzi and the Art of Belly Dance

Serpentine Moves

by Amanda Leslie

The far right wall of Café Istanbul in downtown Halifax, Nova Scotia, is adorned with colourful veils hanging from ceiling to floor, a shimmering display of orange, purple and gold. When the front door opens, a gust of cold night air stirs the delicate fabric. It's a small space, crowded with tables and eager guests, and there's a sense of anticipation tonight. They're waiting for the belly dancer.

At half past seven the lights dim for the show. A hush falls and the music starts. In time with the lively percussion, a woman dances gracefully into the room. She shimmies her hips, twirling amongst the crowd. Her arms and hands act as an extension of her body, elegantly conveying the feeling of the song. The woman's red skirt has ornate gold jewelry draped across the hips. A red bra crisscrosses her back, her long dark hair hangs loose to the

shoulders. Every time she moves, the jewelry on her skirt chimes. She manoeuvres around the restaurant with ease, holding a green veil and allowing the material to billow out from her hands. She pulls several patrons up to dance and the customers break into a rhythmic clap. Her performance ends with a final bow and she disappears through the back door as mysteriously as she arrived.

Laura Selenzi doesn't usually tell strangers she's a belly dancer. She doesn't even like the word. Selenzi sometimes describes her work as Middle Eastern dance, but the term belly dance is more familiar to the public and she uses it for convenience, though it doesn't fully describe all the different components of the dance. Belly dancing is an art form requiring control of not just the hips and belly, but the entire body.

Selenzi fell in love with belly dancing when she was a teenager living in Bridgewater, Nova Scotia. Her mother took her to see a play in nearby Chester, and Selenzi couldn't take her eyes away from the dancer performing onstage.

"It was amazing," she says. "I talked to one of the girls after the show and decided to start. It just felt natural to me. I took ballet as a kid, but it felt too restrictive."

After studying photography at Nova Scotia College of Art and Design, Selenzi decided to pursue her dance interest full time. She travelled to Toronto to study under Yasmina Ramzy, who she credits with taking her from a recreational belly dancer to a professional.

With a desire to learn more about the cultures that gave rise to belly dance, Selenzi spent several months in late 2003 and early 2004 travelling around India and Turkey. Many of the people she encountered considered belly dance an important part of their history, even though it wasn't something they were comfortable seeing their daughters perform.

When she returned to Halifax, she reconnected with Monique Ryan, a dancer Selenzi had met years before. Taught by competing instructors, the two women once nicknamed themselves the Romeo and Juliet of belly dance.

As women file into the studio for the start of the class, they gravitate toward the lounge in the corner. Bundled up in scarves and coats, they don't look like belly dancers. But as they shed their outer layers of clothes, the atmosphere in the room begins to change.

Soon, the room is full of students rolling their hips in front of the mirror. This advanced class is learning the drum solo. The routine consists of sharp, isolated movements in time with a heavy percussion beat. Selenzi manages to keep the women laughing, even as she guides and critiques. It is a difficult balance between commanding respect and inspiring the class.

Selenzi attributes her teaching style to Sahra Saeeda. Originally from California, Saeeda spent six years working as a dancer in Egypt. The two women met at the International Belly Dance Conference in Toronto, when Selenzi signed up for two of her workshops.

"We respected her knowledge, but she still treated us like we were all scholars of dance."

borrows heavily from other influences. "Some of the most well-known belly dancers of the golden age, from the mid-1920s to the 1950s, were fusing in elements such as Latin dance and ballet. People are afraid of losing the beauty of traditional belly dance," she says. "But like any art form it's just evolving."

As well, people today have mixed perceptions of belly dancers. Selenzi says some people focus on the seductive, rather than the cultural side. "There is a flirty and glamorous aspect to it, but that's not only what it's about." She's careful not to pay more attention to men during a show, especially those sitting with a woman. Selenzi doesn't want to make anyone feel uncomfortable. "[Men] don't always know how to act. Sometimes they think they have to ignore me entirely out of respect to their date."

Women can occasionally feel threatened by her performance as well. "Preconceptions can colour what they think is going on. They can't always see it through my eyes," she says. "[Seduction] is not my aim."

"A good crowd is giving you all this energy; you can feel it. And then you give it back to them. I almost burst into tears at the end of every show."

After 12 years of serious study, they were disappointed to see amateur performers representing the art form in inauthentic Halloween costumes and lingerie. Selenzi and Ryan decided to introduce Halifax to professional belly dancing and the idea for Serpentine Studios was born.

Serpentine Studios faces down onto Barrington Street. At night, purple lights shine up toward the windows, occasionally catching the eye of a passerby below. Tucked away in a corner of the studio is a small lounge where brightly coloured veils drape around a trio of lanterns hanging from the ceiling. Benches against the walls are lined with beaded pillows and a pot of tea waits on a table in the centre. The only wall not covered in veils displays a collection of vinyl records. The music is Arabic, with album covers showcasing elaborately costumed dancers.

In the early afternoon, sunlight streams into the windows of the studio, streaking across the wooden floor. Leaning against the pillows in the lounge, Selenzi recalls how the idea for a permanent studio came about. "We wanted to teach dance without running from place to place," she says. Serpentine Studios opened in September 2011.

In addition to Selenzi and Ryan, five other belly dancers teach classes ranging from Tribal Fusion to Aziza Veil choreography. The differences between Tribal Fusion and classic Egyptian belly dance are the most pronounced. The latter must look easy, soft and expressive. Tribal Fusion is meant to appear as an impressive show of skill, with muscular belly rolls and back bends.

Some proponents of traditional belly dance are wary of the growing popularity of fusion style dances. Selenzi understands these concerns, but says our modern version of belly dance already

Selenzi strives to show her audience how the music makes her feel. "It's a high," she says. "I like transporting people from the mundane reality of life to something more exotic. That's how I feel when I dance. The music carries me away."

When she choreographs, character is key, and she often plays a more glamorous version of herself. But the best part of a performance is always the reaction of the audience. "A good crowd is giving you all this energy; you can feel it. And then you give it back to them. I almost burst into tears at the end of every show."

For the second year in a row, the Lord Nelson Hotel has served as a venue for the Night of Inspiration, an event recognizing the contributions of individuals within the Turkish community in Halifax. Selenzi performed for free last year. Tonight she is getting paid, but only half her usual price. Three communities,

Turkish, Arabic and Persian, have come together under one roof, and this is a chance to introduce herself.

There are no chairs in the long hallway where Selenzi waits backstage, but a few empty equipment trunks serve as a table on which to lay her coat and belongings. She keeps busy with a few pre-show rituals. Selenzi moisturizes her hands, demonstrating how she uses her wrist and palm to create the illusion that her fingers stay elongated, which is a trademark of Egyptian belly dance. Next are the facial exercises: wide smiles and long frowns to help relax her muscles so she can keep smiling throughout the show.

Selenzi fidgets with her costume, a sparkly black ensemble with matching turban and purple veil. The rhinestone necklace pinned to her headpiece was a present from her grandmother, one of her biggest fans.

When Selenzi hears her cue from an announcer, she enters the main ballroom and dances beautifully underneath a ceiling of crystal chandeliers.

Afterward, she waits for her second performance of the night. To pass the time, Selenzi practises a few steps of her routine, moving gracefully down the length of the carpeted hall. In the restaurant across the street, a handful of customers sitting near the window take notice. Selenzi stops dancing when she sees she is being watched.

"I don't like to be the girl at the party who's always showing off," she says.

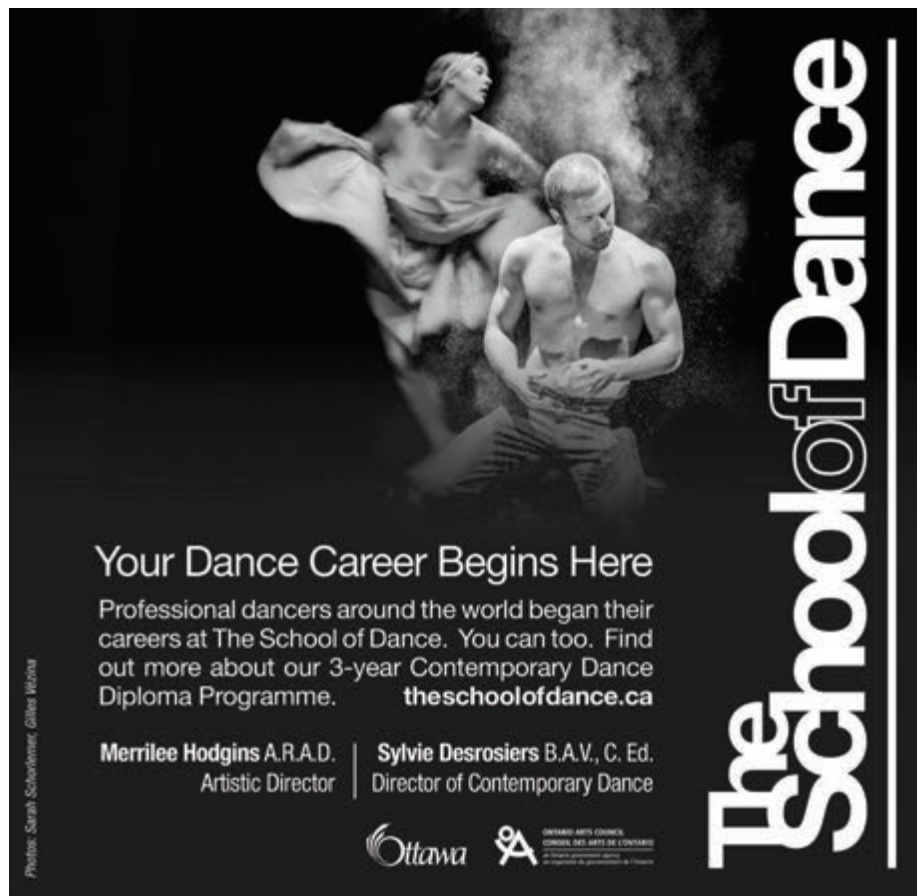
By 10 p.m. the cue for her second set is more than 20 minutes late. The band plays on and Selenzi continues to wait. Finally, the sound of the band stops drifting down the hall and she hurries back to wait for her cue.

She performs a drum solo to a percussion piece written by the Egyptian composer Hossam Ramzy. The music gets a few members of the audience on their feet.

Selenzi finishes her routine to applause and as she steps backstage, she can hear one of the announcers compliment her on the show. When the praise ends she sighs. They forgot to say her name.

At the World Tea House, Selenzi sits at a table with a cup of pumpkin herbal tea.

"When I was little my favourite game was dress up. I wanted to grow up to be a princess," she says. "I think I got pretty close." ▼



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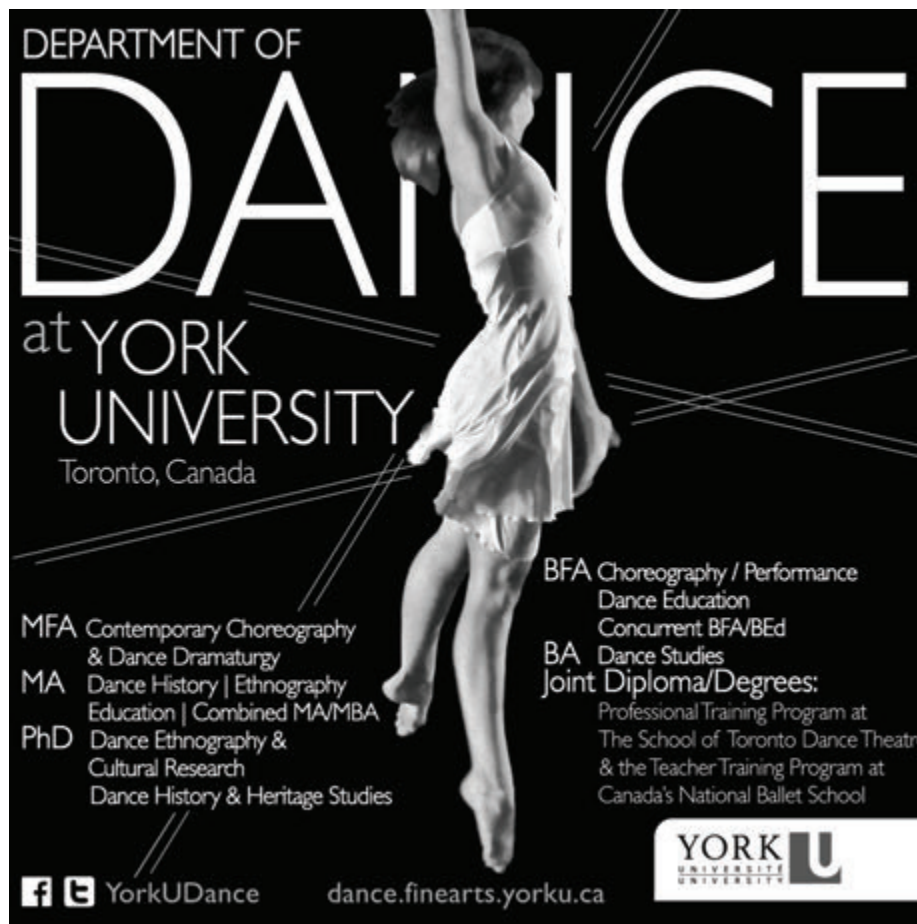
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Can Artistic Directors Take Back the Lead?

Ballet's entrance into the first decade of the new millennium saw a resurgence of interest in the works of the three previous ones — the seventies, eighties and nineties — but with an inverse decline in funding. This gave rise to a curious phenomenon in a number of places, particularly in the United States: a host of artistic directors with stellar curricula vitae as dancers, choreographers and ballet masters, whose careers took shape during those earlier decades, resigned or were fired from companies they had founded or built into premier dancer and audience destinations.

Those responsible for their sudden departures were for the most part unknown to the public: ballet board members, taken on for their business-world savvy, some with deep pockets, and many with uninformed opinions and personal preferences, who dispatched the counsel of more knowledgeable colleagues to the dustbin.

Shortfalls triggered by the financial crises marking the decades from the mid-1970s to the present fed disputes dominating meeting agendas. Terms such as “marketing,” “development” and “branding” became the lingua franca. Apparently, it began to grate on board members that the legatees of the Golden Era of ballet posed an obstacle to their plans to sprint ahead of the crisis by trading respect for popularity.

In 2011, Edward Villella resigned as artistic director of Miami City Ballet in the face of threats that the company he founded and spent 25 years building would be declared bankrupt if he didn't. Current artistic director Lourdes Lopez says the board recognized Villella's contribution, but, faced with the paradox of the need for company growth during an economic crisis, wanted to rescue it from what she termed its “Mom and Pop” operations, in order to broaden the donor base and delegate tasks to experts.

“What began as a cottage industry, grew. To professionalize the board, you have to invite professionals in. Edward built the company through sheer will, charisma and brilliance, but at a certain point it started teetering. Arts education

disappeared, a hurricane levelled Miami, ballet began receding from [the prominence it had in] the era when Mr. B was alive.”

In 2011, Dennis Nahat was fired without warning as Ballet San Jose's artistic director. In 2013, José Manuel Carreño succeeded him. The Cuban dancer, who had a stellar career at American Ballet Theatre, says, “The hardest thing is to co-ordinate everything. It was all about me [as a dancer] before. Now I have to deal with other people: the board, the union, the school. I have these huge ideas, but need approval from so many quarters that it can be frustrating at times.”

Jennifer Kronenberg, veteran principal with Miami City Ballet, believes that it's important to involve the board in the company's inner workings, to have them “sit in the studio six hours a day to bridge the divide in what they know about how a ballet company functions administratively with how it functions artistically.”

Lexie Overholt, a corps de ballet dancer, agrees that a good relationship between artistic staff and the board is necessary; otherwise, she says, being at work can feel more like “a factory” than a truly creative enterprise.

Two questions on the minds of dance artists seem to be: “How much is society willing to invest in this essential art form?” and “Shouldn't dancers steeped in ballet's traditions themselves remain its caretakers?”

In Cuba, the revolutionary government passed Law 812 in 1960, guaranteeing funding and leadership to ensure that working people and others would have access to ballet, “one of the loftiest and most beautiful of artistic expressions,” and ballet training. Government funding in other countries has worked successfully in some cases, but in others has transformed ballet into a political pawn as the economic crisis has accelerated. For example, in 2004, when the City of Frankfurt, Germany, found itself in debt, its oversight of public funding for the company did not prevent it from firing Frankfurt Ballet artistic director William Forsythe as a cost-cutting measure.

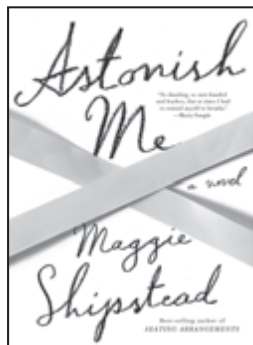
Private funding in the United States has turned some companies, large and small, into mini-me replicas of corporate mismanagement, where box-office receipts are equated with profit and loss statements, and union protection for dancers is viewed as a threat to administrative control. There's progress on the union front at Ballet San Jose, where soloist Damir Emric, who is the company's American Guild of Musical Artists (AGMA) rep, says: “It's finally been possible to find an organized way to communicate with management. The time when the board wanted us to not be union is past.”

Reflecting on what she would like to see in the future, Kronenberg speaks about how people invest in the stock market, without any control over their money, and are willing to risk losing it all in a day. But when people invest in a ballet company as board members, she says, they become afraid of risk and want more control. She asks: “Isn't it a healthier strategy to invest one's trust and confidence in the company's artistic staff? They have all the necessary training, experience and background, as well as an enduring commitment.”

Kronenberg's concern, which seems to echo throughout the profession, is that money worries have prompted some board members to view a company's artistic vision as subordinate to the business habit of approaching audience members as “customers,” where certain works might be an easier “sell” than others. Oregon Ballet Theatre artistic director Christopher Stowell, for instance, resigned in 2012, citing differences over repertoire: board members wanted more popular works.

Ballet, while needing a healthy fiscal endowment, will never be an arena for amassing super profits. But it can, regardless of the fortunes of the marketplace, extend its reach into the community, draw new audiences, and educate and elevate the public's appreciation of the art form. Hard times will be vanquished not by pandering to wrongheaded notions of taste and profitability, but by utilizing ballet's innate strengths and the riches of its culture, including thoughtfully curated repertoire. ▼

Mediawatch



Astonish Me

by Maggie Shipstead, Alfred A. Knopf

“Étonne-moi” (Astonish me) is the legendary challenge made by Serge Diaghilev to Jean Cocteau, who went on to do just that with, among other things, his scenario for *Parade* in 1917. But it is the 1970s ballet boom, not the Ballets Russes, that Maggie Shipstead channels in her second novel, *Astonish Me*.

The book comes on the heels of Shipstead’s accomplished first novel, *Seating Arrangements* (2012), a closely observed evisceration of a society wedding on a lightly fictionalized island off the Eastern Seaboard. With *Astonish Me*, Shipstead turns her gaze to another insular environment with arcane rules and deep dysfunctions, the world of ballet.

Unlike *Seating Arrangements*, *Astonish Me* does not confine itself to a week-end or follow a chronological narrative: it jumps around in time and place from 1977 to 2002. The protagonist is Joan Joyce, who has an affair with a Russian defector, stops dancing young because she knows her talent isn’t big enough for a big career, marries a childhood sweetheart when she gets pregnant, and mothers and trains a male dance prodigy who by the novel’s end is shooting the theatrical lights out.

In spite of being able to see the book’s denouement coming at you from its early pages, this is an impressive piece of work in many ways. Shipstead does not come from a dance background: she is a ballet fan who attended performances with her mother, and researched the

book by watching YouTube videos and consulting reference books to get the names of steps right.

But she is a keen observer who zeros in on what makes Arslan Rusakov, the defector, the best at what he does: the perfection of his centering, the precision of his positions, even when transitioning, the surety and intentionality of his balances and turns.

That sounds, of course, a lot like a description of Mikhail Baryshnikov in his glory days. In what is the book’s central weakness, Shipstead shapes her characters around key dance figures and events from the 1970s. Rusakov defects in Toronto (as did Baryshnikov) while on tour with a second-rate group of aging Russian stars. The choreographer Mr. K is a womanizer who left Russia for Paris via Berlin, and gifts his leading ladies with perfume (think Mr. B). Joan’s friend Elaine is a cocaine addict (think Gelsey Kirkland) and Arslan sometimes partners with Ludmilla Yedemskaya, a “tiny yellow-haired Russian” defector also known as “the disco babushka” who bears more than a passing resemblance to Natalia Makarova.

The book doesn’t just riff on facts; it borrows from fiction, too. The plot line is unmistakably similar to the 1977 Herbert Ross film *The Turning Point*, in which one dancer (Anne Bancroft) stays in the field and one (Shirley MacLaine) leaves, a situation that only equalizes years later when MacLaine’s on-screen daughter Emilia (Lesley Browne) becomes a star after a brief affair with a Russian defector played by Baryshnikov. (If you haven’t seen it, this potboiler of a film is still insanely fun to watch, and captures Baryshnikov at his dance apex.)

Shipstead’s cocktail shaker of a dance era is amusing but also distracting, getting in the way of her sure prose and gift for capturing the small moments with large-scale accuracy. This, combined with the book’s choppy structure, makes *Astonish Me* a classic second novel, significantly less astonishing than the author’s prize-winning debut.

— DEBORAH MEYERS



Chaplin

by Mario Schröder, Leipziger Ballet
100 minutes, www.euroarts.com

The great Charlie Chaplin was a formative influence for German choreographer Mario Schröder and *Chaplin* is clearly close to his heart. A straightforward account of the iconic star’s life, the ballet traces his troubled childhood, his introduction to the stage and then the movies, his triumphantly successful Tramp character, and his fall from favour and subsequent exile from a Communist-fearing Hollywood. The ballet is elaborately produced with a large and very busy ensemble, varied costumes and props, and some clever staging that evokes the era of the early movies. Chaplin is played by two dancers: the private man by Tyler Galster and the Tramp by Amelia Waller, the casting of a woman designed to reflect some of Chaplin’s feminine qualities. This pairing provides the emotional heart of the ballet: both dancers are excellent, capturing the complex and sometimes unsettling relationship between the man and his creation.

— HEATHER BRAY

The Metamorphosis
 by Arthur Pita, the Royal Ballet
 89 minutes, www.roh.org.uk
 (Opus Arte title)

South African-born choreographer Arthur Pita's dance theatre adaptation of Franz Kafka's absurdist classic, *The Metamorphosis*, is made on an intimate scale, with a cast of just eight. Pita made the work for the Royal Ballet's homegrown star Edward Watson, whose hyper-flexible body, nervous intensity and otherworldly pallor make him a perfect fit for the unfortunate Gregor Samsa, who wakes one morning to find himself transformed into a large insect. Pita bravely relies on movement alone to convey this, and Watson delivers an astonishing performance in this DVD recording;

his body contorts into inhuman shapes, limbs tangled, fingers and toes frantically waving, eyes filled with horror and confusion. This tour de force is just one element in a brilliant collaboration where set design, lighting, music and choreography together create an unforgettable portrait of an oppressive world, whose pristine white space is gradually contaminated by a mysterious black goo emitted by Watson's body.

— **HEATHER BRAY**

Edward Watson in the Royal Ballet's *The Metamorphosis*
 Photo: © ROH Tristram Kenton (2013)

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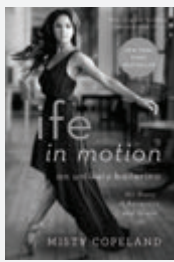
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**Life in Motion:
An Unlikely Ballerina**
by Misty Copeland,
Touchstone

Two American ballerinas have recently published memoirs: American Ballet Theatre soloist Misty Copeland with *Life in Motion: An Unlikely Ballerina*, and Jenifer Ringer, former principal dancer with New York City Ballet, with *Dancing Through It: My Journey in the Ballet*. Both write about the competitive and prestigious New York ballet world, offering easy reads packed with interesting tidbits and personal experiences.

Copeland's story begins with the Boys and Girls Club in San Pedro, California, whose instructors were thrilled to find a child prodigy in their ballet classes. Copeland, at age 13, with no previous training, was on pointe within three months. Having never viewed a ballet before — not even on television — and with no inkling of the arduous training that normally prepares a dancer for working on pointe, it felt natural to her. Not long after, the African-American teen was cast as Clare in Debbie Allen's *The Chocolate Nutcracker*. Copeland has been in the spotlight ever since.

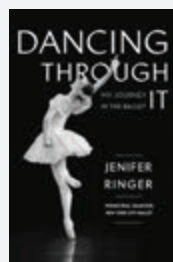
To say things were complicated is a vast understatement. She and her five siblings often lived in poverty, and there was a very public battle between her mother and dance teacher when Copeland sought legal emancipation in order to be free of parental control while still a minor. Copeland gives insight into her difficult past, with a clear adult understanding that is fair to both sides.

After her first year with American Ballet Theatre's corps de ballet, she suffered a stress fracture to her back and did not return for a year, during which two things changed her: puberty and weight. The company told her she needed to "lengthen." Anxiety led to boxes of Krispy Kreme donuts.

She describes herself as having "full breasts, muscular limbs and a curve to my hips." Her skin colour also makes her stand out. In 2009, she played Puss in Boots in *Sleeping Beauty*. When makeup came at her with white powder, she protested. Why couldn't she be a brown cat? They relented.

Copeland also wants to be Juliet and Odette/Odile, but is savvy enough to know this may not happen.

Why hasn't she left American Ballet Theatre for a company where she might have



**Dancing Through It:
My Journey in
the Ballet**
by Jenifer Ringer,
Viking

more chance of achieving such goals? Copeland writes that she perceives this as giving up on her dream, and relishes the fact she is the first African-American soloist in the company in more than 20 years. "This is for the little brown girls," she repeats throughout her book.

Like Copeland, Ringer faced her own very public problems. In her book, in a chapter titled Sugar Plumgate, Ringer describes a *New York Times* review of *The Nutcracker* in which she danced the Sugar Plum Fairy, when Alastair Macaulay wrote: "Jenifer Ringer looks like she had one Sugar Plum too many." The comment sparked huge public debate, and Ringer gained a platform to talk to girls and women about body image, appearing on the *Today* show and *Oprah*. Now, at the end of her career, Ringer says she has gained enough confidence to let the criticism slide. It wasn't always so.

Earlier, Ringer had been fired by New York City Ballet for one year because of her weight. This was a turning point and life became less ballet-centric. She finished her degree in English literature, maintained a healthy diet, worked at an office, made new friends and fell in love. Ringer came back to professional ballet lighter in both weight and spirit, soaring up the ranks to principal dancer.

Her memoir is not solely about struggle and triumph. Theatre life comes alive with rehearsals and performances as Ringer takes the reader through her favourite ballets. There is a section about the day of the performance, when pointe shoes and ribbons need to be sewn and maintained, and the body stretched and freshly showered. Stage makeup is ritually achieved over about an hour and a half by the ballerina, not by a hair and makeup team.

Then there is the unglamorous — on-stage falls, blanking out and forgetting steps, and injuries.




One wants to high-five Ringer and wish her well as she retires. As for Copeland, her stage career continues. Maybe that's why both books read so differently. Ringer can shrug off the difficulties, which are all in the past. Copeland is still in the middle of it all.

— KAREN BARR

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Cultivating Presence by Desirée Dunbar

INSIDE ED

My definition of presence — both onstage and in daily life — refers to being calm, grounded and alert, and arises from harmonious connection to both one's internal and external worlds. Intentionally cultivating presence can greatly enhance a dancer's ability to be a powerful vehicle of expression, and to become a potent artistic medium for new creation.

Weaving mindfulness techniques into the dance class provides students with skills to let go and feel more grounded — physically and mentally — creating a fertile environment in which they are more prepared to fully embrace each moment of class, rehearsal or performance.

Being present requires, first, clearing the mind. Dancers must leave their “baggage” at the door in order to achieve the intense level of focus required to do their job well, striving to not only be in an ideal physical state but also an ideal psychological one. To facilitate this, at the beginning of every class I teach (regardless of age or skill level), I lead students through a breathing exercise that brings awareness to the beginning, middle and end of each inhale and exhale. As they breathe, I ask them to let go of anything that has happened earlier and anything that needs to happen later.

Calming the incessant chitchat of the mind and the attachment to seemingly important thoughts through meditation and stillness cultivates mental clarity as well as endurance for finding comfort in discomfort. I have found success in having students break free from those attachments by using the analogy of “inner weather.” When we see these thoughts like a storm that will pass, the intensity dissipates and the mind, like the sky, clears.

Those who engage with any physical activity that brings personal enjoyment can attest to the fact that once engrossed in the pursuit, cumbersome thoughts slip away. An intense focus backed by technical skill

and the desire for results get one into “the zone,” where high-performance achievement, joy and satisfaction are possible. A good dance class that builds dynamically as technical movements are repeated and practised a variety of ways, leading to a crescendo of full body shifts of weight and flight, creates an ideal environment for bringing dancers into the zone.

By completely embodying the exercises through repetition and focus, dancers are encouraged to release the constraints of the mind and to begin to think with the body; in other words, to be fully present to the dance. This means they are more effective and efficient movers, and are able to manifest the expressive qualities of the dance that enrich them experientially and add to what they bring to their performance.

Also key to achieving presence is allowing an internal process to unfold that is a constant cycle of inhabiting a moment and then letting it go for the next one. A dancer cannot hold onto feelings such as frustration over a mistake or elation from a success, but instead must be constantly ready and awake, letting experiences flow through. The external environment has many variables that could change from one show to the next, including lighting, props, the reactions of other performers and audience response, and dancers must make instant choices to uphold the integrity of the work when something unexpected happens. Being present in the moment makes each performance exciting and fresh.

Dancers with authentic spontaneity and vitality in combination with their love of dance, and their fierce dedication to and mastery of craft, can become compelling artists with the potential to have a profound effect on their audience.

Desirée Dunbar mentors emerging professionals in her Vancouver-based Catalyst Program and is artistic director of Dezza Dance. ▼



Vancouver

by Kaija Pepper

Making a stage full of white balloons obey choreographic order is no easy task, but Vanessa Goodman managed to direct hers with such finesse it was like they were sentient beings. These delicate props start out attached to the costumes of five dancers; once they're loosed, a clever use of fans sends the balloons across the stage with precision and speed.

In *what belongs to you*, Goodman — an emerging voice on the Vancouver scene through the Contingency Plan collective — was perhaps a little seduced by her restless, demanding props, which are a focal point throughout the hour-long piece, somewhat upstaging the dancers. Balloons do not, will not, stand still! Yet Goodman manages to harness their unique qualities, creating a series of surreal scenes where balloons and humans co-exist.

The show was part of the annual Dancing on the Edge Festival this past July, as was *NGS* (“*Native Girl Syndrome*”), another highlight, though with much darker overtones. This tense statement from Montreal’s Lara Kramer is an angry domestic drama inspired by her grandmother’s migration from a remote First Nations community into the city. It’s also a political statement, made clear by the appearance of a Canadian flag near the end, with a First Nations face obscuring the maple leaf.

Like last year’s *of good moral character*, *NGS* featured dense performances that

felt real and raw. Angie Cheng and Karina Iraola are devastatingly believable as the drunk or stoned women pushing buggies on a stage littered with garbage bags and tin cans. The sense of reality is heightened because Kramer’s choreography is not about dance moves, but about body language: how these women stand, lurch and crash to the ground; how they lie there, and fumble back up.

The truth of this *danse vérité* was impossible not to recognize given the festival’s venue: the Firehall Arts Centre, located in the middle of the city’s poorest, most drug-riddled neighbourhood. The audience approached the theatre on streets filled with women and men very like the two individuals in *NGS*.

Fast forward through the city’s quiet dance calendar until late September, when two touring groups came to town. At Scotiabank Dance Centre, France’s Ballet Preljocaj brought artistic director Angelin Preljocaj’s *Empty moves (parts I, II & III)*, set to a recording of John Cage’s *Empty Words*, a vocal score in which Cage reads text, apparently minus the vowels, in a slow, stuttering drone. The recording was made in 1977 in front of an Italian audience whose passionate displeasure and boredom is heard in whistles, rhythmic clapping and shouts.

Virginie Caussin, Sergio Diaz, Yan Giralidou and Natacha Grimaud began the piece in fine fettle, crisply moving through their calm, Cunninghamesque sequences, the musicality of a

group of bodies lunging and jumping together satisfying to watch. They were definitely more engaging than Cage, with his indecipherable monotone. But nothing much develops in Preljocaj’s conception, and the dancers start to flag, at one point drinking from a large water bottle. I started focusing on the recorded audience, who get more and more disruptive. After the first hour, it was obvious nothing was going to build choreographically, but there were 45 more minutes to go. Finally, two audience members slunk out, followed by two more, who whispered apologetically as they shuffled down their row. Then the dancers made rabbit ears with their hands and began skipping, while the recorded Italians jeered and whistled with increased vigour, and the live audience — including myself — seemed eerily quiet.

The next night, the city’s premier contemporary series, DanceHouse, presented Wayne McGregor’s *Random Dance*, coming from their London home to the Playhouse stage. McGregor’s 2010 work, *FAR*, begins with four dancers holding torches to light a duet and it ends an hour later with a woman lying flat on the floor as a computerized pin board of LED lights that hangs on the back wall moves slowly up and away, leaving her in the dark. Yes, a beginning and an end, and a journey in between of frankly dramatic proportions.

If that sounds conventional and predictable, it wasn’t. The 10 dancers have bodies that are impressively strong and super-flexible, as if they’re made of both steel and toffee, and they unfold, unfurl, slice and quiver in finely etched choreographic invention. The women and men come together in a satisfying range of configurations with fractured, intense movement that is strong, nuanced, gutsy and lush.

The large rectangle of lights created a high-tech atmosphere, offering contrast to those torches at the start and some sense of the progression of the ages. Yet the work doesn’t belabour any concepts behind it (a “radical cognitive research process” and the Age of Enlightenment are mentioned on *Random Dance*’s website notes). Instead, *FAR* goes for the theatrical moment and, aside from a slight floundering about three-quarters through, delivers and delivers and delivers. ▼

The Winnipeg Fringe Festival — the largest event of its kind in North America — showcased four local contemporary dance companies this past July. One, the city's newest modern dance baby, Alexandra Elliott Dance, marked its local debut following its premiere at the 2014 Toronto Fringe. Artistic director Alexandra Elliott performed her work, *Get Served*, at Ace Art gallery, an autobiographical solo straddling both dance and physical theatre worlds, inspired by her own 10 years toiling in restaurants, where she served a colourful series of “wack-a-doodle” customers.

Elliott begins by constructing an inventive sculptural set out of chairs. She then proceeds to deconstruct her past experiences with spoken word and movement vocabulary that includes percussive strikes on her body, floor rolls, distorted hops, and extended arms and legs that reach across space. As she twists her face and body into increasingly grotesque formations, the work becomes increasingly visceral. When she finally forces her torso through the slats of a chair, it becomes her prison.

Renée Vandale's Black Heart Dance performed at the Royal Manitoba Theatre Centre's Tom Hendry Warehouse, exploring the dark underbelly and pressures of the professional ballet world, including its notorious legacy of eating disorders, in

Vandale's *VERIKA*. Performed by Rachele Bourget, Grace Hanley and Sarah Helmer — with Vandale appearing only in Kayla Jeanson's projected, naturalistic forest images — the intense, 50-minute work set to a rumbling, electronic score often startled with its imagery. The three women first appeared inverted, grasping silks hung from the ceiling, reflecting the ever-increasing presence of circus arts in dance. Dressed in brown leotards with their eyes blackened by raccoon-like makeup, their individual identities became obscured just as their rigid pointe shoes and tightly wound topknots evoked the rigours of the ballet studio.

At times, the ensemble, and in particular its central figure Hanley — a former dancer with the Royal Winnipeg Ballet, the National Ballet of Canada and Dutch National Ballet — appeared tormented, entangled in the silks. But Vandale wisely tempered this with more poetic moments. At one point the women broke from their ballet-inspired movement, including poker-straight legs in hyper-relevés and spinning top pirouettes, to wave their arms by their sides, evoking a flock of soaring birds. When the dancers finally removed their pointe shoes — with painted laces remaining on their calves like battle scars — it brought relief. By the end, a sense of hope emerged as a now barefoot Hanley stood alone, waving her outstretched arms as though in hard-earned, suspended flight.

Winnipeg

by Holly Harris



Drive Dance presented its fifth annual production, *Accelerate*. The mixed repertoire performed by founding members Robyn Thomson Kacki, Kathleen Hiley and Arlo Reva featured five ensemble works by Winnipeg's Stephanie Ballard and Gaile Petursson-Hiley. Drive Dance has honed its reputation by offering a steady diet of highly theatrical and often very entertaining solos; their latest program bears witness to the company's growing artistic maturity, feeling more thoughtfully reflective than previous shows.

Two pieces particularly resonated as explorations into the complexities of human relationships. One was Petursson-Hiley's *Outside In* (2013), where the women, dressed in white slip dresses, partner guest dancers Brett Owen, Aaron Paul and Ardley Zozobrado. In this fluid, lyrical work, the six dancers took turns donning — and shedding — loose overcoats that become protective, unifying skins. But they could also signify the loss of individual identity; the choreographer leaves it up to the viewer to decide.

The other relationship piece was Ballard's *Time Out* (1981), inspired by American writer F. Scott Fitzgerald and his novelist wife, Zelda. Riveting in its honesty, the intimate duet unfolded with private glimpses into the couple's life together. The final moments when Thomson Kacki glanced backwards as she walked upstage with Paul, hand-in-hand, shuddered with emotional ambivalence.

However, this would not be a Drive Dance show without their trademark wit. Petursson-Hiley's melodramatic *Blind Faith* (1991) is a deadly romp as a murderous, lovesick Reva seeks vengeance on four tulle-winged, diaper-clad cupids popping out of cardboard boxes. And *Metallics* (2013) is a full-out ensemble work teeming with the same choreographer's characteristic body isolations, karate kicks, quick tumbles and high-flying lifts.

The 14-year-old Gearshifting Performance Works — the festival's oldest dance company (and the city's second oldest, after the 50-year-old Winnipeg's Contemporary Dancers) — presented founding artistic director Jolene Bailie's *Eat All You Want/ The Top?* The surrealistic show, which premiered last May and was reviewed in this column in the Fall 2014 issue, once again brought its absurd images to the stage, including an Elizabethan-collared unicorn and cryptic cake parties. ▼



Anyone who imagines that dogs don't enjoy dance has never attended Dusk Dances. Unless distracted by an alluring scent or scurrying squirrel, the quadruped attendees at this charming summertime outdoor event are often quieter and more attentive than the two-legged toddlers.

Dusk Dances, proudly canine and infant-inclusive since its inception, marked its 20th Toronto edition in early August with a typically varied program, accessible to a broad public.

Founder/festival director Sylvie Bouchard, in choreographic mode, offered expressive contemporary dance and a touch of poetic whimsy in *La Vie*, an almost contemplative solo danced by Mairéad Filgate. Jamaican-born Peter Chin explored his continuing fascination with Asian cultures — in this case Cambodian and Javanese — in a stirring duet for Boby Ari Setiawan and Chy Ratana called *Through the Mask*. Traditional African culture found enthusiastic champions in the dancers and drummers of Toronto's COBA with their rousing *Down Down Dance*.

Unsurprisingly, a revival of Julia Aplin's splashy wading-pool romp, *Inner City Sirens, Part II*, was the runaway hit — even if its clownish excesses tended to drown out the work's clever construction and more detailed choreographic wit. As a pair of aquatic comic-book heroes — “reigning world champions,” as a program note informs us, “in the sport of pairs synchronized swimming for petite pools” — Filgate and Brodie

Stevenson wrung *Inner City Sirens* for all it's worth, and the youngest audience members, sitting closest on the grass, relished getting splashed.

Bouchard launched Dusk Dances in 1993 as a site-specific park event under the auspices of the now defunct Fringe Festival of Independent Dance Artists. Although it was a resounding success, Bouchard thought of it as a one-off affair. She had lots of other irons in the fire. There was a two-year hiatus before Bouchard, with then partner David Danzon as co-producer — in 1997 they also co-founded Corpus — revived Dusk Dances. It has been held annually ever since, weathering the ebb and flow of funding and the personal split of Bouchard and Danzon. (She took Dusk Dances; he got Corpus.) Both have thrived independently. Dusk Dances evolved to venture into underserved, disadvantaged communities, often integrating local performers, and has expanded its reach across Ontario and even nationally.

Toronto has remained Dusk Dances' base and over the years it has appeared in 10 different parks throughout the Greater Toronto Area. For a few years it played in three different downtown locations each season, but has made Withrow Park, in the trendy eastside Riverdale neighbourhood, its sole hometown venue since 2007. On a fair evening as many as 800 people gather to listen to a warm-up musical act before being marshalled by a colourful and charismatic master of ceremonies — in recent years the full and fruity-voiced Dan Watson — who leads them to different performance locales throughout the park.

As early as 1998, Dusk Dances played Ottawa as part of the Canada Dance Festival. Two years later, it appeared for the first time at Vancouver's Dancing on the Edge Festival. The two cities have become perennial tour stops. It has not made significant inroads into Montreal-raised Bouchard's province of origin although it did touch down in Quebec City in 2006. Bouchard still hopes to see the Dusk Dances banner raised on the east coast.

The eventual likelihood of that occurrence is bolstered by an important organizational change launched four years ago. Dusk Dances in effect franchised its strong brand, allowing communities to license the event's model, format and name in exchange for a fee. “It's been working incredibly well,” says Bouchard.

While Dusk Dances still self-produces outside Toronto, it now also appears in co-production arrangements with regional organizers and incorporates local artists' contributions along with established Dusk Dances repertoire in specially programmed performances in Ontario centres such as Deep River, Haliburton, Kingston and Mindemoya, Manitoulin Island. This year, Hamilton joined the list.

Dusk Dances' enduring popularity is variously accountable. It's a pleasant, family-friendly way to spend a summer evening. It's not static. The audience gets a tour of the park along with the show. Bouchard has never seen it as a proselytizing event aimed at luring audiences into more conventional theatrical venues. It is what it is, a different kind of dance performance for a different kind of audience. For that reason, Bouchard has always encouraged participating artists to make works that play well within a park setting. Tree hugging has always been preferred to existential brow-beating. Dusk Dances has made a commendable effort to represent different styles and cultural traditions — from native hoop dancing to bharata natyam. Kinetic humour has always found a warm welcome at Dusk Dances and, mercifully, nothing is allowed to go on too long.

The wild card, of course, is always the weather. Bouchard vividly recalls an evening when a thunderous storm rolled in unexpectedly. “Naturally,” she says, “we had to urge people to take shelter, but there were about 50 or so who just sat there, expecting the show to go on. It was really rather heart-warming to see.” ▼

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Montreal

by Linde Howe-Beck



After four decades of being a singular force in Montreal's contemporary dance scene and on stages around the world, Paul-André Fortier recently premiered another exceptional work and made some eloquent observations about onstage longevity. At 67, he enjoys his role as Quebec's most senior active dancer and continually searches for ways to enhance his choreography and performing career. In an interview, he happily discusses the once-verbotten topic of the older dancer.

"This is what's fun in aging ... you dare to go to places you wouldn't when you were younger. Now I can loosen up and just go for it, just work for my joy, my passion, my pleasure."

Like two of his major inspirations — visual artists Françoise Sullivan, who at 91 is still creating huge paintings, and the late Betty Goodwin — he feels aging brings freedom to create. "Betty Goodwin told me the older she got the better she got as an artist."

Fortier has no plans to retire although he has allowed himself to slow down a bit since ending six consecutive years touring *30x30*, an outdoor, on-site, 30-minute rain-or-shine solo. He did hundreds of performances — as many as 150 a year — on several continents in venues as diverse as Paris' Eiffel Tower and a vacant lot in central Montreal.

He kept in shape for *30x30* by training in a gym, but since the demands of his latest piece, *Misfit Blues*, are more moderate,

he has scaled back to "some simple floor and standing sessions — I think they're the right thing for my body."

Slender and straight, he maintains a precise daily routine — rising early, doing a barre at home, breakfasting calmly at a table. "I sit for meals with a tablecloth every morning. I set the table properly." Then he does some reading before checking in at his office. He likes his simple pleasures.

He also likes to tour, something many dancers despise. "I enjoy waking up in another city. I like newness, discovering new places, new people." Although familiar with the stresses of touring and performing solos like *La Tentation de la transparence*, *Bras de Plomb* and *Les Males Heures*, the nomadic artist found *30x30* to be particularly stressful — "a lonesome enterprise." So he followed up with three duets: *Cabane* with visual artist/writer/performer/musician Rober Racine in 2008, *Vertiges* with violinist Malcolm Goldstein in 2012, and his latest, *Misfit Blues*, with Regina dancer/performance artist Robin Poitras. While choreographing the latter, he also worked on the site-specific *15 Times at Night*, performed in Tokyo in September by French dancer Manuel Roque, and a 2011 solo, *Box*, for 15 Japanese dancers performed in Tokyo in October.

Misfit Blues is about opposite attractions. Fortier and Poitras are temperamentally divergent talents, and the work fits them to a T, portraying moments in the life of two strong, offbeat characters for whom compromise is a dreaded inevitability. They cannot be together without friction, but, because they care deeply for each other,

they cannot be apart. *Misfit Blues* is a work of wide-ranging moods — cranky, frustrated, funny and tender. It's a love story between two dissimilar people who goof around, make love, tease, laugh and lure each other into the other's world, flitting from joy to pain, wonder to regret and back again.

Misfit Blues developed in Poitras' Regina studio. "We were like two kids playing together. We have a complicity that is quite rare," Fortier explains. Poitras, all wiggles, giggles and unconventionality, is archly provocative — and when push comes to shove, conciliatory. Fortier's character is a stiff sort, yet he does a lot of yielding, too. How surprising to find him shedding his poker face to look at the world upside down from beneath a bench.

Fortier is as much in command of his considerable talents as ever, yet in *Misfit Blues*, which premiered at Montreal's Festival TransAmériques and tours to Vancouver, Edmonton and Regina next year, I noticed aspects of him I'd never before seen in 40 years of watching him evolve.

Decades ago, Fortier used to threaten to retire because of a bunion on his right foot. Today the bunion is still there, although Fortier has no plans to stop performing. "But it would be nice to suffer a bit less. When it's inflamed it is pure pain. But I've learned to deal with it." Meanwhile, Fortier has decided to do more for his bunion than dunking it in a bucket of ice. He's waiting for surgery. After that it's anyone's guess. "I hope I will have the possibility to keep [dancing] as long as the fever and the passion are with me." ▼

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In summer, the thoughts of San Francisco dance fans turn increasingly to the lure of dance festivals. As it has for the past 35 years, the San Francisco Ethnic Dance Festival launched their events June 14 at the Yerba Buena Center for the Arts Theater. The program offered was nothing less than a survey of all eight forms of Indian classical dance, said to be the first concert of its kind in the United States. The festival represents a cross-section of the rich multicultural dance mix that flourishes in the Bay Area. Alas, the festival betrayed its mandate: not all eight forms are practised or taught in the Bay Area, so artists based in Los Angeles, Texas and Pennsylvania were recruited for the project.

Much fascinating material was offered in the three-hour opening concert, which began on a note of sadness. The great kathakali master, K. P. Kunhiraman, to whom the festival was dedicated, had passed away a few days earlier. But his company, Kalanjali, offered an irresistibly lovely sequence. The eight women melted into patterns, mingling unisons and canons, their bare feet hitting the floor with mesmerizing force.

A fusion of kathakali and the dramatic and spiritually oriented form known as mohiniattam featured the remarkable Sunanda Nair in a chilling vignette that involved a dead child and the expelling of evil from the body. An exponent of Manipuri, Sohini Ray offered two short extracts, which looked meaningless out of context. Sujatra Mohapatra stressed proportion in her Odissi-based number, *Varsha — The Rains*, in which the performer replicated movement found in the animal world.

The program's sole example of Kuchipudi came from San Jose-based Natyalaya, whose gentle jumps and melting symmetries summoned superlatives. Satriya (almost unknown in this country) found exquisite interpreters in Philadelphia's Madhusmita Bora and Preyona Bhuyan. The piece built into a mystic web of feelings.

While veteran dancers left their mark, the most gratifying aspect of this project was the participation of so many younger performers. The particulars and philosophy of classical South Asian dance are transmitted orally and lessons are being



absorbed. Four young women from the locally based Chitresh Das Dance Company spun and sparkled in a skirt-swelling demonstration of kathak, accompanied by a band of great musicians.

It was impossible not to fall in love with the boy-girl pairing of Maya Lochana Dev-alcheruvu, 11, and Akhil Srinivasan, 10, in a courtly duet in the Odissi style. Although bhārata nāṭyam is widely explored in the Bay Area, young Bhavajan Kumar, who hails from Canada, delivered a tribute to Lord Shiva that sizzled with eye-bending spins, the articulation and the plastique that makes stars of mere dancers. Although the evening was perhaps too rich to be consumed at a single sitting, it meant no one went away hungry.

For most of the summer, Bay Area dancemakers were much concerned with the relationship of choreography and music. Music Moves was the sweeping theme of ODC Theater's annual festival, which offered an eclectic program that ranged from contemporary dance to folk dance to jazz forays. The one visiting company, New York's Dance Heginbotham, in their West Coast debut, left the strongest impression. John Heginbotham, who danced with the

Mark Morris Dance Group for 14 years, imported a six-member team for an evening imbued with tempered energy, effortless charm and droll wit.

Even more fascinating was the fourth annual edition of Amy Seiwert's Sketch series at ODC Theater in July. Risk-taking is the idea here. And this season, it was all about music. Seiwert commissioned a superior, six-movement score for cello and piano by Kevin Keller, which both she and another mid-career ballet choreographer, Adam Houglan, each went about setting in their own fashion. The pair deployed the same eight-member team of dancers, which comprises Seiwert's Imagery company. The results were both worthy and fascinating, and told us much about the sensibilities of the two dance-makers.

In his *Beautiful Decay*, Houglan chafed against the intimate dimensions of the performance space, and seemed in constant experimental mode. In another context, he might have reconsidered all the balance-testing walks. But Houglan exulted in the energy of the dancers, most drawn from other ballet troupes. There was plenty of invention here, but gestures and combinations did not always coalesce into a unity. If we see *Beautiful Decay* again, it's bound to look different.

Although Houglan had jumbled a couple of movements of Keller's score, in her *Don't You Remember?* Seiwert set the score as written. She suffuses the piece with unison tableaux, often in semi-darkness. These moments seem to represent serenity, the still point from which the dancers attempt to free themselves in a series of obsessive gestures. The duets and trios start from an overtly classical base and have a linear continuity. Two men, Ben Needham-Wood and Weston Krukow, maintain an architectural relationship with the irrepressible Sarah Griffin.

Seiwert is scrupulously alert to the details of the score, wonderfully played at the rear of the stage by cellist Robert Howard and pianist Keisuke Nakagoshi. The cello prompts lyrical movement episodes; a descending piano passage inspires a descent of the dancers to the floor. You came away with a new understanding of what musicality means in dance. ▼

The now-annual Lincoln Center Festival had a leaner look this year. Only five organizations were presented over its five-week, July-to-August run. (Six if you include Moscow's Bolshoi Theatre opera troupe, which offered two concert-version presentations of Rimsky-Korsakov's *The Tsar's Bride*.) However you cut or call it, the bulk of the season was given over to the Bolshoi Ballet.

Some discussion in print and conversation centered on the three ballets that made up the festival's repertory. Two, *Swan Lake* and *Spartacus*, were both from the choreographic hand of Yuri Grigorovich. The former had additional credit, worded as "Scenes in choreography by Marius Petipa, Lev Ivanov and Alexander Gorsky." *Don Quixote*, the third offering, gave choreographic credit to Petipa and Gorsky, adding, "New choreographic version by Alexei Fadeychev."

To some Bolshoi watchers, who have been waiting for a return visit by the company ever since its last appearances here in 2005, the repertory seemed lacklustre, to put it mildly. In 2005, when Alexei Ratmansky was artistic director, the troupe offered a broader range of ballets, including, in addition to *Don Quixote* and *Spartacus*, a reconstruction of Petipa's little known *Pharaoh's Daughter* and a new production by Ratmansky of *The Bright Stream*, an historic, Soviet-era "tractor ballet." Regardless, the troupe, currently under the artistic direction of Sergei Filin, drew audiences in strong numbers.

Swan Lake, first produced in this version in 1969 and finally revised in 2001, was led by four different women in the pivotal dual role of Odette/Odile; three men covered the role of the narrative's imperfect prince. Opening night, launching the season itself as well as the run of this world-famous Tchaikovsky ballet, came and went without real impact. As Odette/Odile, minus any indication according to Grigorovich's revisionist scheme of her being queen of the swans, Ukrainian-born Svetlana Zakharova made an almost rote appearance, hitting accents and striking poses that projected isolated effects more than affecting poetics. As Prince Siegfried, American-born David Hallberg performed with a little more spontaneity and immediacy, but the pantomime-less presentation left him looking almost as isolated and unengaged dramatically as his ballerina. The night's most theatrical

effectiveness came from Igor Tsvirko as the crowd-pleasing jester of Moscow ballet tradition.

Eventually, Olga Smirnova performed Odette/Odile in this floor-show-like *Swan Lake*, and managed to give the production a luminous focus it got nowhere else during this run. Her Siegfried, Semyon Chudin, performed with ease and power, making the most of the alternately tortured mood and baldly athletic dancing that colours Grigorovich's two-note conception of the tale's duped prince. As the Evil Genius, originally known as the sorcerer von Rothbart, Denis Rodkin made the most of his character's doppelganger aspects.

Rodkin made his strongest showing in the title role of *Spartacus*, but even this handsome, talented dancer and generous performer could not, despite his ability to execute travelling jumps with impressive finesse and power, soar enough over the muscle-bound dynamics and cliché-

the map of Bolshoi Ballet history even as the choreography itself remained beneath his full strength and artistry. Rodkin is a different kind of dancer, one with further finesse and elegance. He gave better than this role deserved and yet stopped short of mining the full impact of its hard-hitting intentions.

Although stature-wise she was physically more than Rodkin could comfortably handle, Maria Vinogradova performed Phrygia, Spartacus' love interest, with an intensity and voluptuousness that broke through the clichéd presentation of the acrobatic choreography fashions for her.

Vladislav Lantratov, seen as the Frenchman at the heart of Ratmansky's *Lost Illusions* in a Bolshoi Ballet HD telecast last year, danced a number of roles during the run, but none quite tapped into the elegant ease and dramatic demeanour he showed on screen. He proved a lively



ridden theatrics of Grigorovich's characterization. The choreographer's rendering of Aram Khachaturian's bombastic score — connected to a scenario devised in Soviet Russia by Nikolai Volkov after Raffaello Giovagnoli's writings about a first-century B.C.E. slave revolt — has come down to us as the most successful of the three prominent Soviet efforts. Neither Leonid Jacobson's 1956 staging nor Igor Moiseyev's 1958 production has lived onstage to provide comparison to Grigorovich's 1968 effort.

To acclaim Rodkin in the title role shouldn't suggest this 21st-century Bolshoi dancer is equal to Grigorovich's first Spartacus, the incomparable Vladimir Vasiliev, whose thrilling portrayal, preserved on film, helped put the ballet on

but not quite full-powered Crassus, the bad guy of *Spartacus*. Likewise, as Basilio in the company's reliable, if somewhat strung-out production of *Don Quixote*, Lantratov gave his all to a role that asks for a kind of physical power that isn't inherently his. Maria Alexandrova, leading the opening night's *Quixote* as Kitri, gave a performance noticeably lessened in power by the years since she first showed herself here a firebrand of true Bolshoi order. Injury and age have taken their toll.

The Bolshoi Ballet seemingly remains box-office magic hereabouts. It's anyone's guess if a more adventuresome repertory could keep the enthusiasm up, alongside raising the standards of the troupe's aesthetics and providing more inspired show-cases for its most talented dancers. ▼



Ohio

by Steve Sucato

stringed lute) were played live, providing a haunting soundscape. Shimotakahara's choreography ebbed and flowed between the dancers en masse huddling and cleaving to each other and duets and solos that spoke of earth, family and, oddly enough, the music of Bach and the writings of Shakespeare. An esoteric work compared to most summer dance fare, *Ghost Opera* was marvelously performed and well received.

GroundWorks' double-bill program, which brought the living and the dead together in celebration of the 175th anniversary of the cemetery, began on a festive note with Lynne Taylor-Corbett's *Hindsight* (2011), a tribute to the music of Akron native Chrissie Hynde and her band the Pretenders in a jazzy, Broadway-esque romp.

The series at Cleveland Heights' Cain Park presented dance in two covered outdoor theatres. A ticketed series welcomed Cleveland-based Verb Ballets in four works that showcased the young dancers. Pamela Pribisco's *Tarantella* (2005) provided an energetic boost to the classic dance staple. It was performed with spunk by Michael Hinton and last-minute injury substitution Megan Buckley. Buckley's charm and effervescence captured the hearts of the audience, leading to cheering at the ballet's end.

The program's gem was the company premiere of former Cincinnati Ballet principal dancer Anthony Krutzkamp's *Similar* (2012). Set to piano music by Chad Lawson and Brian Crain, the well-crafted contemporary ballet opened on three male-female couples engaged in angular, elongated unison choreography. Confident and polished, Verb's dancers shone, especially Stephaen Hood and Lieneke Matte in a delicate pas de deux.

A few days later, Inlet Dance Theatre doled out a pleasing dose of artistic director Bill Wade's message-driven, Pilobolus-style dance works, including his athletic, amusing duet *A Close Shave* (2006). The work, which involved the mirror image of a man shaving come to life, was danced with wit, precision and strength by Joshua Brown and Dominic Moore-Dunson. The jam-packed program of eight uplifting works also featured Wade's signature body sculpture wonder, *Ascension* (2006).

Capping the performances was Philadelphia hip-hop troupe Illstyle & Peace Productions in *Same Spirit Different Movement II: IMpossible IZZpossible & KINGZ*. The positive spirit program featured 19-year-old spoken word artist Syreeta, whose hard-hitting poems spoke of small-town poverty and prejudice, along with a potent mix of deejaying, gospel music and magnificently performed old-school locking, popping, breaking, tap and house dancing. Company founder and dancer Brandon "Peace" Albright and dancer Reggie TapMan Myers captivated in the party atmosphere collection of dance. ▼

It's a tale of two cities when it comes to summer dance in Northeast Ohio; two marquee, municipally run performance series, one in Akron and the other in Cleveland, account for the bulk of the region's professional dance by local and nationally touring companies.

Billed as the oldest, free summer dance series in the United States, the Heinz Poll Summer Dance Festival in Akron was established in 1974 to honour the legacy of founding artistic director of now defunct Ohio Ballet, Heinz Poll. The family-friendly series held at four city parks and historical sites showcases dance to some 10,000 attendees each season. The 41st edition, which ran four consecutive weekends, opened with New York's Ballet Hispanico at Goodyear Heights Metro Park.

Chairs and blankets stretched out far and wide in front of the portable stage as area residents of all ages settled in for an evening of dance under the stars, a scene repeated at all the festival's venues. Ballet Hispanico artistic director Eduardo Vilaro's Latin-infused contemporary *Asuka* (2011) kicked things off. Bursting with energy, the playful, hip-shaking piece for a dozen dancers celebrated the music of the late Cuban "Queen of Salsa" Celia Cruz. Next, *Sombrerísimo* (2013) was the first and best of two works by Annabelle Lopez Ochoa. Inspired by the surrealist paintings of Belgian artist René Magritte, the all-male cast of six — in untucked dress shirts, pants and black bowler hats — moved through well-crafted choreography full of leaps, jumps and dancer interweaving as they cleverly transferred hats from one to another.

Rounding out the program was a pas de deux from *Tito on Timbales* (1984), William Whitener's tribute to percussionist Tito Puente, danced adroitly by Alexander Duval and Jessica Alejandra Wyatt, and Lopez Ochoa's *Madmoiselle* (2010), a wonderfully bizarre satire on the many images of "Maria" found in Latin culture, including *West Side Story*.

The second weekend featured Mansfield, Ohio-based Neos Dance Theatre, the rising regional company with national aspirations, which offered up three ballets, including festival stand-out, Penny Saunders' *Flight* (2014).

Flight, set to an eclectic soundscape, opened on a group of dancers in grey uniform tops and slacks moving in robotic unison to spooky music à la Tim Burton. The quirky dance work switched gears as Hank Williams Sr.'s *Ramblin' Man* ushered in a trio of men in western-infused choreography that had them moseying through snaking movement patterns and arching lifts. In the last section, which emulated the work's robotic beginnings, Mary-Elizabeth Fenn, moving like a dancer from a music box, stood atop the lone set piece, a wooden box, surrounded by dancers on their knees holding her in place by her ankles; Fenn's beautifully danced movements evolved from calm and graceful to frantic.

The premiere of artistic director Bobby Wesner's *Slow Moving and Almost Stopped* proved true to its title. Dancers spun one another in crouched, flat-footed circles that mesmerized like a figure skater's effortless glide. Wesner's nonchalant choreography, set to folksy music, had dancers giving into gravity's pull and falling into one another's arms while others engaged in tightly managed movement riffs. The program concluded with Wesner's 2013 *Spinning Plates*.

In perhaps the most apropos pairing of dance and venue, Cleveland's GroundWorks DanceTheater joined with ChamberFest Cleveland musicians to perform David Shimotakahara's *Ghost Opera* (2014) at the historic Glendale Cemetery. Inspired by childhood memories of the shamanistic "ghost operas" found in Chinese peasant culture, Tan Dun's 1994 composition *Ghost Opera* evoked a ceremonial feel of conjuring spirits and communing with the departed that Shimotakahara (GroundWorks' artistic director) sought to capture in movement.

Water splashed, voices chanted and sang, and violins, a cello and a Chinese pipa (a four-



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Artistic Director of the Limón Dance Company



The final days of the Royal Ballet's summer season at Covent Garden brought an extraordinarily complex new work in Alastair Marriott's *Connectome*. In this, Marriott was associated with his usual collaborator Jonathan Howells, a soloist and assistant ballet master of the company, who also designed the costumes.

The word connectome, in neuroscience, apparently describes "a comprehensive map of the connections of the brain," but Marriott has, fortunately, translated it into half an hour of fluent choreography. Set to a selection of music by Estonian composer Arvo Pärt, it was attractively performed by Natalia Osipova, Steven McRae and Edward Watson, backed up by four other men.

Connectome was part of a well-planned triple bill, which included a happy revival of Jerome Robbins' *The Concert (Or, the Perils of Everybody)*. Set to Chopin, and created for New York City Ballet in 1956, *The Concert* is a perfect example of witty dance invention about the daydreams of spectators at a piano recital. A carefully selected cast was led by Lauren Cuthbertson, Laura Morera and Bennett Gartside.

Another delectable comedy, Ashton's *The Dream*, completed the program, and treated us to a brilliantly virtuoso account of Oberon by McRae.

July performances by the Royal Ballet School, both at the Linbury Theatre and on the main stage of the Royal Opera House, were reassuring about the preservation of the high standard of training in both the Lower and Upper Schools. The programs were rather too much like divertissements — the only repertoire piece was *Raymonda Act III*, ably led by Chisato Katsura and Reece Clarke. Clarke has been taken in to the Covent Garden company, as has Calvin Richardson, a young man who danced his own version of the famous Fokine solo *The Dying Swan*.

A new work by Liam Scarlett, *Classical Symphony*, was set to Prokofiev's *Symphony No. 1 in D Major*, and was well planned to display a large selection of young talents. Scarlett's choreographic potential was greatly recognized and developed when he was a Royal Ballet School student, and, in 2004, the year he graduated into the Royal Ballet, his work *Monochromatic* was commissioned

for the annual school performance by the then director Gailene Stock (who died in London last April).

Giulia Frosi and Edivaldo Souza Da Silva made an eloquent partnership in David Dawson's *A Sweet Smell of Oblivion*.

English National Ballet made its usual appearance at the Royal Albert Hall in Derek Deane's lavish "in-the-round" version of *Romeo and Juliet*, first staged in 1998. Always drawing in large audiences, this production has spectacularly enlarged ensembles. The cast I saw included a refreshingly virtuoso Mercutio in Anton Lukovkin, acquired from the Mariinsky Ballet. More importantly, the matinee was the farewell performance, touching and exquisite, of the treasured Czech prima ballerina Daria Klimentová, in a superb partnership with Vadim Muntagirov.

In July at the London Coliseum, the company staged *Coppélia*, a revived and revised version by Ronald Hynd, entertaining both in the exuberant ensembles and in the fine classical work from Swanilda (Tamara Rojo) and Franz (Alban Lendorf, a welcome guest artist from the Royal Danish Ballet). A special pleasure was to see Michael Coleman's expert handling of Dr. Coppélius. This *Coppélia*

was also the basis for the popular introductory touring show, *My First Ballet, Coppélia*, adapted by George Williamson for dancers of the English National Ballet School.

New English Ballet Theatre is a company formed in 2012 whose founder-artistic director, Karen Pilkington-Miksa, has an English-American background. The aim is to show new choreography and feature emerging dancers. Combining the two is necessarily difficult, however — young talents are best served if they work with experienced creative counterparts.

At the Peacock Theatre, the program contained five works — creators included Valentino Zucchetti, Erico Montes and Kristen McNally, dancers of the Royal Ballet. Zucchetti's *Orbital Motion* cleverly echoed planetary circling, while a young freelance choreographer, Andrew McNicol, in *Kreutzer Sonata*, based his short ballet (to music by Beethoven and Janáček) on the novella by Tolstoy. From this tangled tale of sexual lust and jealousy, McNicol worked out a reasonable scenario with the dramaturge Garth Bardsley. Although the action still lacked clarity, it did provide an opportunity for this company to tackle the problems of dance drama and characterization. ▼



Étoile Nicolas Le Riche's farewell evening at the Paris Opera Ballet was kept a secret until the very end. Étoiles usually bid adieu to their public in a full-length work programmed in the season. Le Riche, who is celebrated at home and abroad, chose to design his own soirée in July, turning the event into one of the hottest tickets in town.

He had promised surprises. One was his performance with Sylvie Guillem, whose involvement had been rumoured beforehand. Other guests included actor and ballet buff Guillaume Gallienne from La Comédie-Française, who delivered an homage to his friend fraught with congenial though almost embarrassing middle school humour.

Also present was French pop artist and celebrated guitarist Matthieu Chedid, who opened the show with a song that saw Le Riche, in casual pants and shirt, beautifully going through emotional steps reminiscent of Romeo, Albrecht and other major roles that have marked his glorious career.

Le Riche first caught the astute eye of Nureyev, and was later named an étoile along with Carole Arbo and Fanny Gaida by his successor Patrick Dupond in a memorable *Giselle* performed in 1993 in the Arena of Nîmes, a Roman amphitheatre. Even as a young, tall and athletic teen, Le Riche had won hearts in David Lichine's *Le Bal des Cadets* (*Graduation Ball*) and in *Les Forains* by Roland Petit, who was to accelerate Le Riche's inexorable ascension by giving him his landmark *Jeune Homme et la Mort*. So, as a leap back into time, Le Riche presented extracts from the charmingly dated *Forains* and *Bal des Cadets* following that rock intro. Both were vivaciously performed by the Paris Opera's dance school students.

An extract from *Raymonda* bizarrely segued without so much as a set change. Dorothee Gilbert appeared in full *Raymonda* regalia without much to dance, while étoile Stéphane Bullion tried his best to capture the sensual physicality and revengeful spirit of Abderam.

By then the evening had started to



lose lustre for all the glittering *Raymonda* costumes. Étoile Jérémie Bélingard thankfully brought back vim to the party with his rendition of Nijinsky's Faun. Not a danseur noble by any stretch of the imagination, Bélingard does have the muscular and sexy charisma of a powerful beast. Opposite him in *L'Après-midi d'un faune*, the lovely première danseuse Eve Grinsztajn shivered with beautiful restraint — and great erotic tension was finally reached. It did go on with a vengeance in the following piece, *Le Jeune Homme et la Mort*, Le Riche's first major claim to fame and the first ballet per se to be performed that evening by the beau of the ball, in which he appeared as uncannily youthful and poignant as ever. As Death in a yellow dress and long black gloves, étoile Eleonora Abbagnato ran the gamut of her infinite feminine charm and femme fatale ruthlessness.

An extract from Mats Ek's *Appartement* followed, performed with equal

dramatic energy by Le Riche and goddess Guillem, who at nearly 50 has lost none of her legendary flexibility or powerfully modern vibes. The two, who have often danced together, created one of the most sensational moments of the evening.

An outstanding extract from Le Riche's *Caligula*, which he created in 2005 for the Paris Opera Ballet, was shown next with Mathieu Ganio as Caligula and Audric Bezar as his horse, before Le Riche returned for his show-stopping rendition of Béjart's *Boléro*. There was a prolonged storm of applause and confetti before the man of the hour finally disappeared behind the red curtain. But as he brilliantly demonstrated during this farewell evening of mixed emotions, Le Riche is still young and full of plans.

Another highlight of the quarter was Nederlands Dans Theater's first visit to Théâtre de Chail- lot for a mixed bill that left the audience mesmerized both by the pieces on offer as well as the stunning quality of the dancers. The evening opened with *Mémoires d'Oubliettes* by Jiri Kylián, who founded the company and directed it until 2004. *Mémoires*

d'Oubliettes was, in fact, the last piece he created for NDT in 2009. The piece is less luminous and fluid than most of his other works, a darker stroll down memory lane, perhaps somewhat reminiscent of *Doux Mensonges*, which he created the same year for the Paris Opera and which saw the dancers descend into the usually unseen abyss below stage.

It was followed by *Solo Echo* by Canadian Crystal Pite. Just as visually striking as the previous, it has the dancers float and race in a snowstorm to a lyrical Brahms score. Yet *Shoot the Moon* by Paul Lightfoot, NDT's current artistic director, possibly packed the bigger punch in a revolving set made up of three wallpapered rooms with both a very plain and yet a surrealistic feel to them, the tension enhanced by Phillip Glass' gripping score. The piece unfolds vignettes of couples' angst, anger and hankering. It also reveals dancers of such clear-cut precision and dramatic talent as to leave you quite gobsmacked. ▼



VENICE

by Silvia Poletti

Up and down sunny calle (streets), through campi (squares) and in palaces, old arsenals and factories, in breathtaking terraces and halls, as well as on a few traditional stages: these are the varied venues where the Venice Biennale took place this year. Italian choreographer Virgilio Sieni, the current artistic director of the Biennale's Dance Section, conceived a tight map of performances by world-renowned dance-makers for the 2014 edition of the international festival that engaged more than 100 performers, including professional dancers, students and ordinary people. No surprise for those familiar with the choreographer's work: Sieni often creates similar theatrical events in the oldest districts of Florence.

As a follower of the artistic vision of the American postmodern generation, Sieni believes in the "democracy of the body." He also believes in a form of creation that is like a liturgy where celebrants and spectators live the same emotions and ideals. That's why Sieni recommended Steve Paxton, whose egalitarian ideology is still so influential, for the Golden Lion for Lifetime Achievement in Dance. In addition to the official

ceremony and a long talk with the audience, the 78-year-old American maestro was celebrated with the revival of his 1982 piece, *Bound*, performed by Jurij Konjar. It is a sequence of closed episodes, pieced together as a patchwork, starting with a man coming out from a box. His costume looks like a soldier's uniform, though overall he resembles a homeless person. Indeed it does not really matter as the piece is based on pure movement and some simple physical tasks recalling Trisha Brown's first experiments.

The Biennale also featured some prime examples of the extreme radicalism that conceptual dance has reached, as seen in the creations of French dancer and choreographer Jérôme Bel or in the British-Italian duo of choreographer Jonathan Burrows and musician Matteo Fargion. Bel, for instance, in his *Mondo Novo* (inspired by a Tiepolo painting of the same name) gave us a naughty hymn to egalitarianism by involving 25 amateur dancers of different races, ages, weights and abilities, dressed with vintage rags. A touch of tarantella, a hint of *A Chorus Line*, a run across the hall by a dancer in a wheelchair: these dreamers are disarming in their tender naiveté, though I somehow found the piece cleverly cruel.

What a contrast with the Biennale's presentation of Japanese Saburo Teshigawara's *Lines*: here Teshigawara and Rihoko Sato give body and consistence to an exact and fluid stream of dancing shapes and forces in the near darkness, moved by Bach, Biber and Bartok's music for the solo violin played by the virtuosic Sayaka Shoji.

Sieni gave many Italian dancemakers occasion to take part in the Biennale. Enzo Cosimi, who, along with Sieni, was one of the first generation dancers of the Italian Nuova Danza movement in the eighties, presented *Sopra di me il diluvio* (*The deluge over me*). Some came with special projects for young dancers, such as the delightful *Bolero* created by Cristina Rizzo for a group of 10- to 13-year-olds: a deconstructed, algebraic demanding step map danced with moving devotion.

But these are only a few impressions from a very intense Biennale experience that also featured pieces by Meg Stuart, Christian Rizzo, Iris Erez, Roy Assaf, Laurent Chétouane and others. Sieni presented his own project, too; *Vangelo secondo Matteo* (*The Gospel According to St. Matthew*) is inspired by the movie of the same name directed by the late Italian poet and filmmaker Pier Paolo Pasolini. As Pasolini did in the movie, Sieni conceived almost neorealistic frescoes with dancers mixed with non-professionals, to create some lyrical tableaux vivants recalling the Renaissance art that Sieni is so fond of (as was Pasolini).

Later in the summer (a very unusual stormy summer in Italy, compelling many open air performances to be cancelled), again in Venice, a new production commissioned by La Fenice Theatre and the Bevilacqua La Masa Foundation for contemporary arts gave the opportunity to German Bundesjugendballett to debut in Italy with a special creation conceived for the occasion. The brilliant ensemble of eight international dancers is directed by Kevin Haigen under John Neumeier's artistic supervision. *Dungeness Redux*, a choreographic meditation by 21-year-old Patrick Eberts, combined with an emotional video installation by London's Isaac Julien, evoked film director Derek Jarman's last days in his country home in Dungeness. Not an easy challenge to face for such a young choreographer, yet Eberts was able to find some poetic and visual connections between dance and screen. ▼

Outdoor performances happen all over Norway during the summer months. It is a risky enterprise, but even if the weather is really bad, performances are seldom cancelled. Happily, this July and August were the best ever, with temperatures passing 30 degrees Celsius.

Driving up to the mountains to watch Henrik Ibsen's *Peer Gynt*, in beautiful surroundings that are the title character's homeland, was exciting. The play has been performed by Gola Lake, which is about 1,000 metres above sea level, over a period of 25 years. This year, it was a complete new production: new director (Erik Ulfsby), fantastic new costumes (Christina Lovery) and new choreography (Belinda Braza).

beautiful Arabian horse. She showed that she is not only an imaginative choreographer, but also a very temperamental dancer. The play, which combined theatre and dance in the very best way, was timed so the sun went down behind the mountains just as Gynt's mother Åse dies.

When a choreographer works in another environment, it is always interesting to see the result, as when Norwegian Ina Christel Johannessen visited Hong Kong to work with City Contemporary Dance Company. Her piece, *Hedvig from The Wild Duck*, was based on the well-known Ibsen play, but with a stronger focus on the main character Hedvig.

At the beginning of August, the company came to Oslo and the Opera's Second House. The 13 dancers were all of

are made of a special substance that does not cut their skin walking on it, but it makes you jump in your chair watching them.

The House of Dance in Oslo started off the new season after the summer holiday with a guest performance by Belgian's Les Ballets C de la B directed by Alain Platel. They came with his newest piece *tauberbach* (deaf Bach), which is inspired by Marcos Prado's documentary film *Estamira*, about a Brazilian woman who lived 20 years on a garbage dump. Did I really want to go see a dance performance with such a depressing theme? The answer might have been no, but this was actually worth seeing. One of Platel's collaborators was the fantastic actress/dancer Elsie de Brauw, who also performed the main character. She walked around on the garbage dump, a set consisting of 5,000 kilograms of used clothes, and talked to herself, the audience and her fellow dancers onstage without expecting an answer. Platel managed, together with his team, to lift the theme up to become a humanistic and existential experience.

When the Théâtre des Champs-Élysées in Paris wanted a triple bill with ballets from Jirí Kylián, he suggested they invite Norwegian National Ballet, who have 20 of his works in their repertoire. *Symphony in D* was the first one staged in 1986, making it nearly 30 years of collaboration. Before they left for Paris at the end of September, they presented the strong evening at home in Oslo. In the opening piece, *Bella Figura* from 1995, it was great to see two of the company's soloists, Maiko Nishino in the main female part and Eugenie Skilnand, both back onstage after giving birth last year.

Second out was *Gods and Dogs* (2008), a ballet in two parts. In the second half, the back wall is covered with a curtain consisting of metallic threads. When it is moved sideways, it dances together with the dancers and becomes an effective partner.

The third ballet on the program was *Symphony of Psalms*, which must be one of Kylián's best ever. The music from Igor Stravinsky does also help! The eight couples gave a solid performance, but they could have had stronger unity in the ensemble moments. Hopefully that was taken care of before they left for Paris. ▼



Oslo

by Fredrik Rütter

The music used was by Edvard Grieg, revitalized by Kjetil Bjerkestrand. The audience of more than 2,000 was seated overlooking the lake and mountains with patches of snow, and some of the scenes took place in boats or actually in the water.

Peer Gynt was played by Mads Ousdal, an actor who did a lot of folk dancing as a youngster. The way he performed the role was extremely physical, using all the tricks available from athletic Norwegian folk dancing. Braza, together with the director, had thoroughly choreographed every scene, and took on the part of Anitra, the Chieftain's daughter, entering the stage area on a

high technical standard, and they had taken on Johannessen's way of moving surprisingly well. At the same time, it was noticeable that Johannessen had worked more with narrative than she normally does, integrating a narrator to tell the story with a humorous twist. The performance had a fresh touch with some intense dancing from Jennifer Mok as Hedvig and Dominic Wong as her Grandpa. That intensity is mirrored in the breaking of glass onstage, an effect Johannessen has used before. Here, the whole kitchen service is broken, just as the lives of the family break up, but the incredible thing is that the dancers keep on dancing. The plates and cups

September was overwhelming for Danish dance enthusiasts. For the 14th time, Tivoli Gardens had invited the Alvin Ailey American Dance Theater for a week's performances. Three bills included works by Ronald K. Brown, Azure Barton, Bill T. Jones, Robert Battle and Hans van Manen. Tivoli's Big Band and American jazz pianist Eric Reed provided live accompaniment to three Ailey pieces set to Duke Ellington music. The final work at every performance was the signature piece *Revelations*, and the energy of the company sent the auditorium to the boiling point.

The following week, London's Royal Ballet visited Tivoli for the first time. London-based, Danish Kim Brandstrup's *Ceremony of Innocence* was created in 2013 to Benjamin Britten's *Variations on a Theme of Frank Bridge* celebrating the composer's 100th anniversary. An ambience of melancholy pervaded scenes from a man's life that unfolded partly in silhouette and occasionally involved him in a duet with an evasive woman.

In a collection of six pas deux, finely matched dancers demonstrated the wide span of the company's repertoire in excerpts from Frederick Ashton's sprightly *Voices of Spring*, Kenneth MacMillan's dramatic *Manon*, Christopher Wheeldon's image-laden *Aeternum* and the stringent abstractions of Liam Scarlett and Wayne McGregor. The virtuoso *Don Quixote* pas de deux was danced with surplus ease by Akane Takada and a soaring Steven McRae. The fine evening concluded with

Jerome Robbins' *In the Night* for three differently tempered couples.

The autumn season of ballet at the Royal Danish Theatre opened with a guest performance of Hamburg Ballet in John Neumeier's *Death in Venice*. The 2003 ballet is based on Thomas Mann's novella that also inspired Luchino Visconti's 1971 film. Where Mann's protagonist, Aschenbach, is a writer, Neumeier makes him a choreographer. In the lead role, 44-year-old Lloyd Riggins, a much-loved principal with the Royal Danish Ballet from 1989 to 1995, created a deeply felt portrayal of an artist who, in spite of accolades and fame, cannot complete his masterpiece.

In Neumeier's ballet, Aschenbach's attraction to Tadzio (freshly danced by Alexander Trusch) is not solely a pent-up desire for the carefree, smiling boy. It also echoes his own lost youth and revives his creativity. Their last duo became, for Aschenbach, love in sublimation and his moving farewell to life, as Riggins, with death written on his face, fell in exhaustion at the feet of Trusch, who gazed out into the distance through his binocular hands.

In the triple role of assistant to Aschenbach, as well as his and Tadzio's mother, the eminent Laura Cazzaniga was, respectively, rigidly perfect, tender and elegant. An inimitable recurring duo, Otto Bubeníček and Carsten Jung, appeared as gondoliers, as a provocative waltzing couple, as Dionysian tempters in Aschenbach's sensual dream and as stylists, who rejuvenate his aging looks.

Neumeier's chosen music partners were J. S. Bach for Aschenbach's chore-

ographic efforts and, when the plague spread in Venice, a short moment of rock music by Jethro Tull. When emotions overwhelmed Aschenbach, Richard Wagner prevailed, played live in part by the wonderfully temperamental pianist Elizabeth Cooper.

The Royal Danish Ballet now has its own production of Neumeier's *Lady of the Camellias* with Jürgen Rose's precious, new, hand-sewn costumes created for the present remount of his 1978 ballet. To Chopin's piano music, the tragic love story of the tuberculosis-ridden, Parisian courtesan Marguerite Gautier and her lover Armand Duval is told in a series of flashbacks. Neumeier also weaves in a theatre performance of *Manon Lescaut*, wherein the lovers see their destiny mirrored.

In September, the two principal couples, Susanne Grindler with Alban Lendorf and Gudrun Bojesen with Ulrik Birkkjær, repeated the moving performances in the lead roles that had secured the success of the ballet when it entered the company's repertoire in 2012. In a third cast, Neumeier chose the young couple Ida Praetorius and Andreas Kaas, who had each won the Erik Bruhn competition in Toronto in 2012, where Neumeier was on the jury. Last season, Praetorius danced Juliet and Kaas Paris in his *Romeo and Juliet*.

The two 21-year-old dancers have known each other since they were eight years old and both entered the Royal Danish Ballet School. They trust each other both technically and as best friends, which brought a rare quality into their dance together. A mere glance or the touch of a hand conveyed the whole nature of their characters' relationship.

At the end, in a flash forward, Marguerite's maid gives Armand the diary that we see her writing in the background. It was heartbreaking to watch Praetorius in the final moment of death, as she stretched out her arms toward her invisible lover. At the side of the stage, Kaas quietly closed the diary.

On September 9, Praetorius was appointed soloist. Kaas has been invited to dance the Prince in the National Ballet of Canada's *Nutcracker* in December 2014. ▼

COPENHAGEN

by Anne-Marie Elmbj



Ida Praetorius and Andreas Kaas in John Neumeier's *Lady of the Camellias*
Photo: Costin Radu

by Jordan Beth Vincent



With vengeful gods, ghosts and guards, and star-crossed lovers and murder (by snake) at a wedding, *La Bayadère* offers an argument for more-is-more in ballet, with a collision of 19th-century notions of orientalism expressed through the demands of 20th-century technique. Australian Ballet's version, which premiered in Houston in 2010, features choreography by Stanton Welch (after Petipa).

Welch, Houston Ballet's artistic director, is also Australian Ballet's resident choreographer, and the arrival of his *La Bayadère* fits with the company's penchant to present new versions of significant classical story ballets. In the past few years, the company has premiered two *Swan Lakes*, a *Cinderella*, a *Madame Butterfly*, a *Romeo and Juliet* and a *Nutcracker*, in which new choreography and design is combined with traditional storylines and score.

Are these "reimaginings" of story ballets offering something new and innovative, or merely mining ballet history? Looking at Welch's *La Bayadère*, its stated inspiration of modern Bollywood, when mixed with the ballet's 19th-century sensibility (including Ludwig Minkus' 19th-century score), creates a sometimes uncomfortable presentation of the "exotic."

La Bayadère is a love story between a temple dancer, Nikiya (Lana Jones) and a newly minted hero, Solor (Adam Bull). Solor's rival is the High Brahmin (Brett Simon), whose desire to quash Solor leads

to Nikiya's death. In Houston, Welch was able to feature a snake handler and snakes onstage; however, Australian wildlife protection prohibited live animals, leaving us with stuffed and plastic reptiles rather than real slithering creatures.

For much of the first two acts, gestural scenes introduced Solor's fiancée Gamzatti (Robyn Hendricks) and her duplicitous servant (Vivienne Wong), and their role in the death of first Nikiya and then Solor. The choreography for these early scenes developed in the service of narrative.

Elements exploring the relationship between Solor and Nikiya — as well as the notion of what it means for Solor to leap his social strata and the nature of the caste system — are pushed to the side. This comes to the fore in Peter Farmer's costume design. Solor, who is both a poor hunter and the romantic hero, was the only male in tights, as opposed to the loose-fitting harem pants and bare chests of the other men. In his white tights and gold-trimmed jacket, Solor looked more like *Swan Lake's* Prince than a character from *La Bayadère's* imagined India.

It soon became apparent that far more attention had been lavished on the third and final act. Welch's choreography for the Kingdom of the Shades scene embraced the tradition of diabolically challenging choreography with its exact lines in unison as, in white tutus and veils, the women slowly danced down a ramp. The choreography demands focus and balance, and the company performed beautifully.

In its presentation of the 19th-century duality of the supernatural and the exotic, Welch's *La Bayadère* offers something quintessentially Romantic, despite having premiered less than five years ago. Farmer's design for costumes and sets was reportedly Bollywood-inspired; this is certainly apparent in the opulent jewelled brassieres over bare midribs, glittering headpieces and colourful fabrics, as well as in the wash of bright light that characterizes the first two acts at the expense of nuance or suspense. However, Welch's choreography sticks closely to traditional technique with barely a nod toward Bollywood or classical Indian dance, with only the occasional upturned palm or arched torso indicating something "exotic."

On the same night, Bangarra Dance Theatre premiered *Patyegarang* in the smaller Playhouse theatre at the same Arts Centre where Australian Ballet was performing; like *La Bayadère*, *Patyegarang* explores the collision of cultures, although it does so in a more nuanced and thoughtful way, drawing from Australia's history.

In the late 18th century, a young Aboriginal woman, Patyegarang, struck up a friendship with the timekeeper from the colony from the First Fleet of English colonists. The man, William Dawes, kept diaries of his conversations with Patyegarang, which captured his struggles to learn her language and culture, and also the intimacy the two shared.

Choreographer Stephen Page has a team of collaborators who give Bangarra its distinctive aesthetic. Composer David Page, costume designer Jennifer Irwin and set designer Jacob Nash have worked with him on a number of occasions and here, as usual, the production was beautifully realized — stylish, innovative and yet somehow timeless in the way that the earth-inspired textures and colours are layered onstage. New to the team was dramaturge Alana Valentine, who seems to have brought a break from the choreographer's usual episodic structure, with scenes blurred together to create a sense of time passing.

There are violent clashes between the communities, as even Dawes (danced with strength and elegance by guest artist Thomas Greenfield) is caught up in the bloodshed, represented by a red jacket shared amongst the male dancers. Jasmin Sheppard, as Patyegarang, brought something otherworldly and infinitely sad to her interpretation of this historical figure. ▼

by Hilary Bird



Estonian National Ballet

Estonia is a small nation in northeast Europe with a population of just 1.4 million, but it has two major ballet companies — the 36-strong Vanemuine Ballet in the second-largest city, Tartu, and the 60-strong Estonian National Ballet in Tallinn, the capital. Estonian National Ballet has been led since 2009 by Thomas Edur (Toomas Edur) and his assistant Agnes Oaks (Age Oks), who bring a wealth of experience and global contacts.

Edur and Oaks are longtime partners onstage and off. The pair first attracted attention when they won Best Senior Couple at the Jackson International Ballet Competition in 1990 soon after graduating from Tallinn Ballet School; they married that same year. Based in London, they established an impressive reputation as dancers, appearing with Houston Ballet, La Scala Milan, Berlin State Opera, Zurich Ballet, Dutch National Ballet and Cape Town City Ballet, to name but a few. Sarah Frater in the *Wall Street Journal*, previewing their premiere in Kenneth MacMillan's *Manon*, wrote that Oaks and Edur performed classical ballet "with an integrity and depth of belief increasingly rare in the dance world."

Classics are staples of Estonian National Ballet's repertoire, now joined by contemporary works by Gianluca Schiavoni,



Wayne McGregor, Robert Binet and several Estonians, including Edur, Mai Murdmaa and Marina Kesler.

Edur's first short ballet, *This is forever*, was created for himself and Oaks for a London gala in 2000. Since then, his choreographic language has evolved, and *Modigliani* (2012) for Estonian National Ballet is an ambitious mix of classical and jazz dance, tango, naturalism and contact improvisation. Edur worked in close collaboration with Estonian composer Tauno Aints on the score, was part librettist (with poet Irina Müller) and part set designer (with Liina Keevallik). Edur says: "My inspiration was all those artists who create art for art's sake and not for money or glory."

Edur is happy to be able to present work by Murdmaa and Kesler, serious choreographic voices from very different generations. Murdmaa trained in Tallinn and danced there with Estonian National Ballet in the late 1950s. Later she studied choreography at the Moscow Theatre Institute. The "Mai Murdmaa era" began in 1974 when she became senior ballet mistress at the Tallinn company.

Murdmaa's work combines dramatic expression and virtuosity. Her narrative ballets are intense and demanding for both dancers and audiences, with themes that concentrate on the fragility of the human

condition. Much inspiration has been derived from the work of modern Estonian composers, beginning in 1963 with *Ballet-Symphony (Ballett-sümfoonia)*, to music by Eino Tamberg. Her 1980 narrative ballet *Estonian Ballads (Eesti Balladid)* is set to a modern folksong style cantata by Veljo Tormis, based on Estonian legends addressing the fate of women in extremis.

Murdmaa's exhilarating *Petrushka* premiered in 2013. Tõnu Pedaru, writing in ERR (Estonian Public Broadcasting online) described the "emotional, spontaneous and elemental force of the choreography," concluding that the "grand old lady ... has not lost her touch!"

Kesler also trained as a dancer in Tallinn and studied choreography at the Moscow Theatre Institute. Her *Danse sacrée* (from Stravinsky's *Rite of Spring*) and *Ne me quitte pas* (to Jacques Brel) won her an award at the 2005 International Moscow Choreography Competition. Her style is highly charged with a clear preference for contemporary dance and music and "big" themes.

Kesler's first full-length ballet, a neoclassical version of Prokofiev's *Cinderella* (2012) for Estonian National Ballet, follows a time-honoured Estonian tradition — of fearlessly reworking the classics for a new generation. The program note invited the audience to "recognize moments from our everyday life" in Kesler's cheerful and colourful modern dress (and dance) world of 21st-century clowns, fairies, butterflies and gladiators.

When Estonian National Ballet danced Kesler's *Othello* (2012) at the company's United States debut in 2013, in San Francisco, Mary Ellen Hunt, posting on SF-Gate, wrote that Kesler's choreography was "absorbing in its mix of austerity and sensuality."

As for Estonian National Ballet itself, Hunt described it as an "elegant Baltic company." ▼



Estonia's

Fine 5
by Kate Stashko

Fine 5 Dance Theatre is Estonia's most influential contemporary dance company. Based in Tallinn, the group was formed in 1992 by five intrepid dancers looking to carve out a contemporary dance voice in what had been a ballet-dominated arts and culture climate until the fall of the Soviet Union in 1991.

"We felt a need to express something different," says Fine 5 co-founder René Nõmmik. "Everybody felt it, but there were no tools, no funding. But something was in the air." Since then the company has undergone some changes, but two of the founding members, Nõmmik and Tiina Ollesk, remain involved as artistic directors.

When Fine 5 began, members were getting their first taste of the modern dance movement, with influences from Limon, Cunningham and Graham, but, as the years passed, the company's approach became more contemporary. Now their performance aesthetic rests on a training based in improvisation and release techniques. The dancers of Fine 5 (Ollesk, Simo Krusement, Helen Reitsnik, Tatjana Romanova and Endro Roosimäe) are strong, efficient and dramatically intense. Ollesk explains that they work collectively to create their pieces, which combine set choreography with improvisation.

They also frequently incorporate live music. *Phases* (which received the Estonian Theatre Union Dance Production of the Year award in 2009) was inspired by the music of Steve Reich, and was presented recently by Mile Zero Dance in Edmonton, Alberta. Fine 5 joined forces with Edmonton's Ridere Ensemble, which performed Reich's *Triple Quartet* onstage. Edmonton experimental sound designer Shawn Pinchbeck, who teaches at the Baltic Film and Media School at Tallinn University, and works frequently with Mile Zero, was one of the work's original collaborators. He created an interactive design in which recorded sounds are triggered by the dancers' movements across the stage.

Working in Tallinn comes with its share of challenges. Until the fall of the Soviet Union, public funding was provided exclusively to ballet companies in Estonia, and even now there is a lack of resources for smaller contemporary dance groups like Fine 5. *Phases* reflects some of this political and social frustration by combining wild, aggressive movement with sound bites taken from political speeches.

Nõmmik shares with me a quote from Ludwig Wittgenstein that has become the motto for this work: "How small a thought it takes to fill a whole life!" With this small thought, an ambitious group of visionaries continues fighting for the future. ▼

Helen Reitsnik, Tatjana Romanova, Endro Roosimäe and Simo Krusement in *Phases*
Photo: Tracy Kolenchuk

Graham Company
Festival des Arts de Saint-Sauveur /
Mixed Bill
by Linde Howe-Beck

Singapore Dance Theatre
Ballet Under the Stars / Mixed Bill
by Germaine Cheng

Dance Factory
Dada Masilo / *Swan Lake*
by Pia Lo

BalletX
Matthew Neenan /
Sunset, 0639 Hours
by Lewis Whittington

Paris Opera Ballet
Roland Petit /
Notre-Dame de Paris
by Jennifer Fournier

Dutch National Ballet
Krzysztof Pastor / *The Tempest*
by Judith Delmé

Martha Graham Dance Company



would also be known for sparse and minimal gestures, her lifelong love of heroic themes and exotic textures, fabrics and sets, was born at Denishawn. Graham's reconstruction of a Ted Shawn solo, *Serenata Morisca* (1916), showing her dancing with drama and attitude in a 1925 film, was a far cry from her best-known solo, *Lamentation* (1920), also shown on film, in which she sat in a simple tubular fabric, stretching and writhing in sorrow.

The evening program began with a repeat of *Diversion of Angels* (1948), performed with slightly deeper intent on the part of six of the company's exemplary dancers than seen in the afternoon. Plotless, intricate, it showed some linear traits of ballet that Graham had once abhorred. It brought to mind Paul Taylor and Merce Cunningham, two great Graham dancers and disciples whose very different futures as dance leaders in their own right can be traced to some of *Angels'* gestures.

Lamentation Variations (2007) was made up of three short works inspired by the great Graham solo and commissioned by the company from contemporary choreographers Larry Keigwin, Richard Move and Bulareyaung Pagarlava. *Errand*, a recent arrangement of Graham's *Errand into the Maze* with new staging, sets and costumes (concept and direction by Luca Veggetti), illustrated Graham's fascination with archetypal figures. It retained the taut sexuality and sensuality with which she challenged conservative mores of her time.

However grand it was to revisit the Graham pieces, the evening belonged to *Echo*, a significant new work by Greek-born Andonis Foniadakis. Premiered last spring, it was a triumphant pastiche of the passion and plasticity pioneered by Graham. Going beyond its inspiration, the mythical tale of Narcissus and Echo, it concentrated on exposing internal landscapes as Graham often had. Jealousy, a love triangle, the swirl of fabric, pliable bodies and contractions — these were classic Graham. But *Echo* undeniably belongs to the 21st century with monochromatic costumes, and dark, angular, acrobatic and repetitive movement splicing a fury of complex twining.

— LINDE HOWE-BECK

Festival des Arts de Saint-Sauveur / Mixed Bill

It's rare these days for established American contemporary dance companies to be seen in Quebec. Thankfully, the grandmother of them all, the Martha Graham Dance Company, broke this habit in August.

The venerable Graham company, founded by the modern dance pioneer in 1926, made the most of a single day of events at the 22-year-old Festival des Arts de Saint-Sauveur in the Laurentian mountain town north of Montreal. It was the company's third visit to Quebec; it appeared in Montreal in 1985 and 1989 under the watchful eye of Graham herself who died at 96 in 1991.

The events presented at FASS were thrilling — and educational. This was vital, given that, unlike in other parts of North America, Quebec modern dance did not evolve from national or international dance predecessors, but from a regional pan-artistic movement fired up by a sociological backlash against repressive religious, cultural and political leaders. This Quiet Revolution, as the movement was known, led to an explosion of unfettered DIY experimentation in which dance participated after it was virtually outlawed for decades.

Martha Graham was one of the most influential artists of the 20th century. Her career was long and her creative

output huge, continuing until her death. At least a generation of dancers have grown up since, possibly blind to her vast artistic and historical imprint. Perhaps understanding something of the isolation of many in the Quebec dance community, company artistic director Janet Eilber deserves kudos for reminding FASS audiences of Graham's unassailable importance to the world while avoiding any suggestion that her company had become a museum piece.

Although not a single member of Montreal's large dance scene appeared to have made the one-hour drive to see what modern dance's beginnings looked like, local residents and visitors got full benefit from the afternoon conference, the evening performance and the master class given to FASS ballet camp students.

These presentations navigated between the company's historical importance and its future direction in what could casually be termed Martha Then and Now programs. The afternoon and evening presentations shown in the Big Top tent were distinct and singularly focused.

Illustrated by archival films and remounted live works, Eilber's conference addressed Graham's beginnings with the revolutionary Denishawn company in the early 20th century, through to her establishment as choreographer and company director. Although Graham

Ballet Under the Stars / Mixed Bill

Singapore Dance Theatre's annual Ballet Under the Stars, held on an outdoor stage at Fort Canning Green in downtown Singapore, attracted nearly 10,000 audience members over six performances in July. Now in its 19th season, the series used to feature a combination of crowd-pleasing classical ballet — all glamour and virtuosity — and lightweight contemporary fare.

However, in recent years, artistic director Janek Schergen has programmed decidedly serious modern ballets that are more representative of the company's mainstay programming. Yet a sizeable portion of the Ballet Under the Stars audience is being exposed to ballet for the first time and may prefer the lighter fare; as such, there is a delicate balance to be maintained. This year, despite the range of dancemakers of various nationalities, cultures and sensibilities, the programs seemed like an indistinguishable medley of extreme extensions, off-kilter pivots and daring pas de deux.

At the heart of the two mixed bills was the premiere of Australian Natalie Weir's *Bittersweet*, a writhing, surging duet to Hans Zimmer's grandiose soundtrack to the film *Gladiator*. A multi-faceted capsule piece encompassing the range of emotions in a relationship — trust and anguish, apprehension and courage — *Bittersweet* added much-needed expressive variety to the program. However, it was marred by spectacle as repeated swooping lifts descended into overt displays of strength and agility. A one-armed lift, for instance, drew applause from the audience, but seemed sorely out of place amidst some more organic movement.

On the first weekend, Timothy Coleman was tenderly secure in his partnering of fragile Rosa Park, using his full body as canvas to her paintbrush. He reached toward her in despair while she was emotionally moved, but motionless. By contrast,

Chihiro Uchida and Chen Peng, who performed Weir's duet the following weekend, portrayed a more tumultuous relationship, charging into the duet's cascading series of lifts with intensity.

The rest of the ballets on offer were mostly pieces that entered Singapore Dance Theatre's repertoire recently. While the idyllic outdoor setting lent itself well in some instances, most of Schergen's choices needed the formality of the theatre to soar.

The imperial opulence of George Balanchine's *Theme and Variations* was set starkly amidst the lush foliage of Fort Canning Green. As the principal woman, Park is a force to be reckoned with, serenely darting through fiendish footwork and luxuriating within the vigorous metre of Tchaikovsky's *Suite No. 3 in G Major*.

In the effervescent *Allegro Brillante*, Balanchine demonstrates unerring symmetry through an explosion of classicism. Its sparky choreography reveals the technical intricacies of ballet, while highlighting the playful energy of Tchaikovsky's coruscating score. Heidi Zolker and Coleman shone in the principal roles, meeting the challenges of speed and precision with an expansive use of the upper body. The couple could not contain their infectious energy and, in

a rare moment of rest, they stood centre stage, smiling in acknowledgement of the warm applause.

The company's ex-ballet master Edmund Stripe's unpretentious *Piano Concerto No. 2 Opus 102* sought to do the same as *Allegro Brillante*, colouring Shostakovich's vivid music with terpsichorean images. Littering bright classical vocabulary with the occasional cheeky lifted hip and flexed hand, Stripe delivered two exuberant outer movements, which bookended a gently euphoric duet for Chen and Li Jie. The lyricism of the solo piano was reflected in the stunning pliancy of Li's back and Chen's attentive, fluent partnering.

The lithe Uchida was a steely presence in Taiwanese-American Edwaard Liang's *The Winds of Zephyrus*, reveling in the undulations and ripples of the fluid choreography. The men of the company were gales to the women's delicate breezes, hurtling into aggressive slides and loft jumps. The stage seemed to be enveloped by a freewheeling current, causing dancers to converge and diverge with mesmerizing volatility.

Completing the program were East-meets-West ballets by Liang and American Val Caniparoli. Liang's *Opus 25*, a pièce d'occasion for Singapore Dance Theatre's 25th anniversary last year, was a sight to behold with the full company onstage. The work is overtly physically demanding, with dancers exhibiting gymnastic qualities as they flipped, tilted and leaped at speed. There are breathtaking moments of quiet beauty — Park ascending from the ground in an improbable backbend, for instance — which are a respite from the piece's hyperactivity.

There were also striking passages of brilliant athleticism in Caniparoli's *Chant*, inspired by Lou Harrison's splicing of Western string instruments with the Javanese gamelan. However, the Asian influences — a tilted chin, a hip askew — seemed like perfunctory additions to the expanded classicism of his movement vocabulary.

— GERMAINE CHENG



Singapore Dance Theatre

Timothy Coleman in
Natalie Weir's *Bittersweet*
Photo: Bernie Ng

Dada Masilo / *Swan Lake*

Dada Masilo's *Swan Lake*, commissioned by South Africa's Dance Factory, has toured successfully within its home country, as well as in Europe, since premiering in 2010. Last July, it was presented at ImPulsTanz, the annual international dance festival in Vienna. In *Swan Lake*, Masilo, known for her *Romeo and Juliet* (2008) and *Carmen* (2009), confronts homophobia and questions the traditional narratives on which our societies are based. The work is humorous and emotive, with succinct storytelling that wraps up in a snappy 60 minutes.

The piece opened with a parody. One of the dancers recited Paul Jennings' "Backswoon Four-Up," published in the *Sunday Telegraph*, which gives an amusing, layman's view of traditional ballet. The dancers comically illustrated Seaweed Arms, Twiddletoes, the Nobody Loves Me Fold-Up and Weightlifting with Four-Up, which Jennings describes as "a figure in which he holds her up by one leg and she bends the other so as to form a figure four." These caricatures acknowledge outsider perceptions of ballet and, in doing so, established a firm bond with the dance-savvy, as well as with the non-balletomanes in the audience.

The barefoot dancers, men and women, were dressed in white tutus (the women with bodices, the men bare-chested) and feather headpieces (with costume design by Masilo and Suzette

La Sueur). That the men were also wearing tutus didn't seem unusual; rather, the uniform costuming united the company as stock characters in the ballet parody.

References to the traditional *Swan Lake*, with melodies from Tchaikovsky's score, formed the backdrop and represent the society in which the main character struggles. Prince Siegfried (Songezo Mcilizeli) is being forced into an arranged marriage by his parents, who are white (the only white dancers in the piece) — a visual cue of his disconnection with them and their values. Siegfried wore pants, the one dancer not wearing a tutu, which singled him out from the flock. His reluctance to marry, expressed in his dispassionate pas de deux with his fiancée, Odette (Ipeleng Merafe), incites criticism from his community, the group of tutu-wearing dancers who burst into traditional African dance movements.

The company was at its liveliest here, in a commotion of energetic dance phrases, hissing and vocal shouts, and expressive gestures. In this scene, the quivering tutus amplified the African dance moves and lost their association with classical ballet.

Mcilizeli shone in a solo that expressed his desire for freedom from societal constraints. He demonstrated his range of artistry, which is clearly rooted in African dance but incorporates the lyricism of Western contemporary styles, in a touching balance between a fierce fight and longing for empathy.

He also shared a delicate pas de deux with Odile, his male lover (Llewellyn Mnguni). Later, Siegfried turned the plot upside down by introducing Odile, through onstage dialogue, as the reason he will not marry Odette. The community is stunned, his fiancée breaks down in tears, his father disowns him and his mother faints in shock.

It becomes clear that the traditional narrative is unable to cope, and it requires a contemporary-styled dance in the last scene to come to terms with it. To Arvo Pärt's *Spiegel im Spiegel*, the company returned wearing long black skirts, nude on top. Dancers entered the stage in succession and repeated similar motions with arms that swept fluidly around their bodies, before falling softly to the ground. Their gaze followed their arms as if finally acknowledging their own, self-initiated movements, and perhaps their identity. Movements were precise, and conveyed a sense of honesty, calm reconciliation and community. The first two dancers to enter were also the last left standing in embrace.

Masilo's *Swan Lake* jumps seamlessly between ballet, contemporary and African dance and effectively uses the capacity of each. In doing so, it reveals the universality of themes, including those of gender and desire, that are shared by many societies and that can be told through different dance languages.

— PIA LO



Matthew Neenan / *Sunset, 0639 Hours*

New Zealand composer Rosie Langabeer has previously collaborated with American choreographer Matthew Neenan on several concert dance pieces and one full production with BalletX, the Philadelphia company Neenan co-directs. They premiered their most recent collaboration, a docu-dance based on the life of the American pilot who captained the first airmail flights to New Zealand in the 1930s, in a sold-out run in July at the Wilma Theater.

Sunset, 0639 Hours is a two-act ballet-musical, with Langabeer and her quartet of musicians playing various instruments onstage during the ballet, sometimes even moving around among the dancers. Neenan was clearly inspired by Langabeer's protean musical template of lush ballads, ultra-lounge musical riffs and acoustic sound fields.

Ten dancers were onstage as the audience entered, performing dance improvisations meant to symbolize their character's private life. The dancers were cued by Captain Edwin Musick (heroically danced by Zachary Kapeluck) to take their positions for flight, lining up in mechanical formations, arms mimicking propellers and other such airplane-related pantomimes. The literalness was a bit cloying, but things soon lightened up with the comic scene when Musick and his crew land their maiden voyage — 4,000 miles long — and are greeted by New Zealand's prime minister, heard in an archival voiceover and danced with punch-drunk comic precision by Colby Damon.

The action moved to the middle of an Auckland nightclub on New Year's Eve in 1937. A hot band played vintage martini-lounge ballads and tangos, as male-female couples took to the floor, the men in dinner jackets and the women in sheer lamé gowns and pointe shoes. Each couple moved forward with different show dances, with Neenan's choreography at his most whimsical, featuring witty, flashing inlays of lindy, tango and transition phrases à la Astaire and Rogers.

During this scene, Langabeer played piano and Andrew Marsh a haunting trumpet, and then the two traded off verses of a torch song, helping transport



us back in time. Neenan completely uncorks *Sunset* in this scene. As the music gets very dreamy and sultry, the dancers on the floor get visibly drunker, with lusty body language. Midnight is counted down and the revelers lock together in cinematic slow motion with everyone floating offstage, save for Richard Villaverde and William Cannon, who remain embraced in a slow dance.

Suddenly, it is morning, and the dancers have morphed into indigenous South Pacific birds. Later, on the Samoan beaches, there is a drunken stag crew party, with the men horsing around gymnastically (if not erotically), soon joined by an equally voluptuous quartet of female island dancers; they all swing together in the hula and hand dances. The steel riffs by guitarist Isaac Stanford drive Neenan's flair for indigenous cultural dance forms, which he successfully incorporates into his choreographic template without diluting them. These airy divertissements distracted the audience from what we all knew (from the synopsis in the program) would be the plane's doomed return flight. Meanwhile, Neenan used voluptuous ensemble unison passages to drive the story arc forward.

A central thread to the story is the letters sent between Musick and his wife, luminously danced by Chloe Felesina. In the first of two fantasy sequences, The Captain Dreams of his Wife, Andrew Marsh sang the halting lyrics, "I was an island/I was a diamond in your eye," while Felesina and Kapeluck performed

one of the most lyrically beautiful pas de deux Noonan has created, which is saying something, because his duets are always strong. Its specific lustre shows the results of working more experimentally and organically with his dancers in the studio, as Neenan explained he was doing during an interview we had earlier this season.

The dénouement depicts the ill-fated return flight, with Neenan at his most choreographically direct, yet also managing to suggest ethereal depictions of a crash through movement without exploiting its more violent aspects. Set designer Maiko Matsushima's floating sculptures work a bit of magic and suggest either wind shears or fusillade fragments.

Throughout *Sunset*, Drew Billiau's deft lighting design creates a kinetic gallery of panoramic stage pictures. Christine Darch's dance couture flowed luminously on the women, with vintage cut gowns, and the men's flight uniforms were well tailored to showcase body lines in motion.

Sunset shows again that Neenan avoids repeating himself, always tapping new creative veins, and steering clear of his choreographic safe zones, despite their success with his audiences. Adding to the poignancy of *Sunset* was knowing that it marked the final performances of departing BalletX dancers Jaime Lemmon, Cannon and Damon.

— LEWIS WHITTINGTON

Roland Petit / *Notre-Dame de Paris*

Roland Petit's *Notre-Dame de Paris* remains a beloved classic at the Paris Opera Ballet, where it was presented in July in the season's last week, though it is seen almost nowhere else. Unfortunately, this anachronistic ballet proved hard to appreciate for much besides its pride of place in the history of the Paris Opera.

Petit's creation of *Notre-Dame de Paris* in 1965 marked the return of a prodigal son to the company where Petit began his career as a dancer. By then, Petit was internationally famous thanks to *Carmen* and a sojourn in Hollywood and had, with his wife and muse Zizi Jeanmaire, created a recognizably French chic style of neoclassical ballet: a ballerina, her hair cut short, using her legs and feet like daggers, swaggering around the stage with her hand on hip, both glamorous and deadly. He had a

choreographer, and invited fashion designer Yves Saint Laurent to design the costumes, movie composer Maurice Jarre (of *Lawrence of Arabia* fame) to write the score, and painter and designer René Allio to design the sets. Petit also broke with the strict Paris Opera Ballet hierarchy and cast a non-étoile, Claire Motte, to dance the gypsy Esmeralda. Petit, a wonderful mime, danced Quasimodo, the "hunchback."

Many of the work's shortcomings can be attributed to Jarre's awful score. The music is soulless, repetitive and lacks thematic development. The endless marching beat leads nowhere. To punctuate the random staccato crashes, the dancers assume dramatic poses in a manner that can only be described as vogueing. In adagio sections, the harmonies are so thin and emotionally unconvincing that Petit is left with almost nothing to support the protagonists' claims for our sympathy.

While the immense medieval crowds are a force of their own in Victor Hugo's novel, Petit's uninspired crowd scenes failed to convey their humanity. It was frustrating to watch the corps march flat-footed in sixth position or shuffle in à-la-seconde, always in strict unison, "dancing" with little more than their hands to Jarre's grating beat.

As Quasimodo, Stéphane Bullion was too slight and lacking in menace to be convincing. But Petit's choreography for Quasimodo is also far too literal to be expressive; he lopes around the stage with one shoulder hiked up and the arm bent, while the other hangs limply by his side. Quasimodo's power as a character derives from Hugo's ability to give the reader access to his psychology; Petit's Quasimodo is a cartoon-like figure.

Dancing the part of Esmeralda was the relatively new étoile Alice Renavand. Although Renavand's beauty and her refined upper-body comportment meet all the standards of the Paris Opera, she gave us no over-arching dramatic conception of the character beyond a feminine tenderness, and this was exacerbated by her tendency to dance every step with equal value. Her academic approach emphasized form at the expense of expression, and was not enough to bring the iconic gypsy to life.

From a design perspective, *Notre-Dame* is much more successful. Saint Laurent's pop-art palette of primary colours and women in sixties' shifts are fun and irreverent; Jean-Michel Desire's gloomy and dramatic lighting successfully evokes the dark forces of fate in 15th-century Paris; and the clever use of trap doors and flies is often more effective at telling the story than the presentational choreography. The most memorable scene was in the cathedral of the bell tower: Quasimodo's dance on and around the massive clanging iron bells captures, for a brief moment, the enormous scale of *Notre-Dame* and his own lonely vulnerability.

During the curtain calls at the almost 3,000-seat Opéra Bastille, the full house greeted the dancers with loud synchronized applause — a show of appreciation usually reserved for particularly inspired dancing or extraordinary works. Petit's *Notre-Dame* offered neither. It seems more likely that what the audience was applauding was their own glorious cultural history — embodied by the Paris Opera Ballet and Roland Petit, and celebrated by Hugo in his novel, but only tangentially represented in *Notre-Dame de Paris*.

— JENNIFER FOURNIER



profound effect on French ballet, and his influence continues to resonate through the generations at the Paris Opera Ballet. Sylvie Guillem, for instance, would not have danced Forsythe the way she did without the influence of Petit.

A self-described "enfant de Diaghilev," Petit's insistence that *Notre-Dame* be "une création totale," a fusion of libretto, dance, music, sets and costumes, and that he have carte blanche, pointed the way to a new era of artistic freedom at the tradition-bound Paris Opera. Petit was librettist and

Petit's anecdotal approach to a rather unwieldy novel for a dancemaker led him to narrow his focus to four characters: Quasimodo; Frolo, *Notre-Dame*'s evil archdeacon who took him in as a boy; Esmeralda; and her lover Phoebus. Frolo was danced with panache and commitment by Audric Bezac, although his all-black costume and slash of black paint over his eyes made him hard to see at times. Florian Magnenet danced the thinly drawn and thankless part of Phoebus.

Dutch National Ballet



Krzysztof Pastor / *The Tempest*

Shakespeare's *The Tempest* is a troubled and complex play, which, unlike his tragedies filled with intrigue, bloodthirsty murder and revenge, or the rich humour of his comedies, has thoughtful, philosophical undertones. And that is what Krzysztof Pastor, Dutch National Ballet's Polish-born resident choreographer, attempted to elaborate in his new ballet, which premiered at the end of June in Amsterdam's Muziektheater.

It's an ambitious one-act piece, 90 minutes long. To realize his vision, Pastor worked closely with dramaturge Willem Bruls and musical advisor Jan Pieter Koch, as well as video artists Shirin Neshat and Shoja Azari (both New Yorkers of Iranian descent). Neshat's input went deeper — it was she who introduced the ideas of colonialism and feminism.

The opening moments bode well: we see old Prospero, alone on his island, seated motionless under a stark tree, the only decor. As the polyphonic voices of Thomas Tallis' *Spem in Alium* swell to a climax, onto the giant horizon screen is projected the face and then the figure of an older woman, enclosed motionless in a huge gnarled tree. This grainy image morphs into that of dark figures stepping slowly out of the sea.

Prospero, who is played by Abbas Bakhtiari, an Iranian actor and daf player (the daf is a large, tambourine-like hand drum), whipped up the first tempest, and the crashes, shivers and ripples of sound from the drum evoked the noise of a thunderous sea.

Waves of dancers, clad in voluminous skirts, bourréed on from the wings,

bearing on high the forms of young Prospero and his daughter Miranda. Each of the four flashback scenes were preceded by a storm and began in similar fashion, with the bourréed dancers clad in skirts of a different colour (first all in blue, then red, black and white) and with the characters rescued from the waves. The second storm threw up Ferdinand, the only nobleman remaining from the shipwreck, who becomes Miranda's second suitor and escapes with her during the final tempest. Third to emerge were Stephano and Trinculo, slightly comical seamen who attempt to manipulate the island dwellers in order to oust Prospero and take control of the island.

Caliban and Ariel also made their appearance. Caliban (Young Gyu Choi) is no monster: instead he was portrayed as a handsome savage. Dressed in loose black trousers and with a golden, glistening torso, he made a play for the innocent Miranda (fragile Erica Horwood) to the anger of her father. Ariel (a fleet Koen Havenith), released from the sacred tree and clothed in sand-coloured flowing scarves and a feathered neckpiece, leapt and darted appropriately as Prospero's slave spirit. Magic, however, was only hinted at in the form of a glowing red circle of light in which the human action is contained and from which none can escape.

All well and good, but the production floundered on several major points, not least the music. Though the choice of unknown works by 17th-century composer Henry Purcell was apt enough, the overabundance of baroque was monotonous, relieved only by the opening Tallis and a short interlude of raw, visceral music by modernist Michel van der Aa.

And beautiful though Neshat's projections were, they overwhelmed Pastor's uninventive choreography. The immense

waves that swept and rolled across the screen overpowered the bland, rather stilted movements of the "wave" corps de ballet. Havenith jetéed beautifully as Ariel, but couldn't compete with the giant images of sea gulls, swooping and darting over the water.

The choreographer failed, too, in his portrayal of Caliban and the original inhabitants of the island. The latter walked out of the wings in single file, positioned themselves upstage, and had a few moments of camp theatrics when Stephano and Trinculo attempted to educate them (most bizarrely in a form of courtly dance). Caliban meanwhile spent a great deal of time preparing for double tours, taking aggressive postures, legs astride, or angrily raising his fists. It raises the question of whether a complicated political theme such as colonialism can be interpreted through dance. Also, Pastor's (or Neshat's?) slant on feminism took a cynical turn; Miranda was visualized as a melancholy, introverted young woman (in the play she is an innocent teenager filled with curiosity about men). In her erotic pas de deux with the two men (the duets are rather undistinguishable one from another), she appeared to be more manipulated than aroused.

The apotheosis of the ballet, one of supposed attrition and forgiveness, sees all the characters exit (more walking) as the circle of light fades and the old man, alone except for Caliban and Ariel, and bereft of his daughter, lies curled motionless against a backdrop of a serenely calm sea.

Apart from this poetic ending and the promising opening, the production, overwhelmed by filmed images, fell short of offering any new insight into Shakespeare's final masterpiece.

— JUDITH DELMÉ

Casse-Noisette Compagnie Final Bows

Hans Gerritsen



I prefer not to shoot during a performance, but in the Grimaldi Forum Monaco last New Year's Eve, I could not resist catching the final bows of Jean-Christophe Maillot's *Casse-Noisette Compagnie* from my vantage point on a small balcony. The bows were packed with theatrical effects — a fireworks of light with confetti cannons — that were not present at the general rehearsals or photo call.

Technically, the major problem was the very high contrast of light between the dancers, who were onstage in full light, and the audience, who were in the dark, involving a difference of four exposure stops. In order to get both in the same photo, I had to act quickly to make two shots in two different exposures, creating one image later in “the lightroom,” that is, on the computer. The result is a reflection of the event that includes the viewer's experience. There is also tension between the flat photographic plane of the image and the actual space of the stage and the auditorium.

— HANS GERRITSEN

Netherlands-born Hans Gerritsen began his career as a freelance press photographer in Germany. Since 1980, he has specialized in dance photography for, among others, Introdans, Scapino Ballet, Nederlands Dans Theater, Les Ballets de Monte-Carlo and Koninklijk Ballet van Vlaanderen. Visit www.hansgerritsen.nl.

Jean-Christophe Maillot's *Casse-Noisette Compagnie* (2013) brings the iconic characters created by the choreographer throughout his career to a story about dreams that become real. Maillot is the choreographer and director of Les Ballets de Monte-Carlo.

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Misty Copeland and Roman Zhurbin in The Firebird. Photo: Gene Schiavone

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