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CLASSICAL AND CONTEMPORARY DANCE IN CANADA AND ABROAD

WINTER 2015 | VOL. 43 No. 4

**Publisher** Vancouver Ballet Society

**Editor** Kaija Pepper

**Art Direction** Brenda Finamore

**Copy Editor** Margaret Jetelina

**Fulfillment** The Oyster Group

**Printing** Horseshoe Press Inc.

**Mailing** Mail-O-Matic

**Advertising** Jorssen Marketing

**Web Administrator & Social Media Manager** Deanna Peters

DANCE INTERNATIONAL is published quarterly by the **Vancouver Ballet Society** (vbs@telus.net), a not-for-profit organization established in 1946 to support dance.

Opinions expressed within are those of the authors and do not necessarily represent the opinions of DANCE INTERNATIONAL magazine, the Vancouver Ballet Society, its directors or editors. The editors reserve the right to make changes in materials selected for publication to meet editorial standards and requirements. No part of this magazine may be reproduced without written permission.

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

Distributed in Canada by Magazines Canada

Distributed in the USA by Coast to Coast



We acknowledge the support of the Canada Council for the Arts, which last year invested \$153 million to bring the arts to Canadians throughout the country.

Nous remercions le Conseil des arts du Canada de son soutien. L'an dernier, le Conseil a investi 153 millions de dollars pour mettre de l'art dans la vie des Canadiennes et des Canadiens de tout le pays.



We acknowledge the financial assistance of the Province of British Columbia.

ISSN 1189-9816  
Federal Tax Exemption No. 0308353-22-27  
Public Mail Agreement No. 40050848



of dance. I want to make sure *Dance International* — and every word in it — counts.

The choice of writers is crucial, because it is through them that we bring global dance to your door or device. The choices they make — over what to see, what to cover, what to say and how to say it — contributes to the public record of dance. Which is why bringing on a new correspondent is always a big deal. In the case of our two newest, we are proud to feature their regular reports from the cities in which they live.

Welcome to Sanjoy Roy, who joins us from London. Sanjoy began writing about dance in 1994 and, since 2002, has been a regular contributor to the *Guardian* newspaper. To see dance through Sanjoy's eyes, read his inaugural London report on page 47.

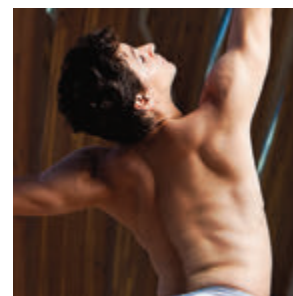
Malcolm Tay, in his third report from Singapore, once more brings readers inside some of the theatres in that Southeast Asian city-state. This issue, Malcolm also takes us to productions at more unusual venues: the old Tanjong Pagar Railway Station and a former rice warehouse.

**While putting the magazine together, I'm drawn to the people and events we cover. With the reports, I usually want to be in that city, in those theatres, gorging on that dance.** I hope you feel the same excitement as you read this issue of *Dance International*.

*Kaija*

Kaija Pepper  
[editor@danceinternational.org](mailto:editor@danceinternational.org)

Guillaume Côté on location at the Art Gallery of Ontario  
Photo: Aleksandar Antonijevic, courtesy of the National Ballet of Canada



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Dance International



DIMagazine



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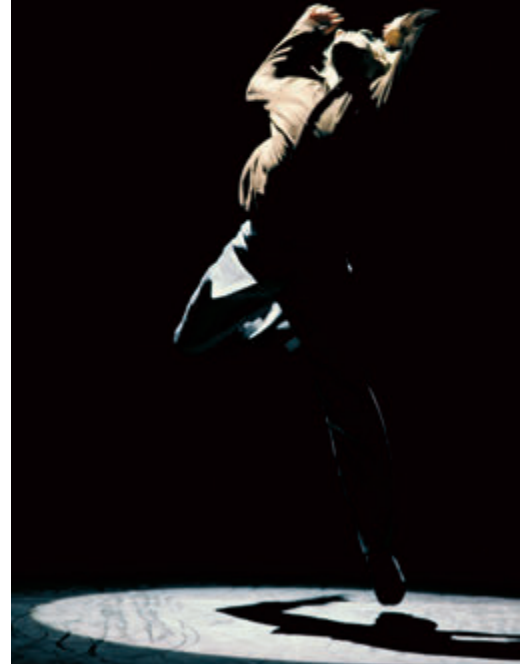


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# Parallel Tracks

Academia and the professional stage



Above: Dancers Dancing's Antonio Somera, Vanessa Goodman and Bevin Poole in Judith Garay's *The Fine Line ~ twisted angels*  
Photo: Chris Randle

by Gigi Berardi



Mo Liu (centre) and Kun-Yang Lin/Dancers in  
Lin's *Be/Longing: Light/Shadow*  
Photo: Frank Bicking

Top-flight dance artists can also be high-powered academics. Several artistic directors-cum-professors from around North America show a variety of ways to navigate that double path. For their companies, they direct, manage, fundraise, book gigs and rehearse dancers. Their academic jobs require them to plan lectures, grade final exams and sit on curriculum committees. They are chairs, co-ordinators and deans, and many of them came to their respective academic institutions by chance.



REALITY's Emily Beattie in  
David Roussève's *Stardust*  
Photo: Yi-Chun Wu



**Above: Oriah Wiersma of York Dance Ensemble in Holly Small's *bronze by gold*  
Photo: David Hou**

David Roussève, who had performed in the companies of Kathryn Posin, Senta Driver, Jean Erdman and others, was on tour with his own company in 1995 when he heard about an opening at the University of California, Los Angeles, in the world arts and culture department. "I was ready for a change," says Roussève. "I really enjoyed touring, but touring year-round made me feel ungrounded."

For Roussève, as for most dance academics, the change came with concerns over how his identity as a professional dance artist could be maintained. Roussève says, "I didn't want to be known as a nonworking artist. Still, there is no good reason why artists shouldn't work in academe." A big plus for Roussève was that at UCLA he would be close to a ready source of highly capable dancers. "In our MFA program, we have a lot of professionals — these are some of the strongest dancers I have seen."

Judith Garay had guested at Simon Fraser University for a semester before she accepted a position in 1992 in its School for the Contemporary Arts, now in downtown Vancouver. A few years earlier, she had retired as a principal dancer with the Martha Graham Dance Company and moved back to Canada. Garay appreciated the fact that "SFU was attracting very interesting and interested students — really thinking people and artists." If she was ever to teach, she felt, this was the right place.

**Below: Li Chiao-Ping in her piece *Watching Watching*  
Photo: John Maniaci**



Garay employs several SFU graduates in her company, Dancers Dancing, and has worked with some for more than a decade. Also, an apprentice program that awards university credit feeds into several area companies, including Dancers Dancing. Says Garay: "It's a win-win situation, you know the students and you know their work ethic; in turn, they learn so much working with professionals."

Li Chiao-Ping had earned a master's in dance from UCLA, and had danced with Sarah Elgart and Dancers in Los Angeles before accepting a faculty position in 1989 at Hollins University in Roanoke, Virginia. In 1993, she moved to the University of Wisconsin, Madison, where recently she was offered the prestigious Romnes Award and Vilas Research Professorship. Throughout her academic years, she has continued to direct her company, Li Chiao-Ping Dance, which is currently based in Madison.

Li occasionally works with students as company members, and believes there are great benefits to this arrangement. For the students, "it provides a close view of professional dancers and faculty who are actively engaged in the field," says Li. For the university, "it's a possible recruitment angle."



Scholarly and professional productivity among faculty remains a requirement of higher education. When professional dancers take academic jobs, typically they stipulate that their creative output in their dance companies must be accepted as part of their academic “research” obligations. Says Li, “When I was hired as an assistant professor, it was understood that my area of research was, in fact, my creative work. It was extremely important to me that my choreography and performance be part of my job as a professor rather than viewed as a hobby or outside my job duties.”

Garay, too, believes strongly that “creative works need to be considered the equal of academic research.” These dancers-cum-teachers’ creative output is an important part of their quest for identity, and they do not want to relinquish their professional dancer persona.

Typically, the company and the university remain separate entities financially. Garay’s company is run as a not-for-profit charity, allowing her to apply for government grants, but, she says, “a somewhat unsettling challenge has been the discrimination by some arts funding juries due to my teaching position. It is perceived that the university should be supporting my work.” Li also has experienced discrimination over her double role: “I remember auditioning with my company for a New York venue, and hearing a clear bias from a panelist that I was a university professor, meaning I was somehow less of an artist.”

Kun-Yang Lin, a former dancer with Martha Graham, as well as with Doris Humphrey, Anna Sokolow and Jennifer Muller, directs Kun-Yang Lin/Dancers and is a professor in the Boyer College of Music and Dance at Temple University in Philadelphia. He was at a critical juncture in his life in 2001-2002, transformed by the events around 9/11, the sudden death of his father

Canadian re-creation of the *Rite of Spring*. Still, “My own work also is a priority — it’s part of my drive,” says Small. “It’s a compulsion, I guess. I’m really a creature of the theatre and it gives me tremendous joy to make work with brilliant people.” Administrative duties tend to add up for tenured faculty like Small, and her academic year is filled with departmental service activities and teaching in both BFA and MFA programs. Small’s more ambitious work is created during professional leaves.

Given administrative and other time constraints, these dancers’ own companies are often “project-based.” As Roussève says, “The projects [for his company, REALITY] follow one after the other, and actually are developed over several years.” For example, he started developing material in 2009 for the premiere, five years later, of his evening-length piece, *Stardust*. Roussève, who now serves as interim dean of the School of the Arts and Architecture at UCLA, says, “It’s a struggle to find the hours in the day. I have to fight to make sure my choreography receives the attention it deserves.”

“The amount of time required for teaching, administrative and advising responsibilities at the university is substantial,” says Lin. “It is particularly challenging with respect to touring; from time to time my company has had to forego an opportunity due to my inability to be away from the university for an extended period.”

Li, who has served as department chair, agrees: “Juggling responsibilities is a constant struggle. I want to do all perfectly and give everything my attention. Since that is not possible, something is always giving. Sometimes, that’s me. Physically, I don’t have as much time or give myself as much time as I should.”

Despite the challenges — one of which is very competitive internal university funding for creative work — there are advantages to working in academia. One, of course, is the regular

**“I am surrounded by faculty-based artists who give me feedback so that I am constantly reflecting on and examining my work. I’m almost relentlessly asked by colleagues to define, to qualify, to quantify.”**

— David Roussève

and the discovery that he himself had a brain tumour. Confronted with such loss and sense of mortality, he began to question what directions he wanted to take, recognizing a “need to pass on to the next generation, to my students and the community, whatever gifts had been given to me.”

Today, Lin views his company as a vehicle for mentorship and development, and for “providing a real-world bridge that is very much in line with Temple University’s commitment to ‘real-world ready.’” Lin believes every dance program should have artistic directors on its faculty roster; this “serves as an inspiring motivator for those students and potential students who want to pursue a career as professional dance artists.” A number of his current company members are graduates of the Temple dance program.

Some dancer-professors continue to work as independent artists — choreographing and producing — while directing student-based companies within university dance programs. For example, Holly Small, a professor of dance in the School of the Arts, Media, Performance and Design at Toronto’s York University, directed the York Dance Ensemble for 15 seasons, culminating in its 25th anniversary in 2013 with *Rite Redux*, a uniquely

salary and benefits, including paid periods of professional leave. There are creative advantages, too. “I am surrounded by faculty-based artists who give me feedback so that I am constantly reflecting on and examining my work,” says Roussève. “I’m almost relentlessly asked by colleagues to define, to qualify, to quantify.”

For Garay, working with dancers and other artistic collaborators is a thrilling two-way exchange of energy, information and inspiration that inspires her to teach with passion and integrity — and it seems to suit the dancers, too. Many former company members have been successful in forming their own groups and teaching at different universities.

The benefits of working with professional artists are substantial for dance students who choose to go the university route. With professional dancers as accessible role models, they learn real-world skills and are in the right environment to make both intellectual and artistic breakthroughs. They have time (and earn credit) to explore and reflect upon their training and choreography. Once they graduate, the dancers are well situated to audition and dance in whatever space and for whichever audiences they can find. ▼

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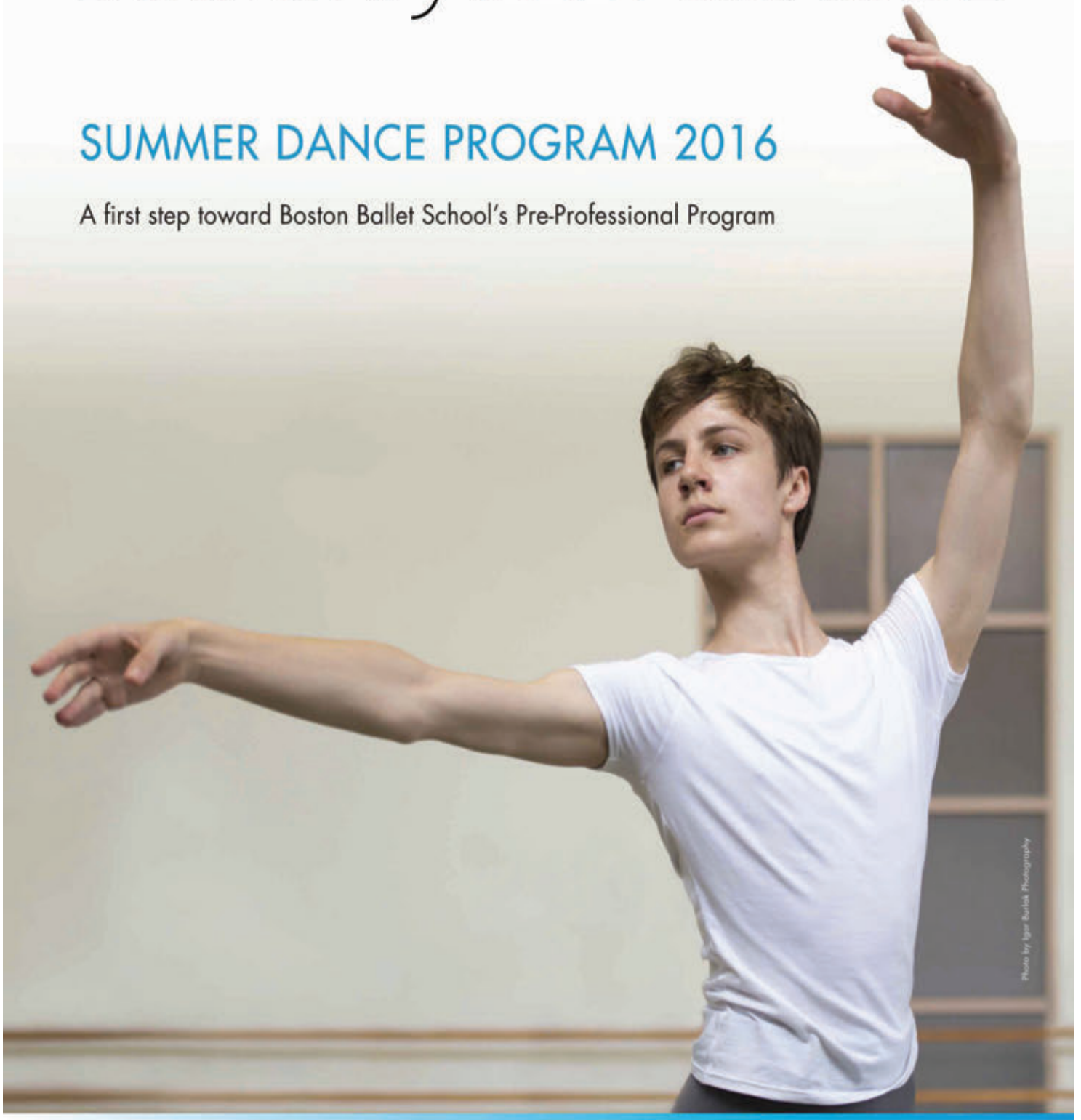


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# A Place Called Souvenir Rachel Tess' Dream Site

In a dank, windowless chamber with stone walls, Rachel Tess jumps. And jumps some more, rejoicing in the movement in much the same way she did as a child dancing Clara in Oregon Ballet Theatre's *Nutcracker*. Wearing sneakers, not slippers, with no party guests in sight, Tess wasn't pointing her toes or landing in plié last June as she performed a solo in her own *Souvenir Undone*. This site-specific 50-minute sequence of solos and duets, presented during the Lower Manhattan Cultural Council's River to River Festival of contemporary arts, is aesthetically about as far from 19th-century story ballets as it gets.



BY MARTHA ULLMAN WEST

Both photos Rachel Tess and Luis Rodriguez  
in Tess' *Souvenir Undone*  
Photos: Darial Sneed





The site itself, an underground warren of munitions storage rooms in Fort Jay on New York's Governor's Island, is just as far from the proscenium stages on which the 35-year-old dancer/choreographer performed for half her life. Tess danced professionally with Oregon Ballet Theatre for two years, then attended the Juilliard School, where she received a Princess Grace Award in 2003 and a BFA in dance the following year. While still a student, she danced with the Lar Lubovitch Company and between 2004 and 2013, with Les Grands Ballets Canadiens de Montréal, Göteborg Ballet and Cullberg Ballet. But, since 2007, Tess has been performing her work in galleries, warehouse spaces and empty storefronts in Portland, Oregon, the city of her birth, and elsewhere. The *Souvenir* project, which earned her a master's in dance from the University of Dance in Stockholm, came out of those site-specific performances.

*Souvenir Undone* does tell stories, many, but they are abstract ones that depend on the answers to a series of questions posed by Tess to her dancers about how they relate to the audience, to each other and to the space where they are dancing; they also tell how the audience relates to all of the above, and how everyone involved, including the audience, responds to a shifting environment of light, sound and movement. Asked to characterize her style and vocabulary, Tess says firmly: "I am using specific movement practices and *not* eradicating technique. I use a little ballet and the dancers are working with highly structured improvisation."

Tess' entire solo provides a case in point. It began in pitch dark, the dozen viewers (mostly from the Princess Grace Foundation, which partially funded the performance) leaning against the rough walls, hearing only the sounds of brushing, a bang-on-a-can rhythm and something resembling a tolling bell. The brushing in particular created a spooky, film noir effect. As the sound got louder, the darkness faded to reveal Tess incorporating a scary puddle of standing water into her movement, which shifted to a sort of belly dance and shooing motions with her hands as co-performer Luis Rodriguez shepherded the audience back to the central room where the piece had its playful, task-oriented beginning.

*Souvenir Undone* was originally slated for the island's St. Cornelius Chapel, a high-ceilinged light-filled space, where a different version was performed last year. That fell through at the last minute, forcing Tess and lighting designer Michael Mazzola to scramble to reinvent the work in a site bearing more resemblance to a dungeon than a church. They were so successful *New York Times* critic Gia Kourlas thought Tess might "have discovered the performance site of her dreams."

Not exactly. That would be the one she created herself, in response to another question: "What if I have my own container that fits into a site?" The answer: a roughly nine square foot, low-ceilinged structure she calls *Souvenir*, designed in collaboration with Swedish-Chilean craftsman carpenter Gian Monti, and built in Sweden to their specifications by Tess' Oregon-based uncles.

Whether that physical structure is used in performance or not, this is where, since it was completed in 2013, all productions are made and then transferred to other sites, such as Fort Jay. There, two different choreographies were performed, including *Souvenir Undone* with fellow Juilliard graduate Rodriguez, whose intuitive partnering kept Tess calm when needed, and whose sense of humour was a match for hers in a jittery duet danced to popular music. Tess danced the other, *These are bodies*, *These are motions*, *This is the place* (originally performed in the structure, in Sweden), with Benoît Lachambre, a Montreal-based choreographer and performer, who shares Tess' speculative, exploratory approach to movement.

So far, what the Baryshnikov Center for the Arts describes as a "self-contained mobile theatre," and Tess, the daughter of an interior designer and an architect, calls "architecture," has only been used in the United States at the Baryshnikov Center, where Tess was in residence for a month in summer 2013. In Sweden, the story is different: in August 2014, the structure was placed inside a hay barn in Valmos, which Tess found ideal "because there was no time limit for performances," as there is on Governor's Island. Mazzola documented that residency with a series of spectacular photographs, some of which were shown at Opsis architectural offices in Portland, where, that September, Tess and Swedish dancer Kenneth Bruun Carlson had performed a 30-minute duet titled *Souvenir* in a pretty accurate replica of the eponymous structure.

The hard-working Tess, in addition to the Valmos residency, had just spent five months doing 160 shows at the Milvus Artistic Research Center (MARC), which she founded in 2012 on 27 acres of farmland bordering a Swedish national park, also home base for her and her life partner, Swedish businessman Johan Nygren. In the same period, she did movement workshops with 300 kids; in some, they built their own space with different materials.

Tess' structure is made of modular pieces of wood that can be taken apart and put back together with wooden pegs. *Souvenir* resembles a small house minus the plumbing and wiring, with cubbyhole seating for the audience and windows (without glass) with shutters that can be opened to let in ambient sound and natural light, and closed again to exclude them.

Built-in LED strips and hand-held lanterns provide the only artificial light; Tess, a native Oregonian, makes conservationist art without polemics or pretence. But that's only a part of what she does.

Conceptually, Tess is a small-scale artist with enormous vision, vision being the operative word here. Like Trisha Brown (another daughter of the Pacific Northwest, whose company also performed in this year's River to River Festival), the emphasis in her work is visual (visual artists would call *Souvenir*, rightly, an installation) and her approach to making dance is speculative. The "what if ..." question that led to the creation of the *Souvenir* project is, according to Portland choreographer Gregg Bielemeier, one he hears Tess use frequently in the studio, when he works with her on her visits to Oregon, where Rachel Tess Dance has been a registered non-profit organization since spring 2008.

The 2007 *Details of a Couple*, made with former partner Stephan Laks, was Tess' first Portland presentation and it featured Tess, her flexible body in an evening gown, negotiating, with elegant squirms, a table full of stemware. Tess, who climbs rocks for relaxation, has always been a risk-taker. When Oregon Ballet Theatre artistic director Kevin Irving was directing Sweden's Göteborg Ballet, he saw Tess' gleefully wicked performance as Carabosse in Meryl Tankard's *Aurora*, in which she "flew across the stage while shrieking." Dancing in the dark on a wet stone floor, as she did last June, held more terrors for the audience than for her.

Tess leads a complicated life as a bi-continental artist, who, Mazzola points out, "is unhampered by labels like dancer or

choreographer, sculptor or painter, making work with child-like zeal and the burning focus of a research scientist." She is also an administrator, organizing residencies for MARC; Lachambre was awarded the first, and Bielemeier, part of a new Portland exchange with Sweden called All the Way, will go next spring. A Swedish artist will travel to Portland the following year. The purpose of the exchange is to see, Tess says, how a change of context affects the artists in question, and what a cultural exchange between Portland (where many Swedes settled in the 19th century) and Sweden can look like.

Tess' funding arrangements are also complex. MARC, which Tess founded to provide a "concentrated environment for artistic research within the field of performance," receives 100 percent of its funding from the Swedish government; the Swedish Arts Council also awarded her a three-year grant to develop *Souvenir*, giving her the luxury of time and consistency. In Portland, where she needs to build *Souvenir II* for performances in the United States, raising money is more difficult, in part because her activities elsewhere keep her from performing in her hometown more often.

That being said, much admiration for her talent and respect for her work remain in the town where her career began. Bielemeier, who began working with Tess quite recently, loves her flexible body and mind; Josie Moseley, who was her modern teacher at Oregon Ballet Theatre's School when Tess was 12, says she "is everything an artist can be." Mazzola, who also has an international following, loves collaborating with her. Chances are, Tess will figure out the funding the same way she did the *Souvenir* project, with energy and imagination. ▼

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# Guillaume Côté



Guillaume Côté with artists of the National Ballet of Canada in rehearsal for *Le Petit Prince*  
Photo: Aaron Vincent Elkaim

Photos both pages courtesy of the National Ballet of Canada

## The artist, the man & Le Petit Prince

**G**uillaume Côté, the 34-year-old National Ballet of Canada star, is a generally affable and courteous man, but these days it's not always easy to get his undivided attention. It's late summer and we're sitting at a table on the patio of a trendy neighbourhood coffee shop overlooking Toronto's Don Valley, where we've met to talk about his rapidly evolving career. The city's impressive bank-tower and condo-spiked skyline looms beyond the lush greenery of Riverdale Park. It's only a few blocks from the home Côté shares with his wife and fellow principal dancer, Heather Ogden. She's sitting across from Côté and the new woman in his life is on her lap – their daughter Emma, born in early January 2015 – to whom Côté's eyes are constantly drawn.

by Michael Crabb

Côté's unfettered pride and delight in being the father of such a bonny babe is clear. "Having a child has deepened my relationship with Heather and it makes you worry less about the little things. It makes you realize what's important in life. I like to think it's made me a nicer person."

Ogden, who has been back from maternity leave since July, now has to balance her professional obligations with motherhood; Côté, who does not shirk his share of parenting duties, also has a formidable professional agenda.

At the time of our interview, Côté is recently returned from his home province, Quebec, having completed his first season as artistic director of Le Festival des Arts de Saint-Sauveur, held for 10 days each summer in a picturesque village in the Laurentians, an hour's drive north from Montreal. As the National Ballet's ranking and much-needed male principal, Côté is also strategizing his return to the stage after being sidelined since December 2014 by a serious knee injury that required surgery and lengthy rehabilitation. He'd hoped to be back for the company's early October tour to Montreal, but on doctors' advice has set *Romeo and Juliet* in late November as a more appropriate target.

Meanwhile, Côté has taken on the biggest challenge of his emerging choreographic career, a full-length adaptation of Antoine de Saint-Exupéry's beloved yet enigmatic fable, *Le Petit Prince*, to be given its premiere by the National Ballet on June 1. Understandably, as Côté explains, another of his passions, music composition, has had to be moved at least temporarily to the back burner.

Men usually have to be coaxed into ballet rights. Guillaume Côté leapt into them at age four. He grew up in Lac-à-la-Croix, a rural town about a three-hour drive north of Quebec City. His mother, not a dancer herself, had gone into partnership with a former university friend to open a dance school. His older sister, Geneviève, was already studying there. Côté was eager to follow. He also studied piano, clarinet and classical guitar, and fantasized about becoming a rock star. (In later years he took composition classes at the Royal Conservatory of Music in Toronto and picked up the cello, "just for fun.") His ballet teacher, France Proulx, kept him focused on his primary talent and persuaded René and Germaine Côté to allow their young son to audition for the National Ballet School in Toronto, knowing that if he was accepted he'd be leaving home.

"It's only now that I fully understand how hard it was for them to see me go," says Côté. He remembers the tears in his father's eyes every time Côté left home to return to the National Ballet School after visiting.

Côté arrived in Toronto speaking hardly a word of English. It was only when fellow student Éric Gauthier, four years his



senior, invited Côté to join a school band that he began to settle in. "Éric was like my big brother," says Côté. "He helped me a lot." Gauthier went on to become a soloist with Stuttgart Ballet before forming his own company. Given their history, it's not surprising that Côté presented Gauthier Danse as part of his first season at Saint-Sauveur.

Côté joined the National Ballet as a 17-year-old apprentice in 1998 just a few months before ballerina Kimberly Glasco launched an unlawful dismissal suit against the company, unleashing a stormy period in James Kudelka's artistic directorship. Ogden, who came to Toronto from the Richmond Academy of Dance in British Columbia, joined the same year.

At age 19, Côté was cast as the prince in *Swan Lake*, the youngest Siegfried in National Ballet history. By 2001, he and Ogden were dancing the title leads in *Romeo and Juliet*. Côté was promoted to principal dancer in 2003. Ogden rose to that rank the following year.



**... Kain has delivered on her promise to put the National Ballet back on the touring map, giving dancers like Côté the international exposure they naturally crave.**

The two young dancers, often cast as partners, established a good working chemistry. However, as Côté made it clear that his interest in her was also romantic, Ogden admits she was hesitant, concerned it might damage their professional relationship. It was not until 2006 that they became a couple, finally marrying in 2010. Côté took Ogden all the way to a favourite spot in Florence, Italy, to propose. He also wrote the song, *If This Is a Dream*, to which they danced at their wedding.

Asked for the first three words that spring to mind in describing her husband, Ogden pauses briefly before venturing, “driven, loving, thoughtful.”

While their personal bond has only grown stronger through the years, theirs has never been an exclusive onstage partnership, nor has the National Ballet tried to promote Côté and Ogden as a 21st-century equivalent of Karen Kain and Frank Augustyn, the company’s legendary “gold-dust twins” of the 1970s. Even so, audiences have come to view the couple as the National Ballet’s most prominent stage partnership. Its special quality is particularly apparent in Alexei Ratmansky’s *Romeo and Juliet*. There is an ardour and abandon to their dancing that speaks eloquently of deep trust and mutual love.

Assuming his mended knee holds up, Côté is moving into his peak performing years as a dance artist, but they are inevitably numbered. Prudently, he is already thinking about the future. Unlike some of his male colleagues who’ve moved into unrelated careers, Côté’s ambitions remain firmly within the dance world. Depending on the success of *Le Petit Prince*, his choreographic career could blossom internationally, but there’s also talk within Canadian ballet circles that Côté is being groomed as a future National Ballet artistic director.

Like Karen Kain before him, Côté could have left Canada to pursue a career abroad. “There have been plenty of offers,” he says. “I’ve had options.” Côté has appeared as a guest with a host of major troupes from Britain’s Royal Ballet to American Ballet Theatre. He has been part of the popular international showcase, *Kings of the Dance*, three times.

Nevertheless, he’s remained loyal to his roots, in part, he explains, because artistic director Kain has delivered on her promise to put the National Ballet back on the touring map, giving dancers like Côté the international exposure they naturally crave. And, as he has learned from his travels, “the grass isn’t always greener on the other side.”

That loyalty has been reciprocated. Were she unsure of his commitment to the National Ballet, Kain would not have nurtured Côté’s dancemaking career and in 2013 appointed him to a new position as choreographic associate, effectively a resident choreographer. Least of all would Kain have taken what she herself concedes is a major risk in agreeing to commission *Le Petit Prince*. A full-length ballet is, as Côté himself admits, “a very different monster.”

Côté explains that he’s loved the 1943 Saint-Exupéry classic since childhood, but understands this is insufficient reason to make a ballet of it. *Le Petit Prince*, after all, while full of arresting characters, is thin on actual narrative and, as befits an allegory, has a strong philosophical thread. Côté, however, is convinced dance can capture and express the powerful ideas and emotions that have made *Le Petit Prince* one of the world’s most-read volumes.





Côté first approached Kain with his ambitious plan in 2012, requesting an allotment of time and studio space to “test the waters” and workshop his ideas. The first session was held in the summer of 2013. Côté assembled his key collaborators, acclaimed designer Michael Levine and rising composer Kevin Lau, both Canadians. He also consulted a noted Saint-Exupéry authority, long-time staff writer for *The New Yorker*, Adam Gopnik. By the third workshop, held this past January, Kain had signed-off on a full production.

By summer, Levine and Côté were finalizing the designs. Lau, meanwhile, has made Côté’s choreographic task easier by providing a piano reduction of the complete score. It helped during three weeks of intense rehearsal in September.

a Ratmansky or Wheeldon, but I do get to be around these geniuses.”

Côté is ardent in expressing his appreciation for Kain’s commitment to developing Canadian choreographers and admits that one day he’d be happy to find himself in a similar position, nurturing other artists’ futures and helping sustain an institutional framework to support them. His experience at Saint-Sauveur has already given him a taste of what that can involve. Apart from artistic programming — music and dance — he’s worked closely with its board of directors, helped with fundraising, and given public speeches, post-performance talks and countless media interviews.

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Photo: Rod Braun | Choreography: Galle Petursson-Hiley

“As far as being a director is concerned it’s been the best kind of internship,” says Côté.

Does this mean he would throw his hat in the ring when Kain decides to retire?

“I’d certainly love to be considered. The company is my home and I know its ins and outs. I love the idea of being in the back of things. I also think I could bring something coherent to the company. However, my belief is that whoever takes over should have retired from the stage and I’ve still got some great dancing left to do.” ▼

**Guillaume Côté, Heather Ogden and their daughter Emma**  
Photo: Courtesy of Heather Ogden



**Guillaume Côté**  
Photo: Aleksandar Antonijevic,  
courtesy of the National Ballet of Canada

## Volta

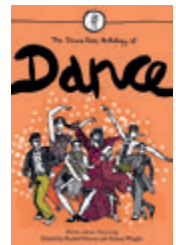
by Felicity Maxwell

The Queen and Leicester dance again tonight.  
I watch their tripping progress and their poised  
flirtation, her ascension and his joy  
to have his hands upon her as by right.  
For me, I stand demure, with eyes not quite  
cast down but certainly not bold to claim  
the glance or hand of any lord. My aim  
is low, and yet he finds me in his sight.  
I turn. The court turns round about me —  
its sudden centre — pivoting gossip  
as my Lord of Leicester leads me round the hall.  
Is not man’s favour fickle? How can he  
not deem it a most foolish thing to slip  
from measured steps and, plunging, hazard all?

*Felicity Maxwell’s sonnet was inspired by her learning the volta, Queen Elizabeth I’s favourite dance.*

*From The Emma Press Anthology of Dance, edited by Rachel Piercey and Emma Wright, published in Great Britain in 2015. Visit [theemmapress.com](http://theemmapress.com).*

# Poem



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# The Tutu

## An Endangered Species

by Karen Barr



**The creation of a tutu, that iconic symbol of ballet, requires the expertise of a seasoned cutter and stitcher; they are time consuming and expensive to make. Despite their enduring popularity, budget cuts within the arts have led to fewer new tutus being built; with so few opportunities to practise, the concern is how costume makers can retain their skills and pass them on to future generations.**

John Neumeier's *Nijinsky* for the 2012-2013 season. Of the 300 costumes and pieces built for this production, there were two Romantic tutus (cut to mid-calf) and eight Degas, or bell, tutus (cut to the knee).

The Royal Winnipeg Ballet, which employs only two cutters, has eight stitchers. "It's been a tutu year for us!" exclaims wardrobe director Alena Zharska. For its most recent season, the tutus from *Swan Lake* had to be remade and the original fabrics sourced from Italy. Twenty-four new tutus were built. The project took three months. An additional 10 to 12 were built for the RWB's school. The company seems to be creating an above average number of tutus per year and will even make tutus for others if commissioned.

Houston Ballet's team of three cutters and two stitchers has a number of tutus to build for the 2016-2017 season, including Romantic tutus for the Willis in *Giselle* and a variety of styles for a new production of *The Nutcracker*. Yet Laura Lynch, Houston Ballet's wardrobe manager, says there are members of her team who have never made one. "If there is staff turnover, the new staff may not have the skills. Making a tutu is intimidating. It's not hard, it's just very systematic."

The cutter starts with a pattern to cut out the fabric pieces. The bottom part of the tutu consists of a panty and basque (the top part of the skirt from waist to high on the hip). To the panty, four to 14 layers of tulle or netting are added, each at various lengths. Each layer is hand pleated to form the skirt. The panty is then attached to the basque and placed on a mannequin, and a long needle is used to tack and sculpt the tutu. Romantic tutus are constructed with tulle cut all one length, to suit the height of

the dancer, and usually have a separate panty worn over tights.

Shaping the skirt can be a challenge, especially today when tutu designs are so varied. Marjory Fielding, wardrobe supervisor for the National Ballet of Canada, remembers the difficulty in creating the title character's tutu for James Kudelka's *The Firebird* in 2000, because at the back it had to look like the tail of a bird. Zharska and her team at the Royal Winnipeg Ballet recently completed some of their most challenging tutus to date in Mark Godden's *Going Home Star — Truth and Reconciliation*. One tutu looks like an Elizabethan collar: a long ruff was attached to a stiff band using cartridge pleats, then attached to the basque. Another tutu was built with wires to look like a cage.

Once the skirt is complete, the bodice is built with or without boning, but either way it must fit the ballerina's figure precisely. The plate (the top layer that sits on the gathered layers) of the tutu is then attached.

Typically, one week is needed to complete the panty and the netting for each tutu. It takes an additional several weeks to complete the bodice, depending on how elaborate the embellishment is. This could include beading, appliqués, lace, embroidery and ribbndry.

Tutus are an investment for the company, so they are built to last, usually with the finest fabrics and embellishments. It is not uncommon for these pieces to last more than two decades. Patti Fitzpatrick, interim head of women's wardrobe for San Francisco Ballet, just re-embellished a 27-year-old Black Swan costume from *Swan Lake*. The National Ballet of Canada still has 58 tutus built for their 1998-1999 *Swan Lake*, which Fielding confirms are in beautiful condition. Of course, as Lynch points out, "Once they are built you need space to store them."

Also, tutus must be danceable. Fitzpatrick remembers building one of the company's most difficult tutus, for the Snow Queen from *The Nutcracker*. "This tutu was designed in such a way that the ballerina's hip was lost in the costume. Her partner could not feel her hip, making it impossible to lift her. The tutu had to be altered several times."



With fewer tutus being built, will tutus become a lost art? All the heads of wardrobe I spoke with agree there are many excellent costume and fashion design programs that do offer training in tutu-making. But, with so few jobs available, working hands-on with an experienced mentor is rare, especially since occasional freelance work is for many the only way into a company's wardrobe department. While ballet companies will likely always require tutus, the opportunities to build them are resting in fewer hands.

"Costume building is a lot like dance — the skills involved are best passed from one generation to the next. When the transfer of skills is broken, knowledge can easily be lost," says Fielding. ▼



Greta Hodgkinson of the National Ballet of Canada in James Kudelka's *Firebird*  
Photo: Cylla von Tiedemann

Tutu from William Forsythe's *The Vertiginous Thrill of Exactitude*  
Photo: Ava Jerao, courtesy of the Royal Winnipeg Ballet

In the past, there were many tutu-centric ballet productions. But times are changing. Choreographers and designers may decide to set even the most classical ballet in current times, buying clothing off the rack, without a tutu in sight.

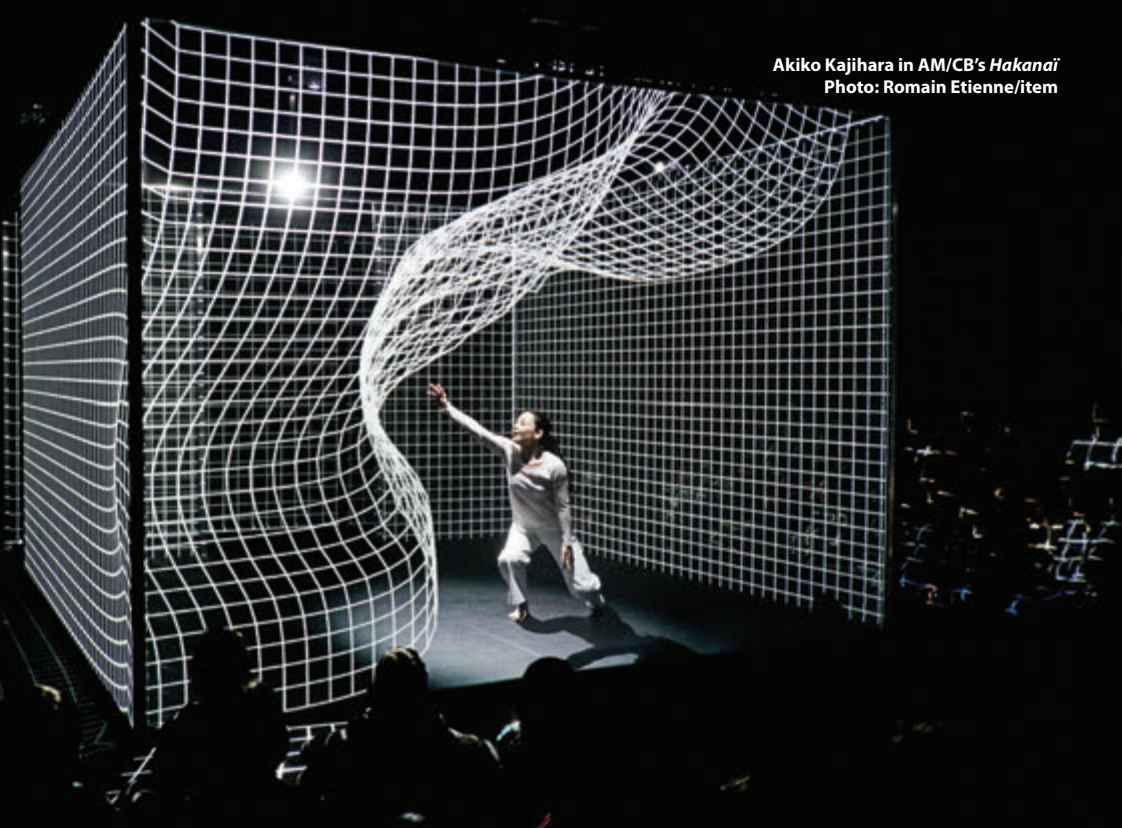
Renting tutus from other ballet companies can cut costs. San Francisco Ballet has 20 white Degas tutus they have often traded with the National Ballet of Canada for their 20 white pancake tutus (a short flat skirt). Slashed budgets have also resulted in co-productions, with one set of newly designed costumes split between two companies. This means one wardrobe department has lots of work, while the other has none.



Above: Elizabeth Lamont of the Royal Winnipeg Ballet in Mark Godden's *Going Home Star — Truth and Reconciliation*  
Photo: Samanta Katz

Right: Paul Daigle's costume illustration based on French court dress for the Royal Winnipeg Ballet's *Going Home Star — Truth and Reconciliation*





## Digital Dimensions

French digital art and performance company AM/CB, led by Adrien Mondot and Claire Bardainne, brought their 2013 work, *Hakanai*, to the 2nd International Workshop on Movement and Computing (MOCO), held in Vancouver. Dancer Akiko Kajihara performed the interactive solo inside a transparent cube at Simon Fraser University's Studio T. Afterward, the audience was invited to explore the space in which body movement triggered a digital visual display.

Vancouver's Holy Body Tattoo, accompanied live onstage by Montreal's post-rock group Godspeed You! Black Emperor, returns to the stage after a 10-year absence with *Monumental*. The January 28 show at the Queen Elizabeth Theatre, part of PuSh International Performing Arts Festival, is the first stop on an international tour, which will include Australia's Adelaide Festival of Arts in March and Quebec City in April. Holy Body Tattoo, co-founded by Noam Gagnon and Dana Gingras in 1993, was a punk darling of the international performing arts scene, with a singular style of adrenaline-pumping movement that combined collaborations with leading visual artists, filmmakers, musicians and writers. *Monumental* was the company's final work.

Artists of Holy Body Tattoo in the original production of *Monumental* in 2005  
Photo: Chris Randle



# Caring Creativity

Arts charity Create recently delivered a series of creative dance workshops in London, England, as part of its cross-arts creativity:revealed program. The workshops bring together older people with dementia, learning difficulties and varying physical abilities to improve their wellbeing, provide creative stimulation, develop friendships and enhance quality of life. Rachel Drazek, the professional dancer who led the workshops, was recently the lead in *Crazy Jane*, a production about Toulouse-Lautrec's muse toured by Birds of Paradise Theatre Company in Scotland. According to Create, which has run 5,824 creative arts workshops that have helped transform the lives of 30,082 disadvantaged and vulnerable participants, every project helps to create a society that is fairer, more caring and more inclusive.

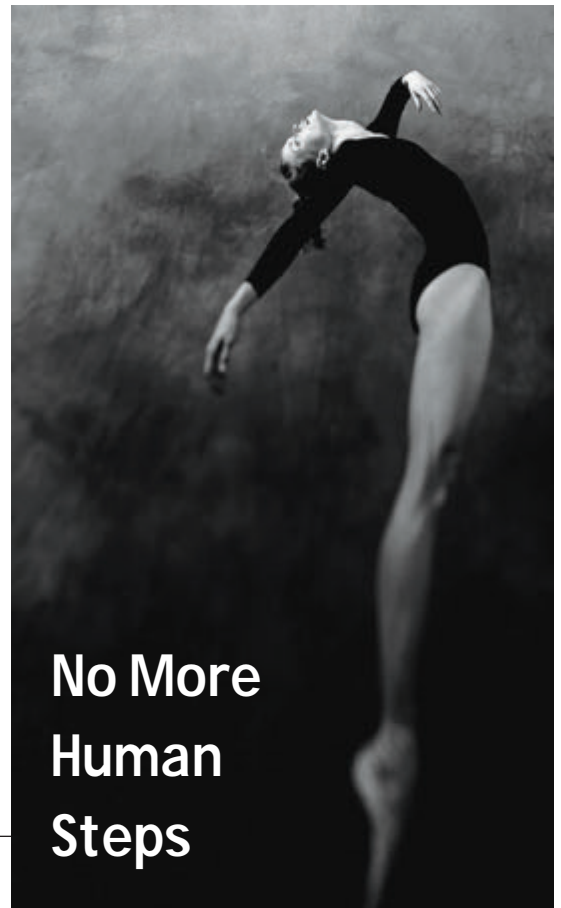
Rachel Drazek (right) with program participant Rhoda at the Jewish Care Community Centre  
Photo: Paul Lang



Costumes for the corps de ballet from the Swedish Royal Opera's *Swan Lake*, awaiting installation  
Photo: © Dansmuseet Stockholm

## The Ballet of all Ballets

An exhibit dedicated to "the ballet of all ballets," *Swan Lake*, opened this fall at Dansmuseet in Stockholm, running to January 6, 2016. Although labelled a ballet classic, its history in the West is young; *Swan Lake* was seen in London in 1934, but was only established in the West in the 1950s and 1960s. The Dansmuseet exhibit, curated by museum director Erik Näslund and photographer Carl Thorborg, traces *Swan Lake* back to its 19th-century premiere at the Mariinsky Theatre and examines its evolution up to the present time when new versions are hatched every year. Groundbreaking readings by John Neumeier, Mats Ek, Matthew Bourne and young Swedes Fredrik Rydman and Alexander Ekman are found among the feathers and tutus on display.



No More  
Human  
Steps

The closure of Édouard Lock's *La La La Human Steps*, the trail-blazing Montreal company he founded in 1980, has saddened the international dance community. Since *Human Sex* premiered in 1985, *La La La* has been at the forefront of dance, typically touring each new creation to world capitals over a two-year period.

Lock has garnered many awards, including the Benois de la Danse for *AndréAuria*, created for Paris Opera Ballet in 2003, and the Order of Canada. He worked with David Bowie on the rock musician's 1989 *Sound and Vision* tour, with longtime company dancer Louise Lecavalier appearing as guest artist.

In a farewell statement, Lock acknowledges the many individuals who have been part of the story, from designers to critics to board members and, of course, the dancers, whose "dancing covered them in a mystery that only beauty at its most fragile deserves. To these dance artists who ... reached both into the work and out toward the seats in equal measure, I offer my heartfelt gratitude."

Brazil's São Paulo Companhia de Dança will perform Lock's *The Seasons* in April as part of Montreal's Danse-Danse series.

# The Dance of Martial Arts



**M**artial arts have an increasingly prominent influence in contemporary dance. The affinity between the two may not be immediately evident, but both feature discipline and grace, and demand full control of body and mind, with high-level practitioners internalizing movements until they seem effortless.

The martial arts began as systemized forms of self-defence, but they have evolved into competitive sports. Capoeira, a stylized fighting form from Brazil, is the most obviously connected to dance — it began as a martial art, practised to music, which was disguised as dance by African slaves. But many other forms feature techniques and qualities also found in dance. Kung fu and tai chi are known for their graceful, flowing movements; boxing demands quick, precise footwork; and some of the momentum techniques used in aikido and judo are found in contact improvisation.

Vancouver choreographer Shay Kuebler says that most martial artists don't realize they share some of the same skills as dancers, such as discipline,

precision, flexibility and agility. Yet, he believes, "martial artists already have a predisposition to be dancers."

It was the kinetic foundation of karate that led Kuebler into dance, which gives him a unique perspective that is evident in his choreography. Kuebler's work features movements that share the choppy, hard qualities of martial arts, with quick directional changes, virtuosic jumps and impressive turns, along with the fluidity of contemporary dance.

France's Compagnie Käfig, led by Mourad Merzouki, who studied circus and martial arts before transitioning to a career in dance, presents work that explores the intersection of hip-hop, martial arts and folk dance. Their recent show, *Käfig Brazil*, featuring 10 Brazilian dancers trained in capoeira, was an exciting spectacle of martial arts-infused hip-hop and break dance with a raw, instinctual quality.

Rootless Root's Fighting Monkey Creative Practice, based in Athens, Greece, is built upon collaboration among dancers, martial artists, athletes, sculptors and anyone who examines human architecture as it relates to motion. Founders Linda Kapetanea and Jozef Frucek are interested in human emotion and cultural expression, and they search for movement that is common across disciplines.

Martial arts and dance also converge in the highly stylized fight sequences found in films such as *Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon* (2000) and the *Kill Bill* series (2003-2004). These fights are dazzling performances of choreographed movement, carrying significant meaning that advances the story, and are arguably a form of dance in their own right.

The parallels between martial arts and dance are explored in seminal books such as Terry Dobson's *It's a Lot Like Dancing: An Aikido Journey* (1994), in which he describes the similarities between aikido philosophy and dance. In *The Dance of Becoming: Living Life as a Martial Art* (1993), psychologist and seventh-degree karate black belt Stuart Heller discusses the common ground of movement in fields such as science, dance, martial arts and healing.

— TESSA PERKINS

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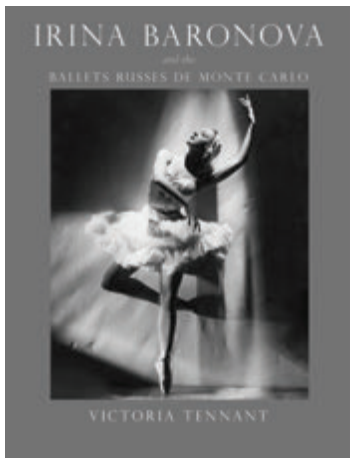
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**Excerpt from *Irina Baronova and the Ballets Russes de Monte Carlo***  
 by Victoria Tennant, [www.press.uchicago.edu](http://www.press.uchicago.edu)

“It was October 1931. Father stayed in Paris to work, which was hard for me because I missed him, and my mother went with me to Monte Carlo. There were quite a few young dancers from the Paris studios so we had lots of mamas, Mama Riabouchinska, Mama Toumanova, Mama Baronova, and four others. Lots of mamas. Who never left our sides.

Everybody in the company was in love with Balanchine. He was young and had a wonderful sense of humor; he was fun with this extraordinary talent, extraordinary charm, very handsome. It was wonderful working with him. When Grigoriev would leave the rehearsal room, Balanchine would rush to the piano and start playing jazz or something, he played the piano beautifully. We were all having a ball. The whole thing was a fairytale.

The Preobrajenska pupils, technically, were the strongest and the quickest to learn. Somehow she didn't nurse us along little by little. Dancing is, or was then, on your toes, so when you start learning this should be part of your training. Little by little, gently, but every day, it should be part of your training. Tatiana Riabouchinska was from Mathilde Kschessinska's studio; Tamara Toumanova and myself were both Preobrajenska pupils, so by the age of 12 we were strong as steel.

In *La Concurrence*, at one point the three of us (Riabouchinska, Toumanova, Baronova) had to do 32 fouettés with Tamara in the middle and Tania and me on either side. We were in front of the set of shop-fronts with dressmakers' dummies at the doors. Tamara was in her beautiful pink dress, Tania in her blonde wig and me in a black wig with red bows. Mama Toumanova was driving Tania and me crazy at the time, always standing in the wings and glaring at us, making us nervous because her glares said, 'I wish you'd break your leg!' So, Tania and I thought we'd teach Mama Toumanova a lesson. We agreed that when we started our fouettés we would do eight in place, then

# Quotable

start moving in and squeezing Tamara, then we'd move back and unsqueeze. So we did it, we did eight fouettés in place and then started moving in. Mama Toumanova went into hysterics. 'My Tamarachtkka! They're going to kill my Tamarachtkka!' Tania and I were delighted, we unsqueezed and then we moved in to squeeze again and disaster struck: Tania hit a dummy with her foot, knocked it over and fell on top of it. While she was rolling around on the floor with the dummy, my wig came off and stayed stuck to my head by one hairpin so each time I turned it slapped me in the face, so I couldn't see where I was, or what I was doing. God punished us, you see. We both thought we were going to get hell from de Basil and Balanchine, and when the curtain came down Tania and I just stood there like two wet chickens. De Basil dashed onto the stage, 'What the hell do you think you're doing?' and we just stood there, we couldn't say a thing. Balanchine appeared; at first, he didn't say a word. Finally he said, 'You really mustn't behave that way.' But his eyes were laughing so we knew we got away with it. ”

*From a transcript of an oral history interview of Irina Baronova made for the New York Public Library. Reprinted with permission from Irina Baronova and the Ballets Russes de Monte Carlo by Victoria Tennant, published by the University of Chicago Press. © 2014 by Victoria Tennant. All rights reserved.*

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**B**ritish dancer Jonathan Ollivier was killed on August 9 when a Mercedes struck the motorcycle he was riding in central London. It was a Sunday morning and the 38-year-old father of two young sons was on his way to Sadler's Wells Theatre. There he was to have performed the male lead in the final and subsequently cancelled performance of a revival of *The Car Man*, Matthew Bourne's 15-year-old, updated spin on Bizet's *Carmen*.

For dance fans, this is old news because the international media immediately shared the story when his family announced Ollivier's death. Ollivier had spent two seasons with Alberta Ballet, from 2007 to 2009, and the CBC quickly picked up on this Canadian angle, interviewing the company's artistic director Jean Grand-Maitre. He spoke eloquently about a man he clearly admired both as an artist and a fun-loving human being. "He was a Marlon Brando in tights," observed Grand-Maitre, also recalling the night Ollivier bailed from a major role debut when he heard that his wife, South African-born dancer Desiré Samaai, had gone into labour with their first child.

Alberta Ballet held its own informal memorial to celebrate Ollivier's brief but impressive time with the company.

Life, as we well know, is fragile and death is inevitable. Yet there is an unsettling poignancy when someone of public note dies suddenly in the full bloom of a vibrant life. We feel the loss more keenly. This helps explain the completely justified but still surprisingly extensive response to Ollivier's deeply saddening death.

There was a similar although slightly less "viral" response in 2002 when former National Ballet of Canada principal William Marrié was killed in Manhattan. He'd left Canada to star in the Broadway production of Twyla Tharp's *Movin' Out*. Marrié, who died when the motorcycle he was riding collided with a cab, was just two days shy of his 34th birthday.

There are some parallels here beyond motorcycles. Ollivier and Marrié, who probably never met, were both charismatic and handsome. They exuded rugged masculinity yet could imbue major dramatic roles with emotional nuance and sensitivity. They could easily have ridden the wave as power dancers but,

instead, became consummate dancer-actors.

Marrié's career had inspirational value because he had been a late starter in ballet who made it to the top. Ollivier overcame formidable odds of a different kind to achieve artistic distinction. He was born in Northampton, in the middle of England. His father left when Ollivier was a toddler, and his mother raised him and his three sisters alone. As he told a British interviewer, Ollivier committed himself to becoming a dancer at age six after watching his sisters in ballet class. He failed to get into the Royal Ballet School and studied at the Rambert school instead.

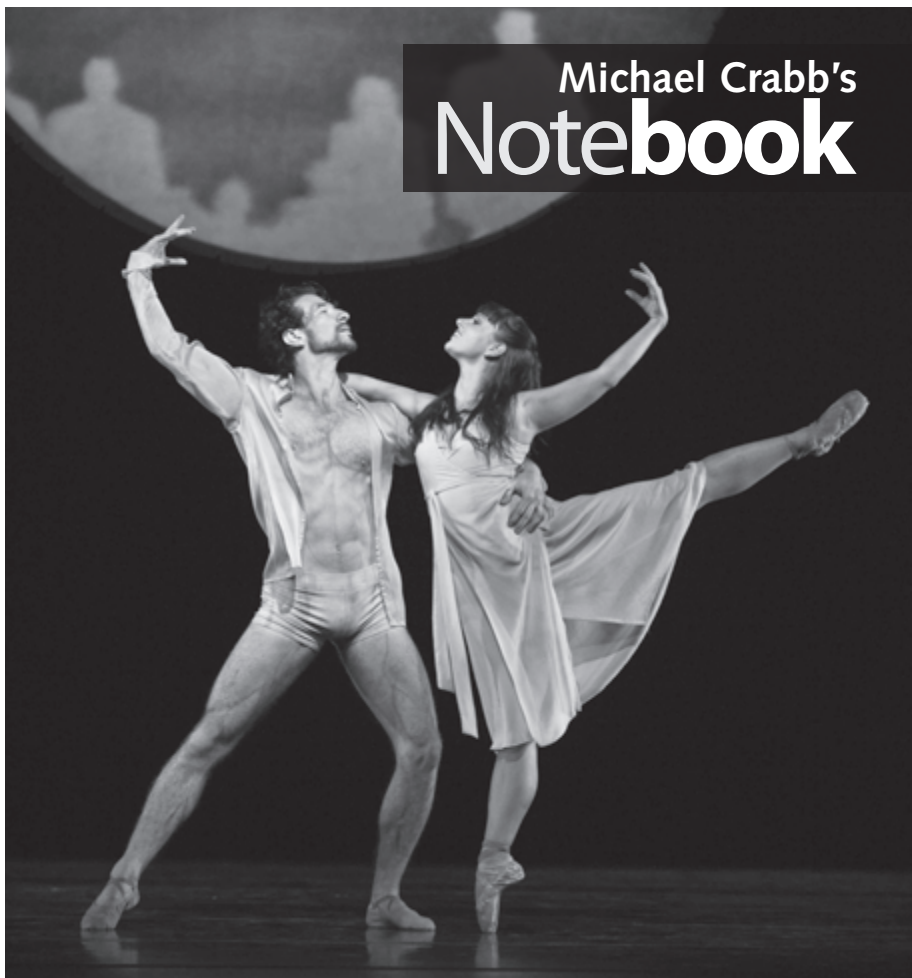
Ollivier began his professional career with Cape Town City Ballet, returning to England to join Northern Ballet where he quickly became one of its most popular leading men. It was from there at age 30 that he took the leap to Calgary, bringing with him an easygoing glamour and level of professionalism and dedication that made him a favourite of audiences and colleagues.

Then came his six-year association with Matthew Bourne. In his tribute, the maverick choreographer described Ollivier as "one of the most charismatic and powerful dancers of his generation." Ollivier was acclaimed for his interpretation of the seductive Speight in Bourne's *Play Without Words*, a work derived from *The Servant*, Joseph Losey's 1963 movie adaptation of a Robin Maugham novella. Some critics ventured to opine that Ollivier was a more compelling Swan in Bourne's male-inflected *Swan Lake* than Adam Cooper, the role's creator 20 years ago.

At the end of the 2000 hit movie *Billy Elliot*, we are given a glimpse of Cooper (who is dancing the mature Billy) as the lead in Bourne's *Swan Lake*. His performance is meant to suggest the passionate young dancer's ultimate artistic triumph — but, of course, there is always another Billy Elliot waiting to break through to the top.

"A lot of guys' stories are like Billy Elliot's," Ollivier once said, downplaying the parallels to his own life. But there was good reason that at Alberta Ballet they regarded him as their very own Billy. ▼

**Jonathan Ollivier and Victoria Lane Green in Alberta Ballet's production of Joni Mitchell's *The Fiddle and the Drum* by Jean Grand-Maitre  
Photo: Donald Lee**



## Michael Crabb's Notebook



# REMIXED | REFRAMED

## ISRAEL'S *TWO ROOM APARTMENT* TODAY

BY GDALIT NEUMAN

When Liat Dror and Nir Ben Gal premiered *Two Room Apartment* in Tel Aviv in 1987, many would agree that the face of Israeli modern dance changed forever. Doing away with then-common Graham-esque epic storytelling, drama and theatrics, the couple was interested in making dance in Israel local, relevant and accessible.

Dror and Ben Gal accomplished this by incorporating a modern androgynous look, pedestrian movement choices, repetitive gesture phrases and an aggressive attack they felt was particularly appropriate to Israeli sensibility. Touching on issues as broad as traditional gender roles, individual versus public space, and personal relationships, *Two Room Apartment* examined these ideas with a certain urgency.

Twenty-five years later, in 2012, Niv Sheinfeld and Oren Laor — who, like Dror and Ben Gal, are partners in life and onstage — decided to adapt the 50-minute work to reflect issues important in their own lives. Their re-worked *Two Room Apartment* is also big, bold and unapologetic.

I sat down with the two men during their recent tour of the piece to Toronto. Sheinfeld spoke about what initially drew them to tackle a reconstruction project. “I’ve been dancing for over 20 years now,” he said, “and there is something to be said about the fact that we

are not working in a void, though many times it seems that contemporary dance artists are only interested in what’s new and novel.”

Inspired by a trend for reconstruction and adaptation happening in Europe, Sheinfeld and Laor searched for an Israeli dance work that could serve as a catalyst for their own artistic vision. “There was always an understanding that we are serving the history of dance; having said that, this was not our primary motivating factor,” says Laor.

Unlike traditional reconstructions, in which authenticity is the objective, Sheinfeld and Laor chose to tackle a renovation of sorts by keeping the framework and gutting the interior of the “apartment.” They called this a re-imagining. The pair understood early on in the process that they could not do the project justice if they did not interject their own ideas into the work. They chose to make it “current and relevant,” in Sheinfeld’s terms, just as the originators of the piece did. He wanted it to be “relevant to us first and foremost; to our relationship, to who we are as performers, stage artists and individuals with a particular worldview.”

Dance scholar Deborah Friedes Galili, in her contribution to *Dance on its own Terms: Histories and Methodologies*, compares traditional reconstruction projects in North America, often spearheaded by

university dance departments or well-established companies, to similar initiatives in Israel, where there is no tradition of reconstruction for preservation purposes. Instead, she says, there is “remixing and reframing” older work in order to arrive at something new.

Friedes Galili mostly describes the phenomenon of established Israeli choreographers who have revisited their own works. Sheinfeld and Laor took this idea one step further by deconstructing another company’s piece and utilizing its unique structure in order to experiment from within. Sheinfeld says that “because *Two Room Apartment* is minimalist, there were more possibilities from which to begin, more angles from which to work. With regard to range of movement, there’s something much more abstract in this piece and more open. It provided us with an opportunity to play.”

Arriving for their performance last spring at the Dancemakers Centre for Creation studio theatre, the audience was confronted with chairs set in the round bordering the edge of the space. Sheinfeld and Laor waited quietly on the side until everyone was seated, then entered the empty stage area and began tracing the borders of the apartment, as well as the barrier between individual rooms, with masking tape. Next, and in line with the original production, they

marched in parallel rectangular pathways, reinforcing the limits of their individual territory. Sheinfeld believes that the simpler an image is onstage, as in the way space is being defined here, the more abstract the concept is overall, and thus the more metaphorical strength it can have.

One metaphor in *Two Room Apartment* is personal versus public space. By describing the personal space many times through both visual aids and movement choices, the dancers create an insular world where personal boundaries can be set and a distinction between self and others is articulated. Then comes the time when boundaries blur and the public sphere pierces the private realm, a moment filled with suspense in both versions of *Two Room Apartment* when one performer, at first hesitantly and then confidently, enters the other's space.

The challenge of balancing their personal lives as partners with their professional portfolios is faced by all four choreographers. Dror and Ben Gal began working together as a young couple and have since formed a dance centre, company and school, all while raising four children. I visited them at their Adama dance oasis in the heart of the Negev desert on a recent trip to Israel, and asked about the inspiration for *Two Room Apartment*. "Our immediate understanding was that we were going to talk about our relationship, and more specifically our relationship in Israel," says Ben Gal. "I wanted to create a dance about a man who goes to the army reserves and his wife who stays at home. I wanted to discuss our life."

In one section, Ben Gal marches onstage as Dror reluctantly hand washes his laundry. The movement choices here were quite literal in order to make clear the artists' intentions. "Both men and women attend army service in Israel, but the actual experience was very different," explains Dror, referring to the fact that

in her generation women were often limited to traditional gender-based roles of assistant and caregiver while serving in the Israeli Defense Forces. Following two years of mandatory service, women then became the support system for their husbands who served in the army reserves for one month per year, on average, until their late 50s.

When Sheinfeld washes Laor's laundry in the 2012 version, gender roles are complicated by the fact that there is a same-sex couple negotiating the division of labour. They were interested in dispelling stereotypical comparisons of same-sex to heterosexual relationships, including the idea that one partner naturally takes on the traditional female role while the other becomes the traditionally male head of the family.

"We feel that we are each equally feminine and masculine," says Laor. Following a dramatic section mid-way through the work in which Laor assumes a typically dominant male position over his partner, he cleverly toys with the fluidity of gender when his hyper-masculine military march transforms into a flamboyant strut more appropriate for the catwalk.

Throughout our conversation, Sheinfeld and Laor often return to the idea of acceptance and tolerance as a driving force behind their work. "Otherness, gay culture and queer culture interests us in that they challenge norms and ways of political and societal thinking about gender. We want to open up a dialogue, even just a little bit. Big changes begin as small adjustments after all."

Dror and Ben Gal's reception of the new *Two Room Apartment* was enthusiastic. "[Sheinfeld and Laor] understood that this piece is about crossing boundaries, and they crossed their own boundaries," says Ben Gal. "It was less Israeli," Dror says. "Their dance could happen anywhere in the world. It was more global and it's nice that the work can accommodate that."

With a clear army theme and a military march as a repeating musical motif, it's no wonder that the original piece was often associated with the Israeli-Palestinian conflict when Dror and Ben Gal



Nir Ben Gal and Liat Dror in their *Two Room Apartment*, 1987  
Photo: Daniel Avidan

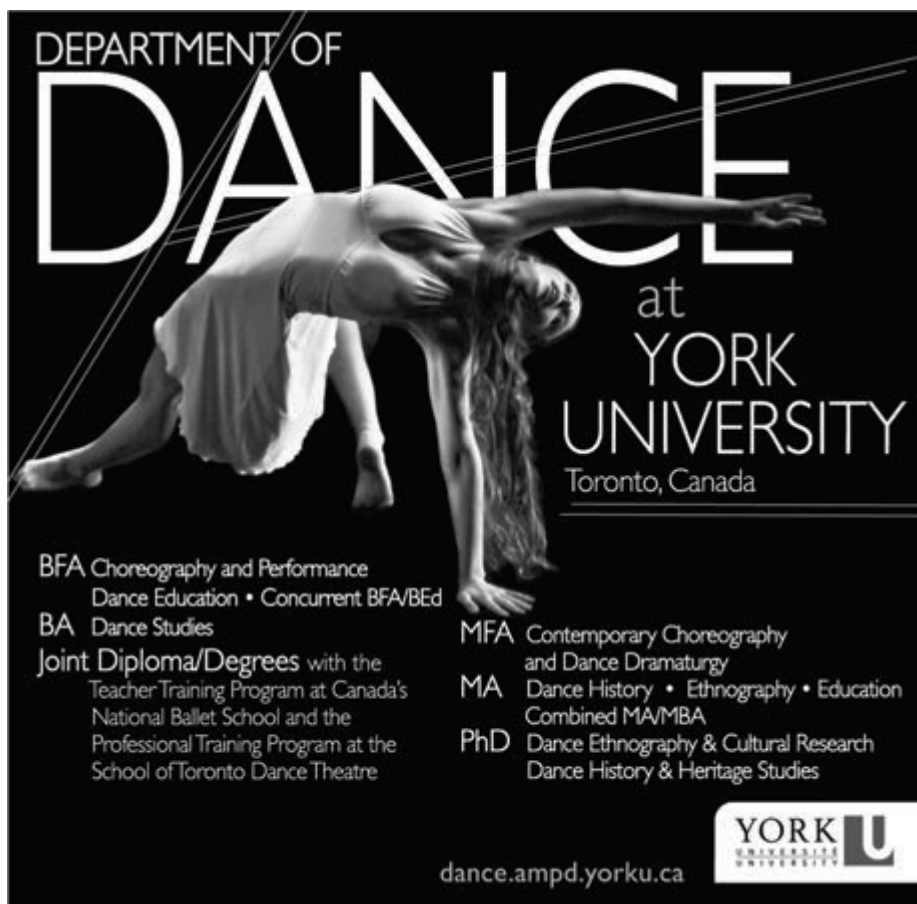
performed abroad. "Audiences couldn't understand that people flirt in Tel Aviv. From their perspective, there were Jews and Palestinians and each movement that we did projected some kind of political statement," explains Ben Gal. "[Laor and Sheinfeld's work], on the other hand, stayed very much about the relationship between two individuals," says Dror. "It was more personal." The universal quality apparent in the new version could perhaps be partly attributed to the fact that it was created outside Israel, during a residency in France.

It seems there are as many differences as similarities between the two versions of *Two Room Apartment*. Sheinfeld and Laor kept some movement phrases as well as the original structure. Much of the music was from the 1987 version as well, including a thematic military march. Other aspects were changed. The new *Two Room Apartment* seems more casual overall, with Sheinfeld and Laor in colourful jogging suits instead of the black costumes worn by Dror and Ben Gal. Additionally, the two men interact verbally and deliberately leave room for play and improvisation, in contrast to the original.

Sheinfeld and Laor's minimalist aesthetic is reflected in their set design. Instead of the simple scaffolding that divided the stage in the original, they set their boundaries at the beginning of the piece with masking tape, and they take time at the end of the work to deconstruct these barriers. The biggest visual alteration, however, is the fact that Sheinfeld and Laor set their *Two Room Apartment* in the round with only one row of chairs per side, allowing for an intimate viewing of the piece.

Following the critical and commercial success of the remixed *Two Room Apartment*, the Suzanne Dellal Centre for Dance and Theatre in Tel Aviv, in co-ordination with the Dance Library of Israel, began funding similar projects. Their goal is to develop a greater awareness of Israel's modern dance history while at the same time challenging contemporary choreographers to form a dialogue with the past, all the while projecting forward. ▼

*Niv Sheinfeld and Oren Laor will continue to perform Two Room Apartment in 2016. Tour details: [www.nivandoren.com](http://www.nivandoren.com).*



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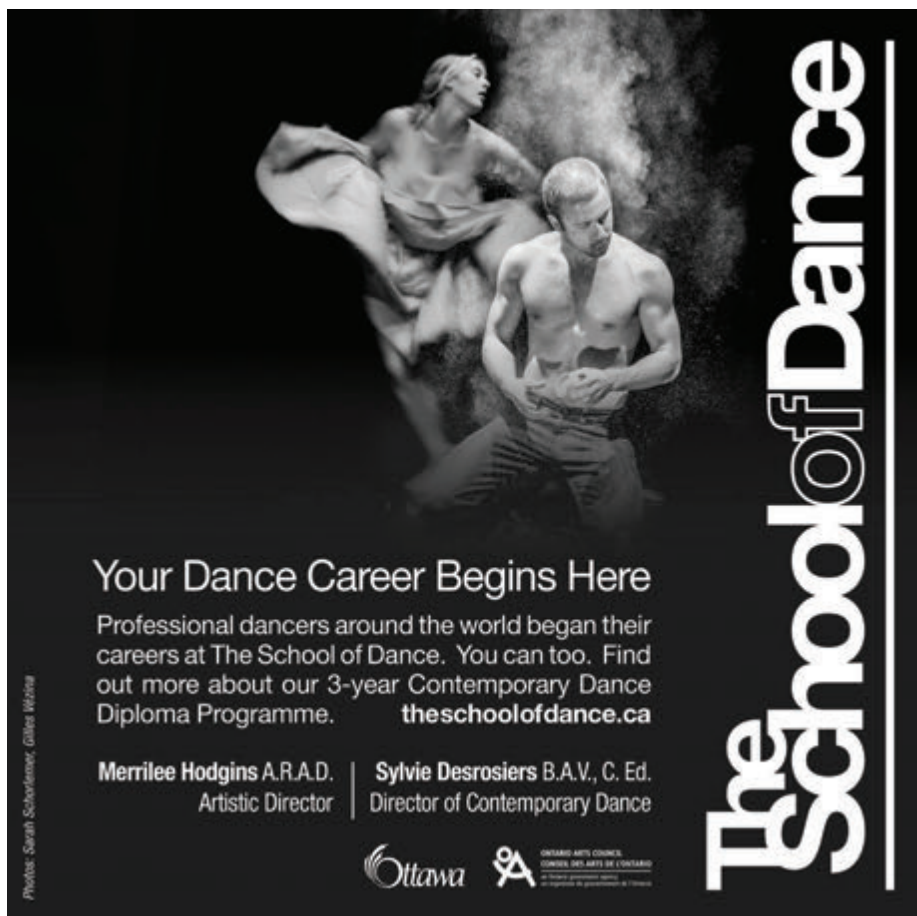
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Photo: Sarah Schorlemmer, Gilles Witzke

# THE BUSINESS OF REGIONAL BALLET



BY GARY SMITH



Robert Conn  
Photo: Nik Schölzel

## A REALITY CHECK AT BALLET AUGSBURG

Watching Robert Conn's splendid little company in Augsburg, Germany, you don't stop to consider the difficulties of regional ballet. I saw Ballet Augsburg last spring in a triple bill called *Dans Impulse* that featured a satisfying range of work: Marco Goecke's *Peekaboo*, with its cutting-edge thrust and dramatic alienation; Georg Reischl's *Verflixte Nähe (Darn Close)*, with its sense of love found, lost and then mourned at various stages of relationships; and *Murmur and Spill*, Stephen Shropshire's pure dance creation that had dancers relating passionately to both the steps and Zbigniew Preisner's dark-hearted music. They not only danced these works with impeccable technique, but they also found necessary inner meaning to create emotional journeys beyond mere steps.

Born in Magnolia, Arkansas, in 1969, Conn, formerly a principal with American Ballet Theatre, the National Ballet of Canada and Stuttgart Ballet, was himself a dramatic dancer who unlocked meaning from steps. An enigmatic Oleg, a forceful Petruchio in *Taming of the Shrew* and a moody Tutor in *A Month in the Country*, Conn knew the value of passion, and inspires his Augsburg dancers to find subtext just as he always did before retiring from the stage in 2003.

Conn's company — he took on the artistic directorship in 2007 — is splendid, but economic realities brought on partly by crises within the European Union are making things tough, even in culture-conscious Germany. It's not easy to manage a small group like Ballet Augsburg, based in a conservative city halfway between the major ballet companies of Stuttgart and Munich.

Economies obviously take place. Conn regularly teaches class and acts as ballet master, too, along with his wife, Yseult Lendvai, a former principal dancer with the National Ballet of Canada and Stuttgart Ballet. And he relies on connections with choreographer friends to obtain rights to works and to commission new ballets, all for attractive fees within his budget. "Not every choreographer wants to allow their work to be danced in the provinces. I'm lucky. Over my career, I have worked with wonderful dancemakers, and took care of their choreography when I danced it. Now they take care of me, giving me the chance to present their works here in Augsburg."

Conn also works to bring the conservative Bavarian audience to edgier dramatic performances at their home seasons at Theatre Augsburg. "I have to be creative," he says, "in every way. Filling 940 seats each performance is a

challenge. Mixed programs are often hard sells and in my first years here we didn't do full-length works because the company wasn't strong enough."

One way he calls on his own creativity is in marketing. Unlike larger companies, where whole marketing departments might exist, Conn says: "In Augsburg, we have to make our own posters, think of campaign slogans and get people into the theatre. I have one assistant who helps with this, but like all small companies we must use imagination instead of money."

Germany may have opera houses everywhere, but, says Conn, "the companies in them are struggling. Every little village wanted its own company, but now they can't afford them. The one in Köln [Cologne], which was of the richest ballet companies, folded. So did companies in Bonn and Frankfurt. There are lots more." It's harder than it was, he says, and fundraising is an important aspect today. "It takes years of networking to court and gain the support of patrons who will help fund your programs. And corporate sponsorship isn't the answer. That's not in the European nature."

According to Conn, Europe is no longer such a giving culture for the arts. "The arts were funded well during the boom of the '70s to the '90s. Then reality hit and the cuts began."

One thing Conn sees happening is companies combining. "Wiesbaden and

Darmstadt did. Gera and Altenburg, too.” He names several more, adding that, in other cases, classical companies are being replaced by more contemporary ones.

“It was partly a swing in public taste and partly because it saves money. Modern ensembles tend to function smaller than classical ones, which means saved positions and salaries. And the dancers for these groups are more flexible in terms of also being able to dance in musicals, operas and operettas at the same theatre.” He cites examples at Linz, Graz, Mainz and even Augsburg, although, he says, “with my hiring Augsburg returned to a more neoclassical vein.”

That meant higher costs again, however. “I had to find 20,000 euros just for pointe shoes last year,” Conn says. “You find there’s a glass ceiling financially and suddenly you hit it.”

Conn admits that when he left North America, he thought many artistic directors there were cowards who didn’t take risks. “I understand survival now. That’s why there’s a measure of dumbing down in many places. Jukebox scores. Erotic costumes. It’s a reaction to the hardships of selling tickets.” Conn has stayed away from this, offering instead programming that allows for a fusion of contemporary work with a classical base, as in new productions like *Romeo and Julia* by Young Soon Hue and *Medea* by Angel Rodriguez.

Besides showcasing exciting choreography, what Conn has on his side is a talent for finding wonderful dancers. He gets about 1,000 applicants a year from as far away as Montreal and as close as Leipzig. With only 12 full-time dancers and four part-timers, they must be able to do everything, both contemporary and traditional; he can’t have a ballerina sitting around waiting to do *Swan Lake*.

“Augsburg is the smallest repertory dance company in Germany. We don’t have a director-choreographer. I’m a managing artistic director who has to build repertoire, raise funds, teach and make things work. That’s the reality check for regional ballet here. I suspect it is the same everywhere.”

Yet Conn knows it’s important to keep growing and to be truthful to the art form. “You must remember the art,” he says. “And not get trampled by financial and artistic difficulties.” ▼

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# More than Winning Moves

The art and sport of competitive ice dance

by Jacquelyn Thayer

Within competitive figure skating, ice dance lies more within the world of sport than art, and is usually presented in short and free dance competitions. Yet for many at the top of their game, the limitations imposed by rules and regulations have created unique opportunities to carve out fresh creative paths. Many skaters, drawn to both the ice's possibilities for flowing movement and the artistic freedoms of theatre, are expanding the discipline by

With nearly three decades' experience creating for elite skaters in singles, pairs and ice dance, choreographer David Wilson appreciates the nuances of partnered skating. "It's really fun having the dynamic of two people to work with as opposed to singles," says the Toronto-based Wilson, whose ice dance clients have included Dubreuil and Lauzon. "There's a closeness in ice dancing — they're not allowed to skate far apart, but they are allowed to do an endless amount of intricacies and complexities. That's fun because it challenges you to look that much deeper inside the music."

For some, choosing that music — and thus much of a program's concept — is the choreographer's first duty. "It's me finding

emphasize collaboration, with couples sometimes selecting their own music. "Generally, everyone brings their own ideas and we do, too; then we try to consider what is better," says Camerlengo.

A common concern is how well a concept's movement may suit, or develop, a team's image, whether showcasing natural romantic chemistry or performance ability. Pillay, with technical assistance from coach Megan Wing, recently created a free dance for 2014 World Junior bronze medalists Madeline Edwards and ZhaoKai Pang — a dramatic tango, a deliberately mature effort for a young team making their official entry to the senior competitive ranks. In doing so, Pillay drew from the broadest of instructions. "All their coaches [Wing and Aaron Lowe] said was they wanted their skaters to skate outwardly," recalls Pillay (that is, with greater projection). "They wanted power and they wanted them to fly."

Camerlengo believes the full-time coach and choreographer is especially well positioned to create for his or her team's strengths, both artistically and technically. "Having your own students, you know them and you know which kind of style they can use, how good they are at certain things," he says. Haguenaier agrees, noting that coaching the same team for whom

**SHORT DANCE:** a three-minute program based on a required rhythm and, usually, a ballroom-based dance pattern. **FREE DANCE:** four minutes in which teams may perform any style of dance while still incorporating required elements like lifts, spins and footwork sequences.

working with a range of choreographers from both the sport and art worlds.

Romain Haguenaier moved last year to Montreal to join an ice dance school led by five-time Canadian champions Marie-France Dubreuil and Patrice Lauzon. For Haguenaier, who worked for more than a decade in his native France as a coach and choreographer, the choreographic process itself is one of spontaneity — finding inspiration with constant exposure to music and performance, but only shaping movement "on the spot, on the ice, with the skaters," he explains. While the initial process may be spontaneous, Haguenaier's immersion in music and dance informs the final content, whether a sophisticated rumba incorporating ballroom elements or a free dance concept inspired by contemporary ballet.

the music, it's me pitching it and a lot of times it's me convincing the skaters, too, that this is what they should use," says Mark Pillay, whose foundation in both figure skating and contemporary dance has shaped his creative philosophy. "The choreographer really needs to want to do the project — they need to be excited about it." After successful work for competitive skaters like Emanuel Sandhu in 2014, Pillay took his first step into ice dance when he created a free dance for a couple from Vancouver, proposing and shaping a romantic, lyrical program that took the duo in a new creative direction.

For the choreographer doing double duty as coach, the creative process may become one of give and take. In Detroit, Pasquale Camerlengo and Angelika Krylova, both leading ice dancers in the 1990s,

he's choreographed allows him to easily monitor a program through both its creative and technical development.

Some skaters, too, may find more advantage in working with a choreographer/coach long-term. Canadian ice dancers Alexandra Paul and Mitchell Islam have trained full time with Camerlengo and Krylova, and created programs on contract with choreographers including Haguenaier, Dubreuil and Lauzon (and recently joined that trio's school full time). With temporary engagements, says Islam, "you may only get a small feeling for what [the choreographers] are all about and how they like to work, and it can be difficult to remember all the things they want from you. When that relationship expands to daily routine and training, it's much easier for the athlete to benefit."





The goal for any ice dance choreographer is to create a work that seamlessly showcases both technique and style. A program's total score is the sum of the technical score, which marks each element based on a combination of difficulty and execution, and the program component score, which considers the full package. It's in this second score that judges rate qualities like skating skill, the dancers' connection, complexity of choreography, and correct use of music and tempo. Music, too, faces certain limitations: the short dance is assigned a mandated rhythm and footwork pattern, which changes by season, while free dance music must contain a discernible beat.

It is perhaps indicative of a competitive program's priorities that free choreographic moments are called "transitions," serving as connective tissue between scored elements. Those scored elements, like footwork and lifts, are not so far removed from the dance world in their essence, though detailed rules of execution limit what may be produced. Both Wilson and Pillay find such movement readily absorbed into ice dance choreography — more so than the jumps and spins of singles and pairs skating, which consume precious seconds in those skaters' programs. "In ice dance, you have time for moments," says Pillay. "I found [the process] a lot more freeing in terms of creating a mood, creating a moment, creating a storyline."

Shae Zukiwsky, who has balanced involvement in Canada's contemporary dance world with choreography for ice dance and other disciplines, says, "Even within those strict guidelines and regulations, there's still the opportunity to be unique and to create engaging programs. Not just for the audience and judges, but more importantly for my skaters who are performing them and training for them every day."

While many coaches enlist dance professionals to train skaters in a style's subtleties, some teams have taken it further, calling on choreographers from outside the skating world to shape a truer interpretation of a given dance on the ice. In recent years, Kaitlyn Weaver and Andrew Poje have worked with several, preparing material on the floor in a studio before translating it to the ice. They find it "refreshing" to work with those who can bring a new eye to their work. "It's great to have a sense of limitlessness when it comes to choreographers on the floor," says Weaver.

American ice dancers Madison Hubbell and Zachary Donohue have also felt that sense of liberation in their work with off-ice choreographers like flamenco dancer Timo Nuñez. "The interesting part of working with Timo came from the fact that he didn't know anything about our sport or the rules. It meant that maybe only 50 percent of what he suggested was possible or legal,

but it also meant he could be innovative," says Hubbell.

A taste for experimentation also led the team to translate a non-traditional style to the ice, tackling hip-hop last season in a free dance set to music selections from the 2013 film *The Great Gatsby*. Despite the challenges inherent in balancing stationary staccato movement with glide and flow, the two believe strongly in the possibilities of performing dance as skaters. "We feel that almost any dance style can be executed on the ice," says Hubbell. "The most difficult thing is that the ice surface is large, with bright lighting."

Yet Zukiwsky sees possibilities within that staging. "Ice dance has so many theatrical elements already incorporated into the very way that we see it within the competitive structure, under the bright lights of the rink and in the very public space."

Indeed, in a discipline where musicality and extension are assessed alongside properly executed technical steps, the ice dance choreographer must constantly balance a passion for creation with an awareness of oft-revised rules and other potential limitations created by movement on ice and blades versus floor and feet. Ultimately, as Haguenaer observes, focus must extend beyond pure art: "Of course, the goal is always to create something innovative, but, in the end, the goal is to win." ▼

# Media watch



Yvonne Rainer (centre) in her piece *Terrain* (1963) Photo: © Al Giese

## FEELINGS ARE FACTS: THE LIFE OF YVONNE RAINER Directed by Jack Walsh 2015, 83 minutes

"I love existing in front of spectators," says Yvonne Rainer in Jack Walsh's documentary on her life and career, *Feelings are Facts*. Rainer is as comfortably low-key being interviewed on film as she was performing her groundbreaking, postmodern dances, such as the 1966 *Trio A* (shown in excerpts from both past and more recent incarnations). True to the famous manifesto Rainer wrote the year before, there is no spectacle and no virtuosity in this weirdly engaging example of pedestrian dance. "It's theorizing in motion," says dancer Emily Coates about Rainer's work, which seems about right.

The documentary is titled after Rainer's 2006 memoir, which — according to Walsh during a Q & A following the Vancouver Queer Film Festival screening in August — says little about her filmmaking. Walsh does include that substantial middle period, with excerpts from, for instance, *MURDER and murder* (1996), inspired by Rainer coming out as a lesbian.

Rainer returned to creating dance with a commission for Mikhail Baryshnikov's White Oak Dance Project; *After Many a Summer Dies the Swan*, which premiered in 2000 and was her first new choreography in 25 years, features the same wry humour as before and one very virtuosic but, here, suitably restrained dancer in the form of Baryshnikov.

With interviews from senior American avant-gardists like Steve Paxton and Simone Forti, as well as from dancers and academics, this is an informative primer on a choreographer who is herself, at age 80, still culturally current: Rainer recently performed in New York at the Museum of Modern Art.

— KAIJA PEPPER

## BALLET 422 Directed by Jody Lee Lipes Produced by Ellen Barr 2015, 72 minutes

The workaday title of the new documentary, *Ballet 422*, refers to it being the 422nd new creation produced by New York City Ballet, "one of the foremost creative ballet companies in the world," as it is grandly introduced in the opening credits.

The 72-minute film was produced by Ellen Barr, a former NYCB soloist and now its director of media projects, and directed by Jody Lee Lipes, who is known for his work as an independent director and cinematographer. With its limited camera movement and characters who seem stripped of all personality, there is little chance this film will inspire young dancers to join the profession, the way the classic British drama, *The Red Shoes*, has done since 1948.

The film's cinematic language is deliberately and infuriatingly static. Dance films should not be shy about adding camera choreography to better tell their story. Intelligent camera work adorns choreography and helps translate a stage picture into a moving image. Think of the low camera angle in Baryshnikov's famous solo to a Vladimir Vysotsky song in Herbert Ross' 1985 *White Nights*. The grandeur of the plush golden theatre towering behind and above him is an iconic visual equivalent of the story of a man fighting the great evil state for individual freedom.

*Ballet 422* tells the story of the creation of a work of art by Justin Peck, a corps member, who at age 25 was commissioned to choreograph a new ballet for the old company. We watch him working on steps alone in the studio, demonstrating them to the dancers, walking home (we see a whole lot of Peck's back here), sitting at his desk, listening to people give him advice. We watch, to the soundtrack of our own breathing (there is no music or dialogue accompanying these lengthy

static shots), costumes being made and dancers being massaged. It gets increasingly tedious, monotonous and hollow because we know nothing about these people, other than their profession, and hence have no emotional involvement. Nor do we get inside Peck's head; he doesn't seem to intimately suffer or enjoy his creation, and barely voices opinions when asked direct questions by other members of the creative team. Overall, he is too positive and polite to be a good or believable subject for a film on the high stakes of choreographic creation.

Judging from the glimpses we get of rehearsals, Peck's choreography is structurally inventive, musical and abstract in the tradition of the company's creator, George Balanchine. But *Ballet 422* refrains from offering a proper viewing of Peck's finished piece, identified as *Paz de La Jolla* in the closing credits.

"Miss Page, I am not a circus conductor and you are not a horse!" says the conductor to an outspoken Moira Shearer in *The Red Shoes*. "It's too fast!" she answers with exasperation over the musical tempo. Almost 50 years of feminist movement later, we have this exchange in *Ballet 422*, when Peck says to a female dancer in rehearsal: "That's great! You know, you make your arms go up and around . . . but . . . you make a mistake look really good."

"Sorry," she says, covering her mouth in a cute imitation of horror.

Tiler Peck (no relation) and Sterling Hyltin — elite dancers of enormous strength — are shown being pleasant and accommodating, agreeing with every suggestion coming their way, and showing no signs of nerves, even before the premiere of the new ballet. While things in the dance world may not be as tempestuous as in the horror-rich *Black Swan*, this calm is unrealistic and boring.

Unfortunately, *Ballet 422* has all the sophistication of show-and-tell in a kindergarten class: it has no story, no characters, no drama and no fun.

— REGINA ZARHINA





**L'ALLEGRO, IL PENSEROSO  
ED IL MODERATO**  
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## KAIJA PEPPER IN CONVERSATION WITH MARK MORRIS

This recording of what many consider a Mark Morris masterwork is bright and fresh, and the 24 dancers present the friendly, sometimes frankly pictorial shapes and bounding energy of the choreography with vigour. *L'Allegro, il Penseroso ed il Moderato*, which premiered in 1988 at Brussel's Théâtre Royal de la Monnaie (where Morris was then director of dance), was filmed in 2014 in performance at Madrid's Teatro Real.

According to Morris during a recent interview, the piece has never been out of his company's repertory, and "right up until we filmed it there were people who had been in the original cast." So, despite the passing of about two decades, "the text" — the choreography — "hasn't changed at all." As for inevitable interpretive changes because of the new people dancing, Morris says: "Of course, that's my favourite thing about it." He insists he doesn't even miss himself onstage in one of his great roles, Dido (in his 1989 *Dido and Aeneas*).

The Handel oratorio, with text adapted from John Milton poems, came first in the creative process (as music always does for this famously musical choreographer), and then the sets by Adrienne Lobel; there are 21 constantly changing scrims and drops. "It's really complicated," Morris laughs. "Sometimes there's only six feet of depth for dancing." He adds: "I rarely use big sets, if I have extra money I'd rather pay my dancers more."

Asked if he would like to change anything about the DVD recording, which was filmed using "seven or eight cameras over three performances, with one pick up day to do crane shots," Morris says matter-of-factly: "Well, it's too late." The DVD director, Vincent Bataillon, has been involved with several dance projects, and this one, Morris affirms, is "wonderful!"



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# INSIDE ED

## States of Gaga

by Vanessa Goodman

**G**aga is a unique movement language and technique created by choreographer Ohad Naharin. He began developing Gaga, a well-structured but also fluid approach to movement that is constantly evolving, in 1990, when he became artistic director of Israel's Batsheva Dance Company.

Baroness Batsheva de Rothschild, who trained in New York with Martha Graham, founded the company in 1964, with works by Graham, who was artistic advisor, featuring in the repertoire. Naharin began his dance training with Batsheva in 1974 and, while a member of the company, was spotted by Graham and danced with her group in New York. This lineage is wonderful to consider while participating in a Gaga class as there are still tiny fragments of pedagogy that relate to some of Graham's attention to form. Also bringing Graham technique to mind is the fact that Gaga is used as a training methodology through daily classes and choreographically.

In 2013, I attended an intensive workshop for professional dance artists in Tel Aviv, where I trained with Naharin alongside his company and 50 other applicants from around the world. Over the seven-day intensive, we trained in Gaga technique and learned segments of Naharin's choreography in a repertoire class taught by Batsheva company members. We also delved into the methodology of Gaga and the specifics of the technique during a class called Gaga methodics to better understand particular concepts and aspects of the movement language.

A key component of the technique that I took away from the methodics class revolved around changing states. With Gaga, I had to access a database of experiences and sensations from my own memories and constantly apply them to my physicality, creating authentic experiences that required a state of mind that is extremely present, alive and shifting. This incredible

negotiation of shifting states and completing movement directives or choreography was compelling to do, and also to witness while observing company members demonstrate and perform.

Another aspect of the technique is a constant state of motion. While you are getting instructions, you never stop your experience or your movement. As a student, you are asked to multi-task and continue paying attention to your own embodiment even while receiving new information. This means you are processing and experiencing external and internal information simultaneously, requiring great mental and physical openness. Also aiding the experience of embodiment is the lack of mirrors. In Naharin's words, Gaga is about "being available"; that is, opening up to possibility and experience within the movement, rather than watching form from the outside.

On a second visit to Tel Aviv, I sought out the Gaga classes offered to the community. It was beautiful to watch individuals, ranging in age from teens to seniors, who haven't necessarily trained in a formal way, embracing Gaga's physical methodology and adding their own unique experiences to the conversation. The training here is as rigorous as the professional classes, but because the technique leaves participants in complete control of their own movement choices, it is widely accessible.

Gaga opens up new possibilities in how to approach creating dance as well as being an interpreter. During class, Naharin used evocative imagery as part of his teaching, encouraging us to "slide our bones through our muscular system" or "shake water off our bodies." By tasking us to connect to the pleasure of movement through all of our senses, a whole new range of options for physicality opened up. Gaga encouraged me to visit a more destabilized place in terms of how the body interacts with space and time.

Working with Gaga pushed me outside of my habitual patterns and enabled me to create new pathways within my movement vocabulary, an invaluable gift for any dancer or choreographer. ▼

*Vanessa Goodman, artistic director of Vancouver's Action at a Distance Dance Projects, facilitates workshops and master classes, and is a certified Method PMI Pilates instructor.*

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Toward the end of a long, hot summer — one with little rain here on the usually wet west coast of Canada and, more typically, little dance — it was refreshing to enter into the elegant world of *Swingin' Time* by tap trio 151 RED. Derick K. Grant, RONxll and Emma Wylie, a young trio up from the United States as part of the Vancouver International Tap Festival, presented a mixed bag of slow and sultry or fast and cheeky tap numbers. Helping to make the evening at the Norman Rothstein Theatre soar was an onstage four-piece band that included fine Canadian jazz vocalist Jennifer Scott.

Wylie and RONxll's buddy-styled side-by-side duet to the romantic Irving Berlin song *Cheek to Cheek* was the one disappointment, especially given the flirtatious wit shown in other numbers. The two chose to use a musical arrangement with no lyrics, but I'm sure I wasn't the only one in the audience who couldn't help but hear Fred Astaire crooning about heaven while dancing with Ginger Rogers, a scene immortalized in *Top Hat*. If you haven't seen this iconic duet from the early Hollywood musicals, go immediately to YouTube to find the *Cheek to Cheek* clip — and swoon!

In September, the Vancouver Fringe Festival presented a few small-scale dance offerings, including a duet set in a city park field house. In *An Empty House (full of air)*, Carolina Bergonzoni and Luciana D'Anunciaco's scramble

of contained motion finds the space inside cupboards and on top of a stove. Esther de Monteflores, in *Climb*, performs both on the stage floor (at the Vancouver East Cultural Centre) and on a rope hanging from the flies; it is on the rope that she is most dynamic and inventive. Whether curled tightly into it, or stretching away, the rope is clearly Monteflores' favoured element, and her mid-air body is deeply engaged, making it easy for us to be engaged with her.

Also in September, another festival — the Vancouver International Flamenco Festival — featured its usual stellar headliner from Spain. Andrés Peña from Jerez de la Frontera and Pilar Ogalla from Cadiz were a firecracker duo in *Cádiz de la Frontera*. The evening was full of bang, with both solos and duets offering a crescendo of finales that the audience eagerly responded to by clapping and, from the many Spaniards in the audience, with shouts of approval.

Peña and Ogalla's clarity of line and attack, as well as the detail of their rapid footwork, was showcased in the one duet in which Ogalla didn't wear a colourful flouncy dress; both are in black pants and white shirts for a stylish choreographed routine full of rhythmic tension and drama. Singer Inma Rivero and guitarist Juan Campallo were fine collaborators, but the full work apparently features a violinist, too, whose absence was perhaps the reason for a few long breaks between sections.

The program described *Cádiz de la Frontera* as being about two contrasting

## Global REPORTS

worlds, that of inland Jerez and Cádiz by the sea, though the cultural distinctions were not obvious to this viewer. No matter, there was much to enjoy all the same. These enthusiastic dancers clearly love their form, and they make the shapes and energy of flamenco their own. Peña's big smile throughout his final solo was matched by the one on my own face.

Another performer from Jerez, singer Manuel Soto Contreras, was onstage at the Waterfront Theatre a few days later in *Tiempos*, with Esmeralda Enrique, Toronto's queen of flamenco dance (her company presented the show), and Caroline Planté, a superb flamenco guitarist from Montreal. In this compact meditation on time, each artist had ample opportunity to offer their own reflections, as well as to support each other in duets or as a trio.

The connection between Enrique, Contreras and Planté was almost palpable, and they seemed to energize and inspire each other. It was such a pleasure to watch the confident older woman, in the form of technically sure-fire Enrique, lead the younger artists in this finely executed, no-frills show; there were no multimedia projections or fancy lighting, no recorded soundscape or complex theme. They all had the chops to just be there onstage, engaging their audience through the art of flamenco.

Contreras is a storyteller who gets to the heart of his Spanish songs with waves and flurries of sorrow, not just using his voice, but his whole body. Planté, a rare female flamenco guitarist, strummed nuanced meditations that glowed with inner warmth. And Enrique glittered in her frills and polka dots, in the central role of dancer.

For the icing on the cake, Vancouver's queen of flamenco, Rosario Ancer, joined the trio for a no-holds-barred, impromptu finale. Ancer has been producing the festival for 25 years with her husband, Victor Kolstee, and has an enthusiastic following. Flamenco seems to offer something joyous, however deep it goes into the angst of life, and the encore sent us home deliriously happy. ▼

Generally, the barbeque season offers slim pickings for dance lovers, but the summer of 2015 delivered a cornucopia of juicy events, in large part thanks to the 35-day Panamania cultural festival associated with the Toronto-hosted Pan Am and Parapan Am Games. Panamania fielded an impressive roster of dance, big names and small, both free outdoor-stage and ticketed indoor events, covering the gamut from breakdance to ballet.

In the former category, the aptly titled *Limitless* featured an international crew of “differently-abled” breakdancers, one of several performances that made more than a passing nod to the spirit of the Parapan Am Games. In a similarly oriented event devised by Peggy Baker titled *FluxDelux*, dancers, non-dancers and wheelchair users followed a simple set of guidelines delivered via a tailor-made App in order to participate in what organizers described as “a spontaneous, ever-evolving, and gloriously eventful group choreography.”

In the ballet department, Greta Hodgkinson appeared before large crowds in front of City Hall at Nathan Phillips Square where, supported by four of her male National Ballet of Canada colleagues, she danced a work specially made for her by Guillaume Côté, Ravel’s *Bolero*-driven *Venom*.

Among other outdoor attractions, the company of veteran New York choreographer and pioneer of physically extreme dance Elizabeth Streb made a popular appearance at the largest Panamania stage, situated in the Canadian National Exhibition grounds. Given Panamania’s interest in building connections between artistic performance and sport, other offerings such as Montreal-based touring show *Leo* and *Tkaronto Bounce* (from Toronto’s Kaha:wi Dance Theatre) leaned conspicuously toward hyper-physical virtuosity, acrobatics, circus arts and even, in the case *Timber!* (from Cirque Alfonse in Quebec), axe-throwing.

Nowadays, as theatrical disciplines cross lines and blend, there were works that are best categorized as physical theatre, or in which, as in the case of Robert LePage’s autobiographical *887*, physical expression is as crucial as verbal. The same, in heightened form, was true of *Betroffenheit*, which had its official “world premiere” as part of Panamania despite having been presented, complete and fully staged, as a “work in progress” a week earlier at the Banff Centre.

Jonathon Young and Crystal Pite’s first co-creation, discussed by Kaija Pepper in the fall issue of this magazine, was an enormous hit in Toronto, receiving a truly heartfelt ovation. In forging such an innovative hybrid of word and movement, theatre and dance, *Betroffenheit* galvanized audiences coming at it from whatever discipline. When, with its searing account of post-traumatic stress disorder and addiction, *Betroffenheit* begins to tour in February, it will likely be very hard to get a ticket.

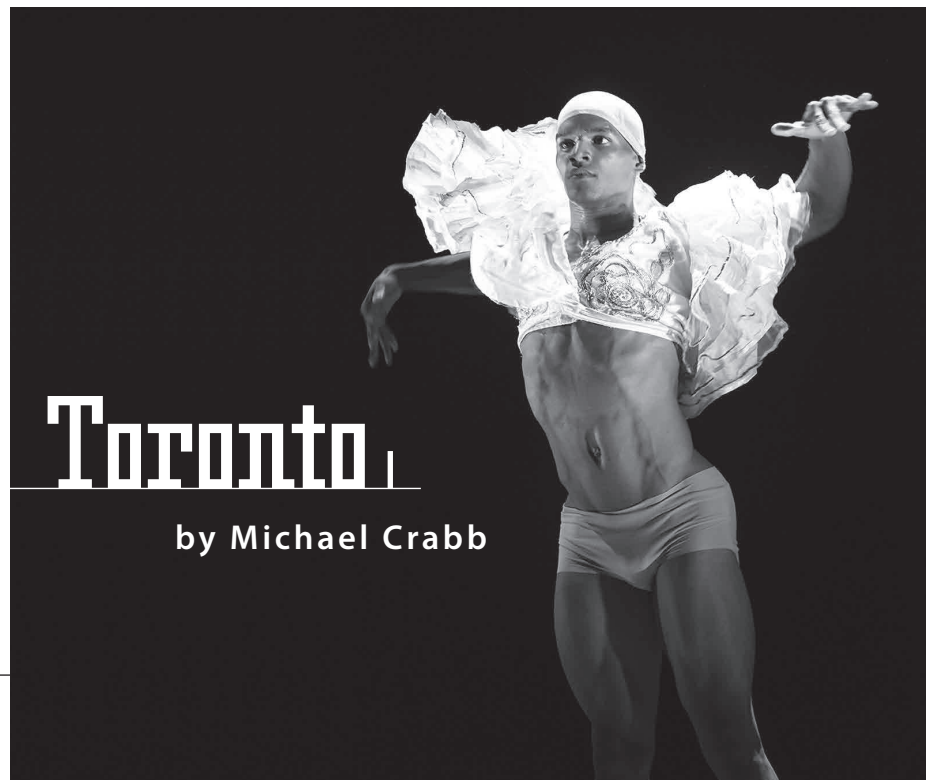
Panamania also provided the opportunity for Toronto audiences to become acquainted with the engaging and talented Cuban company DanzAbierta, founded by Marianela Boán in 1988. The company is now led by Boán’s former assistant, Guido Gali, and Spanish-born choreographer Susana Pous, whose funny yet thoughtfully ironic *Showroom* was presented at the Fleck Dance Theatre.

In *Showroom*, Pous’ talented six-member cast negotiate two worlds, physical and metaphorical. In one world they are cabaret performers in a glittering Tropicana Club-type setting, a clichéd but satirically inflected representation of Cuban exoticism, all sashaying hips and toothy grins. You can imagine them playing to the tourists as, feathered and bespangled, they break through the curtain of a small proscenium stage. When this set-piece pivots, we become privy to a usually unseen world where the dancers inhabit a very different reality defined by performance anxiety and issues of self-identity and emotional confusion.

The most visceral thrill of Panamania’s dance program was delivered by Brazilian choreographer Deborah Colker, whose 16-member company presented her much-toured, much-lauded *MIX*. As the title suggests, *MIX* draws from some of Colker’s earliest works, combining them into a giddy examination of the human body as machine and visible expression of inner spirit.

As the work progresses through six different scenes, Colker references machismo, gender relations, the objectification of the body and sports. In doing so she pushes the dancers to seemingly impossible physical extremes. Couplings are always complex, cantilevered, clampering, inverted or unbalanced. Movements are whipped off at dazzling speed. Bodies thud dangerously to the ground.

*MIX* culminates in what can perhaps be best described as virtuoso artistic rock-climbing. A large square, studded with 60 hand-holds, serves as the playground for a spectacular, gravity defying display as the dancers work their way, often swiftly, hand-hold to hand-hold, up, down and across this stylized rock-face — sometimes upside down, other times frozen and suspended. It’s accomplished with a casual, playful approach that makes it all the more impressive and tempts one to join in, but you know the result would be catastrophic; better to simply relish the thrill vicariously by joining Colker’s incredible dancers in spirit if not in body. ▼



Right: DanzAbierta company dancer in Susana Pous’ *Showroom*  
Photo: Guido Gali





Two contemporary dance shows this season prove the apple doesn't fall far from the tree. Longtime choreographer Gaile Petursson-Hiley's *Eclipse*, presented September 18 and 19 at the Gas Station Arts Centre, featured a stellar six-member company that included her daughter Kathleen Hiley. Petursson-Hiley's *Mouvement/Winnipeg Dance Projects*, co-founded in 2006 with Stephanie Ballard, produced the full-length show, her first since her Victorian-soaked *Brontë* in 2009.

Where the show excelled was its gasp-inducing imagery, brilliantly lit by Robert Mravnik. Petursson-Hiley's surrealistic fantasy world, inspired by Brazilian artist Susan Seddon Boulet's *The Goddess Paintings*, gradually reveals its mythological gods, goddesses and otherworldly creatures through an organic series of solos, duets, trios, quartets and ensemble sections.

One of the show's most potent moments is its opening. A radiant Arlo Reva, suggesting an all-knowing Mother Earth figure, appears in a stage-covering white gown evoking the moon's orb, under which hidden dancers gradually emerge by poking and punching

their way through the skirt's voluminous folds. Another magical moment is seeing the ensemble playfully batting a large luminous ball that floats like a suspended blue moon through the air.

Petursson-Hiley also pushes the boundaries of "beauty" — or what is perceived as aesthetically pleasing — with bizarre, harder-edged solos. In twisting, sky-high stilettos, Reva lurches about the staircases and ladders of the set design by Derek Hiley (the choreographer's nephew). Kathleen Hiley appears as a gentle furry animal, later morphing into a bristling, feral creature, repeatedly slamming her body into the floor. Robyn Thomson Kacki morphs into a wide-eyed innocent bird, gradually overcome by the dancers' whistling calls into the night. Dancers also howl at the moon, and grunt and groan, providing visceral texture.

Some ensembles do not fare as well, with plentiful unison and canonic movement at times making these sections lose their north star. Also, the 72-minute production, shrouded in stage smoke, could be whittled to create a more tightly focused and compact show.

Still, its climax, where the stage suddenly fills with Petursson-Hiley's noble tribe of gods and goddesses garbed in her own costume design (with Hannah Beynon), including feathers, fur, horns and painted antlers veiled in white tulle, sent shivers down the spine. The jaw-dropping image infused the entire show with a sense of compassion for all beings — mythological or otherwise — including our own mortal, imperfect species.

The production whetted the appetite for Kathleen Hiley's upcoming inaugural solo show, produced by her newly minted company Kathleen Hiley Solo Projects, which will be held February 12-13 at the same venue. The full-length production, described by Hiley as her "dream project," will showcase premieres by Montreal soloist Margie Gillis and Winnipeg's Peter Quanz and Petursson-Hiley, as well as a signature work choreographed by Ballard.

"It felt like the next step for me," says Hiley. A five-year company member of popular Winnipeg troupe Drive Dance, she has performed as a solo artist at New York's White Waves Dance Festivals (Dumbo Dance and Cool New York in 2013 and 2014, respectively), as well as at Winnipeg's *núna* (now) presentation

for the Iceland Canada Art Convergence festival last April. The 30-year-old has quickly been gaining a reputation for her expressive artistry and dramatic sensibility, praised for her “mesmerizing intensity” and “dark heroine quality that would be at home in a Tim Burton movie” by CBC’s Anna Lazowski in 2012.

The dance artist also holds a degree in psychology, and earned a Gold Medal award in Theatre and Film after graduating from the School of Contemporary Dancers Professional Program that is affiliated with the University of Winnipeg.

Hiley travelled to Montreal twice last winter to work directly with Gillis, after sending a bold email expressing her desire to collaborate with the modern dance icon. The nine-minute character-based solo set to American singer/songwriter Lucy Wainwright Roche’s *A Quiet Line* and *Call Your Girlfriend* depicts the complexity of a love triangle. In it, Hiley will wear a costume made with leftover fabric from a dress Gillis wore when she danced in *Duet*, an intimate work choreographed by Paul Taylor for

the dance artist and her beloved brother Christopher Gillis in 1982. “I was definitely inspired working with Margie, and by all the different kinds of energies she uses during her creative process,” Hiley says.

She will also perform Quanz’s solo set to Tan Dun’s *Symphonic Poem of Three Notes*, described by the choreographer as an “epic emotional unraveling in 12 minutes,” marked by percussive, repetitive movement juxtaposed with “wild, improvised sections.” Renowned for his classically driven ballets, Quanz reflects on his experience working with a modern dancer: “A dance artist becomes great when they can pour their entire imagination into fleshing out the choreographer’s suggestions. Kathleen enters the studio with the respect of being in a sacred space, before launching into her very personal movement journey.”

Also included will be Ballard’s signature work *Lithium for Medea* choreographed for Gillis in 1984, fueled by its powerfully visceral movement and driving score by Japanese avant-garde musical artists Kitaro and Phew.

“It’s a strong, darker piece, and one of my favourites,” Hiley says. Asked if she’s intimidated performing a solo so closely associated with Gillis, Hiley responds: “I like to approach everything from a character base. Although I studied videos of Margie doing this piece, I’m making it my own by being in character, instead of trying to emulate her. And Stephanie pushed me in such a way that she made me feel it was my own.”

The program will also include a premiere by Petursson-Hiley for her gifted daughter, who has previously danced in her mother’s gossamer light full-length show *Faeries* in 2005, as well as *Brontë*, among other works.

“I’ve always loved dancing, and being able to connect with an audience to express things that I feel are important to me and to humanity,” says Hiley. She’s also keenly aware of following in her mother’s footsteps; Gaile Petursson-Hiley also began as a dancer, working with Winnipeg’s Contemporary Dancers, Stephanie Ballard and Dancers and Pacific Ballet Theatre in Vancouver.

“This entire process has felt very natural to me,” Hiley says. “Dance is in my bones.” ▼



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Photo by David Hsu of CCDT dancers, Nicholas Pirovica and Frances Sorensen in 'The Reader' in the Room by Colin Crozier



**G**radimir Pankov sounds like a happy man. After 16 years as artistic director of Les Grands Ballets Canadiens de Montréal he has achieved all his ambitions for the company, he says proudly. So, though with some qualms, he's set to leap into the unknown at the end of the 2015-2016 season. After 60 years in the highly structured life of the theatre, Pankov's qualms are understandable. He has been dancer, teacher and artistic director of several companies, always living for others, never just for himself. Now, at 77, as he looks forward to freedom to do whatever he wishes, he is stalked by a gnawing fear. "I've never retired before," his soft voice worries. "I don't know what to expect."

Last summer, he got a taste of what his next chapter might be like by taking a stay-at-home holiday at his Montreal condo. He slept in until noon (after getting up early to feed the cats) and enjoyed his daily swim without time constraints. It was a big contrast to the myriad of duties that come with directing a high-profile dance company, which frequently mean not only dealing with the immediate but also with the future — like organizing international tours and grant applications years in advance. As he contemplates retirement, Pankov muses, "I don't know how I will organize my day." He pauses. "I don't want stagnation. I want to be sometimes lazy and not to be thinking all the time about planning ..."

Pankov was teaching at American Ballet Theatre in New York and consider-

ing retirement in 1999 when he got the call from Les Grands Ballets Canadiens. The company was at a low ebb in its history: home audiences were sparse and the deficit growing. Pankov's plan for rejuvenation included making the company as a whole — instead of individual dancers — the star of the shows and injecting a more exciting contemporary repertoire to entice younger audiences. Perhaps most unusually, he wanted dancers' talents — instead of their positions in the ballet hierarchy — to determine casting. This meant that principal roles were suddenly open to soloists and corps members as well as principals.

The quiet-spoken Pankov is a tough-minded visionary who can also be flamboyantly theatrical and whimsical. Simultaneously he is a searcher, planner, builder and listener apt to grill everyone he meets for opinions about Les Grands. He hit the floor running when he arrived. After his first season featuring a new *Carmen* by Didy Veldman, audiences and critics took note. "It was a big change and took guts to do it," he sighs with satisfaction. "I am not a man of doubt."

By 2007, Les Grands' 50th anniversary, Pankov's achievements were recognized as a "revolution" by the *New York Times*. More praise and a continuously expanding touring schedule followed as the company became one of Canada's top cultural ambassadors, in demand from Beijing to Cairo, New York to Paris, where its first appearance in decades was a daring three-week season. Return invitations are now frequent, even to Paris, ballet's birthplace.

In 2014, Pankov brought the group to his native Macedonia in the former Yugoslavia, where he was showered with honours. He returned with the VIP Award for Lifetime Achievement from the Belgrade Dance Festival, to which he added the RBC Top 25 Canadian Immigrant Award presented the same year. He also holds the 2012 Menada Award from the Skopje Dance Festival and the Best Promoter of Macedonia and Lifetime Achievement Award from the Macedonia Loves You media consortium. These honours still bring tears to his eyes. He's deeply touched by recognition from his former as well as present country. After decades of world travel, Pankov and his wife and assistant, former ballerina Margaret Hoffman, became Canadian citizens in 2007.

Pankov's determination and ingenuity paid off with home audiences, too. Packed houses are now the norm and not the exception, even though Les Grands abstains from performing the classics, with the exception of the annual coffer-filling *Nutcracker*. Instead, it imports sumptuous productions by companies like the Paris Opera Ballet, the Houston Ballet and National Ballet of China.

There are two dictionaries on Pankov's desk, one German-English and the other German-French. Born and trained in Skopje, he spent most of his dancing career with five German companies, adding that language to the Macedonian and Russian of his youth. English and French came later with less security. He jokes that he is a man who speaks five languages, "none of them very well," and



Les Grands Ballets Canadiens de Montréal artistic director Gradimir Pankov gives company class on tour in Wiesbaden, Germany  
Photo: Jean-Laurent Ratel

“sometimes when I teach, nobody understands.” In reality, his linguistic acuity has been a plus in Western dance companies where artists know no borders. Besides Les Grands, he has directed Switzerland’s Ballet du Grand Théâtre de Genève, Sweden’s Cullberg Ballet, the Finnish National Ballet and Nederlands Danse Theater II. His experience as a teacher has been even broader.

He credits his dancers — “They are my people” — for inspiration choosing choreographers. Tailored to challenge dancers as much as to enhance Les Grands’ reputation, his programs reflect mature talents like Jirí Kylián, Mats Ek and Ohad Naharin, and younger dancemakers like Stijn Celis, Veldman, Shen Wei and Peter Quanz. “I put myself on the same level as dancers; in the end it comes out exactly how I wanted.”

Jeremy Raia agrees. Now in his 18th season with Les Grands, the

American-born dancer was already a member of the company when Pankov arrived. Raia says Pankov has been “a great mentor and coach” and “helped me find a voice I didn’t know about.” Raia, like other soloists, has danced several leading roles. “I think he has had a vision for each of his dancers.”

Pankov has been “pretty much everything to me — teacher, rehearsal director and coach,” soloist Vanesa G.R. Montoya says. Ten years ago he hired her away from her native Madrid and gave her major roles. “He recognizes potential and gives you a chance. That’s my biggest joy.”

Pankov won’t sit on his laurels until retirement next summer. As usual, he’s trying to guarantee the 36-member company’s future by mapping out international tours for the next several years, and looks forward to working with his successor to make the transition easy. But still he worries: is retirement the right decision? Will he find new challenges? “How will be the life without the excitement?” he asks. “I don’t want to be bored.” ▼

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Summer was high season for what is now called contemporary ballet. This new generation does not scorn classical training for its supposed artificiality, but incorporates ballet language into a hybrid vocabulary, which draws the best elements from different approaches to movement.

Amy Seiwert is one of those inclusive classicists, perhaps the most prolific and distinctive in this city. Almost every month seems to bring a new Seiwert ballet somewhere; she works out of town a lot, remains the resident choreographer of Smuin Ballet and her Imagery company was at New York's Joyce Theater in August. Yet, Seiwert's heart seems to lie with her annual summer Sketch series, a testing ground for herself. July's installment, *Stirred*, highlighted Seiwert's first collaboration with another choreographer, KT Nelson, associate director of ODC Dance.

The idea behind their joint venture, *Starting Over at the End*, was to challenge the trained ballet dancers with modern moves. Why ballet types need to get down with the modernists remained unanswered in this agreeable but inconclusive essay, which took a while to gather steam. In it, Imagery's nine dancers lower their centres of gravity, they turn in, they roll around the floor with ease and they strive to approximate the sublime mood of the accompanying Schubert songs. Finally, the dancers throw themselves into bouncy diagonals and over-the-head lifts. Schubert's *Du bist die Ruh* generates a feeling of isolation in a searching solo for sinewy James Gilmer, bathed in Jim French's evocative lighting.

Seiwert can do much better, especially in her attempts at redefining space. You can observe that gift in *Traveling Alone*, created for Colorado Ballet in 2012. The dancers brought superb technical control and thrust to this work, in which Seiwert divides and subdivides the performance area like a landscape architect designing the gardens at a French chateau. When Diana Benton winds her way through unison couples, this exhilarating ballet takes off; the couples are mixed and matched in inventive partnering schemes. In the middle comes a terrific trio for Gilmer, Sarah Griffin and Liang Fu, the emotional centre of the work. This piece is

# San Francisco

by Allan Ulrich

not perfect. The costumes are truly ugly, while Max Richter's score broods without a pay-off.

For a pop ballet, you couldn't do much better than *Back To*, made for Cincinnati Ballet to the enchanting recordings of bluegrass artists Gillian Welch and David Rawlings. With a prop bench, the Imagery company matches delight for delight. The dancers enter in a wedge and soon they are exulting in passing partnerships, speedy lifts and witty displacements. Liang Fu and Annali Rose look both carefree and sensual in their central duet. Mostly, there's the feigned attitude of cool indifference shared by the dancers, which makes you love them even more. Remarkably, although it is only a part-time assemblage of dancers, Imagery revels in an enviable company look.

ODC is also in the producing business and this summer brought the fourth annual Walking Distance Dance Festival. The gimmick here is that the audience, travelling between performances, splits its time between the main theatre and a smaller studio down the block in the ODC Commons. But the curating too often favours works in progress and fragments of completed pieces, which makes them impossible to review honestly. However, occasionally, the festival gives us a local debut that justifies the enterprise; a few years ago, for instance, ODC introduced us to Los Angeles' fast rising Body Traffic.

The 2015 edition brought the local debut of Brooklyn-based Gallim Dance, perhaps the highlight of the summer dance schedule. Andrea Miller founded the company in 2007, after spending an extended period in Israel, where she steeped herself in Gaga, Ohad Naharin's philosophy of movement. For this



performance of *Pupil Suite* (2010), we were cautioned to make little of that, yet the bodies of Miller's barefoot dancers, with their rubbery lunges, sudden pliés and confrontational stares, recall the Israeli choreographer's style as you navigate your way through the 30-minute dance.

Reduced from a larger work, *Pupil Suite* can seem disjointed, but it offers great pleasure moment to moment. A battle royal between two samurai is both droll and technically stunning. There's a sobering episode about the lack of charity in the world, as a lone supine dancer faces the hostility of her colleagues, while, later, Georgia Osborne, in pink tulle, is swung into the air by her colleagues. Linear continuity is at a minimum here, but the group's energy never flags. Gallim Dance is the kind of small company that can all too easily fall through the cracks in national touring circles. It was a thrill to make their acquaintance thanks to Walking Distance Dance. ▼

by Robert Greskovic



New York City's ballet summer began with a rare visit from Britain's Royal Ballet, a troupe once quite familiar here, especially in the 1970s and 1980s. The recent six-day run presented by the Joyce Theatre marked the company's first visit in 11 years. The mixed repertory — with none of the multi-act narrative ballets that often made up its touring repertory here previously — was presented at Lincoln Center's David H. Koch Theater.

Kevin O'Hare, appointed the Royal Ballet's director in 2012, spelled out the season's offerings in a program statement, hailing the almost exclusively British pedigree of the repertory. He used words like "classic" (for *The Dream*, Frederick Ashton's admired one-act retelling from 1964, to Mendelssohn, of *A Midsummer Night's Dream*) and "masterpiece" (for *The Song of the Earth*, Kenneth MacMillan's hour-long, 1965 work to Mahler's *Das Lied von der Erde*).

Ashton's succinct encapsulation of Shakespeare's five-act play delineates its characters, mortal and otherwise, with artful concision and theatricality. The company's female fairy ensemble performed luminously; with arguably more recognizable Ashtonian accent in their upper bodies than in their pointe work, which sometimes lacked sharpness. The full force and finesse of the ballet's central leading characters, forest queen Titania and king Oberon — two of the master dance-maker's most effective creations — were more indicated than fulfilled in this run. Only the irrepressibly free, forceful and articulate Natalia Osipova made her part, Titania, a fully theatrical creation, suggesting the depths Ashton worked into choreography originally created for Antoinette Sibley.

In the physically and musically demanding role of Oberon, neither a somewhat brash Steven McRae nor a more suitably lyrical but at times physically tentative Matthew Golding, brought the regal dimension that Ashton's fairy king asks for this danseur noble role, originally danced by the formidable Anthony Dowell. That said, both men made good showings of the dancing and acting required for this classic characterization.

O'Hare's "masterpiece" claim for *The Song of the Earth* is one with which I cannot concur. Taking the score's six-song structure as a scheme for dancing, inspired by the music's text, with references to eighth-century Chinese poems (nowhere given in the program) and plain grey-toned costumes by Nicholas Georgiadis, MacMillan gives us a ballet more ponderous than beguiling. As the sole identified character, the Messenger of Death, powerful Carlos Acosta made about as much as anyone might out of the role's choreographic accents. Of the central woman featured in two of the songs, distinctive Lauren Cuthbertson made the most of her kinetic challenges.

Far more happily for MacMillan's reputation and for Cuthbertson, ably supported by Golding, came the most imaginative of O'Hare's choices of divertissements that made up the central part of the triple bill. The *If I loved you pas de deux* from *Carousel* showed off MacMillan and his dancers wonderfully. Taking Richard Rodgers melodious and often soaring music as impetus, MacMillan's duet coursed and flew with dance drama, especially as delivered by these engaging dancers. It presented

two spiritual souls and two flesh-and-blood lovers hell bent on meeting and coupling before ultimately parting.

The only non-British choreographic offering was *Le beau gosse*, a jaunty solo to Darius Milhaud by Bronislava Nijinska from her jazz-age, seaside ballet, *Le Train Bleu*. Making much of the playfully acrobatic choreography originally made for legendary English dancer Anton Dolin, was a sweet-smiling and deft-moving Vadim Muntagirov. Related boys-will-be-boys dimensions seemed intended by the inclusion on the bill of Calvin Richardson's *The Dying Swan* (to Saint-Saëns' familiar Swan section from *Le Carnaval des Animaux*) and Alastair Marriott's *Borrowed Light* (to some over-familiar Philip Glass). These two undistinguished solos gave audiences, in the Richardson, a wash of undulating-limb clichés, and, in the Marriott, an uneventful thread of grinning acrobatics.

Two contrasting one-act ballets framed the triple bill. Wayne McGregor's *Infra*, meaning "below" and set to Max Richter's often delicately metallic soundscape with Julian Opie's striking LED parade of pedestrian figures overhead, presents a hardworking cast of six couples in variously slippery and limb-flashing moves, all to physically impressive but dramatically monotonous effect. The casts included any number of expert men and women, Cuthbertson, Osipova and Eric Underwood among them, but none looked especially individual beyond their own distinct physicality.

*Age of Anxiety*, set to Leonard Bernstein's 1949 *Symphony No. 2* and invoking the title of W. H. Auden's 1947 book-length poem that gives the ballet its name, is the 2014 work of Liam Scarlett. The setting is Auden's New York (designs by John Macfarlane), and the ballet's seven-character cast, depicted on the make in a bar and a private apartment, spring from the poet's images. Scarlett's enactments of interpersonal behaviour and poetic interludes put one in mind of the intriguing dance-theatre established by Matthew Bourne in England. Little, however, in Scarlett's only sometimes fascinating and oftentimes cliché-ridden theatrics rises to the heights evident in Bourne's impressive work.

On the one hand, O'Hare's Royal Ballet returned to a once familiar city with freshness on its mind. On the other, those dimensions remained mostly on paper. Ultimately, the season proved more mundane than memorable. ▼

In the holiday season of July and August, many Londoners fly off in search of shores that are brighter, livelier and frankly sexier than those of Great Britain. But for those of us who stayed put, there were several programs that flew in some bright, lively and often sexy dancing from far-off places: Mexico, Brazil and Cuba.

Ballet Folklórico de México brought a cornucopia of costumes in eye-watering hues of lime, tangerine and fuchsia that made London feel very drab. Part cultural ambassador, part tourist postcard, part stage attraction, Ballet Folklórico draws on traditional Mexican dances in striking and theatrically savvy set-pieces, its dancers combining strict discipline with sunny dispositions.

For sheer energy, you couldn't beat *Baila Brazil* by Balé de Rua, a freewheeling mix of samba with hip-hop, capoeira with MTV, favela funk with acrobatics. What it lacks in polish and focus it makes up for with easy conviviality and infectious rhythms that had the audience partying at the end.

Cuban ballet star Carlos Acosta, long resident in London, revived his show *Cubania*, modern dance pieces featuring dancers or choreographers from Cuba, topped off with his own *Tocororo Suite*, a tale of a ballet boy (Acosta) who discovers his salsa-sass and so wins the love of feisty chica Verónica Corveas and the respect of cock-of-the-walk Alexander Varona. Again, lots of party spirit, not too much depth.

Oddly, the hottest Latin ticket in town was a home-grown work. Untethered by any real-life location or cultural obligation, Matthew Bourne's *The Car Man* (2000) is set in a fictional Italian-American township into which he pours the operatic passions of Bizet's Hispanic fantasy *Carmen* and the lurid melodrama of Hollywood film noir — especially *The Postman Always Rings Twice* (1946), as well Visconti's 1943 Italian version, *Ossessione* — and stews them in a pot-boiler atmosphere worthy of Tennessee Williams. It's all very un-British.

The piece opens with the signs all in place — literally. A billboard displays the name of the town — Harmony ("Population: 375") — in big bold type. Next to a greasy café called Dino's Diner, a placard is scrawled with an ad for a garage workhand: "MAN WANTED." In strolls hunky drifter Luca (Marcelo

Gomes in the performance I saw, guesting from American Ballet Theatre), who takes the job at Dino's, and becomes the MAN WANTED by both Dino's sexually frustrated wife, Lana, and the sexually repressed (and oppressed) hired hand, Angelo — thus seeding discord into Harmony.

As often with Bourne, *The Car Man* is character-led and plot-driven, and if the dancing sometimes lacks choreographic inventiveness, it is dramatically apt and theatrically astute. Indeed, it is often the fine details that give the blocky choreography its emotive force: the caught glances, the impulses and hesitations, the angle of a head, the pressure of a caress.

Bourne handles the sex scenes well. A sultry night, the dancers flopping with torpor and pulling on each other's cigarettes, seems almost to sweat desire. Luca and Gina's consummation is brilliantly portrayed, the couple half-hidden in their room while the chorus of dancers take over the stage, fornicating in various combinations of gender and number. We sense the scene not as sex between individuals, but as Eros itself unbound.

The story turns to jealousy, deception, murder and revenge, with Angelo abused in prison after being framed for Dino's death, and Luca and Gina living the high life until the whole hair-trigger setup finally explodes, leaving another corpse and a smoking gun. It's heady stuff, and could have been hammy, but Bourne does not moralize, and

the performers bring considerable nuance to their characters. Gomes plays Luca as someone out of his depth; Zizi Strallen is a headstrong Gina, driven by desires she cannot control; and Dominic North is an especially affecting Angelo, an innocent soul first bullied, then embittered.

One deliciously wicked scene deserves special mention: using a favoured show-within-a-show device, Bourne has a troupe of po-faced, black-leotarded mime artists act out a triangular story of love and murder in arch, arty style — a parody of the framing story that both underscores the drama and provides comic relief from it.

Credit, too, to the creative team. Lez Brotherston's multi-level set is effective and highly adaptable, and Terry Davies' skilful adaptation of the *Carmen* score allows the music to follow the action like a film score. Indeed, the whole production sits in some unclassifiable, populist space between dance, theatre, opera, musical and film — which is maybe why critics (and indeed theatres) find it hard to place, and why audiences love it.

Cruelly, real tragedy curtailed the steamy fantasy of *The Car Man* this summer. Hours before the last performance, dancer Jonathan Ollivier, due to perform as Luca, was knocked from his motorbike and killed following a collision with a man in a car, who was arrested on suspicion of causing death by dangerous driving. The final performance was cancelled; the season was over too soon. ▼



Right: Danny Reubens in Matthew Bourne's *The Car Man*  
Photo: Johan Persson

It has been hard to travel to international dance festivals in Italy in the hottest July ever. Luckily, travellers were rewarded with clever artistic proposals and lively atmospheres, nurtured by passionate audiences who confirmed that dance is alive and well in this country. Ballet is always a popular show and often becomes a real event thanks to the stars, like beloved Roberto Bolle, who gathered more than 12,000 people in Verona Arena with his touring gala.

Audiences also showed appreciation for different aspects of contemporary dance, mostly where the emotions were clearly readable in the choreographic score. In Bolzano, the most northern Italian town, so close to the Austrian boundaries that both Italian and German cultures and languages coexist, the Bolzano Danza festival has taken place since 1984. Performances are in the Municipal Theatre as well as in the Museum for Modern and Contemporary Art – Museion, and in squares, shop windows, wine cellars and alpine shelters at more than 1,000 metres in altitude.

The artistic goals of the festival — to celebrate the art of dance in all its different creative aspects — not only honour the greatest artists (this year Alessandra Ferri and choreographer Carolyn Carlson, who I missed), but also help discover the newest choreographic trends from Italy and internationally. Bolzano

Danza featured some national debuts and a world premiere by French and Israeli dancemakers, two countries that offer political and economic support for their artists to tour abroad.

One such artist at Bolzano was Israeli Roy Assaf. Trained by one of the most passionate teachers of his country, Regba Gilboa, and a dancer with the renowned Emanuel Gat for six years, Assaf creates very personally styled physical poetry. His dance is about human relationships, but without the necessity of describing them with mimetic gestures or theatrical expressionism; he shows this vision well in the delicate and touching duet *Six Years Later* (2011).

Assaf gives to dance the power needed to evoke emotions and to suggest feelings and moods, cleverly using the physical laws of dynamics and weight in a contact and release structure expressing closeness and abandonment. As the dancers exchange looks, for those of us watching it's not like observing two performers, but two lovers sharing secrets.

We find the same honesty in Assaf's *Girls*, a premiere. While the famous mysterious beginning of Stravinsky's *Le Sacre du Printemps* starts seeping into the air, five women in red, crouched on the ground, slowly move like creatures in an ancient cave. Are they evoking ancestral feminine power? Assaf seems to suggest that although contemporary clichés oblige women to deal with

typical modern role models (like Barbie dolls and models, which he invokes using dance, ordinary gestures and stylized movements), they have a stronger, more powerful innate force. The piece is ironic and tender; the choreography clear, tight and original.

If Assaf was one of the most appreciated of the festival for his intimate way of looking at life, French dancemaker Olivier Dubois impressed with a bold imagination that sees him create physical frescoes with a larger-than-life approach. *Les Mémoires d'un seigneur* premiered at another important festival, Civitanova Danza, which co-produced the piece.

Dedicated to Enrico Cecchetti, whose family came from Civitanova, a nice town on the Adriatic Sea in the heart of the colourful landscape of Marche, Civitanova Danza celebrated its 22nd anniversary this summer. The festival's philosophy is similar to Bolzano Danza's, but here the proposals seem more audacious and radical as the audience is more generalist. The first time Dubois was scheduled at Civitanova Danza two years ago, his *Revolution* was considered controversial. The choreography showed 17 girls turning around on poles, with minimal variations in tempo and speed, while the first measures of Ravel's *Bolero* were on repeat for almost two hours. Many from the audience left Rossini Theatre; others were entranced by the hypnotic force of Dubois' concept.

This year, in *Les Mémoires d'un seigneur*, Dubois created a fabulous dramatic atmosphere. The furious and desperate Sir of the title — performed by strong actor/dancer Sebastien Perrault, with a long beard, bare torso and a large sword — could be a king from the Middle Ages, a tyrant or even a modern rock idol. Surely he is a lone man. In front of him, there are 30 men of different ages and appearance, chosen from the Bolzano and Civitanova audiences; a two-week training period for the staging of the piece gave them a powerful theatrical presence. Who are they? Soldiers to incite for battle? Or prisoners to pile up like trophies? Or citizens who will finally revolt? Through an outstanding use of light design that makes the group look like a Caravaggio painting, and through the cleverness of the patterns, steps and tableaux vivants, Dubois effectively portrays the crazy loneliness of power. ▼







The Madrid Spanish Dance and Flamenco Choreography Competition is the most important yearly event for anyone interested in discovering Spain's most promising young talents. Most competitors are dancers just starting their solo careers who earmark potential prize money for the creation of their first professional production.

Aside from spotting phenomenal new dancers/choreographers, there's one additional competition constant for me: I always fall hard for the second place awardees and am left cold by the first place winners. The 2015 edition was no exception.

The competition is divided into two primary categories: solo and group choreographies. Solos tend to predominate, largely because flamenco has, since its inception, developed as an individualistic art form that highlights a solo dancer. Cristian Martín took the coveted solo prize this year with his choreography *Materia (Redux)*. I was familiar with Martín and his graceful and classical technique prior to the competition thanks to his work in Daniel Doña's company, where he at times has stolen the spotlight from Doña himself. Regrettably, *Materia (Redux)* did not leave as successful an impression.

The piece begins with Martín's upper body protruding from a tent-like fabric structure that resembles a gigantic snail shell or cocoon. It's a prop with interesting visual potential, but ultimately is just dragged around the stage to little and, at

times, clumsy effect. The piece almost painfully tries to marry contemporary sensibilities, with its mechanical and austere music and severe, sharp movement, with classical Spanish turns, jumps and extensions. Elements of flamenco and Spanish folkloric dance are also thrown in. The movement is repetitive and the music monotone, making the piece dark and soporific.

In contrast, second place winner Mónica Iglesias' solo choreography *No me cuentes milongas* (roughly translated as *Quit pulling my leg*) is distinctly flamenco, taking place in a *café cantante*, a cabaret-style locale where flamenco was performed in the late 1800s/early 1900s. The scene is set magnificently by a soundtrack of old recordings by legendary guitarist Sabicas and singer Pepe Marchena, including a *milonga*, a style of flamenco not so commonly heard nowadays.

Iglesias' technique is impeccable and her speed astounding, but what makes her work most successful is that it has a narrative arc that joins three sequences, taking us from the public to the intimate both physically and emotionally. Half of the stage is cluttered with old chairs and we can hear a boisterous crowd; a dancer weaves between the chairs greeting people, making her way to the front where she performs for her imaginary audience. Then the dancer retires to the other half of the stage where a single chair sits empty. Marchena's voice rings clear, singing of undying love for a dark-haired woman. Iglesias performs with gusto to Sabicas' solo guitar piece, expecting, even

demanding a response from the empty chair, which she ultimately receives as Marchena sings of a woman who has only ever brought him bitterness and betrayal. The piece closes with a brief mantón solo, in which the fluttering of the shawl and its long fringe beautifully depict her heartbreak before returning to the boisterous *café*, surrounded by people, but alone.

The first place winner for group choreography, José Maldonado, is a relatively established dancer previously seen in Rafaela Carrasco's magnificent work *Vamos al tiroteo*. He also won first prize for a solo choreography in the 2013 competition. Maldonado's 2015 *Trigo limpio (Clean wheat)* takes aim at machismo and men who attempt to control every aspect of a woman's life, from the clothes she wears, to the people she sees, to the places she goes.

Domestic violence is an issue paramount in Spain's social consciousness, due in no small part to the number of women who are killed each year by their partners. The work is a valiant effort that uses voiceover to establish the man's subjugation of his mate, and a corps de ballet of about 11 female flamenco dancers dressed in men's suits, who seem to represent both the oppressive male and the repressed female. However, the piece is made monotonous by its industrial soundtrack, which simply bangs out rhythms on different metals, a drab lighting scheme and choreography that lacks any particularly memorable or emotive moments.

Everything that Maldonado didn't get quite right came together in the stunning *El amor duerme en el pecho del poeta (The Loved One Sleeps on the Breast of the Poet)*, based on a poem of the same name by Federico García Lorca and choreographed by the second place winner for group choreography, Ángel Manarre. Much like the company Manarre trains and works with — the National Ballet of Spain — it features a classical style of flamenco, and is executed to technical perfection by seven men, including Manarre. The piece is pure elegance in the maturity of its composition, the blending of flamenco and classical music, and one of the most effective lighting designs I've seen in a long time, for which Manarre is also responsible. This was the highlight of this year's competition, even if the judges decided otherwise. ▼



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For the 25th anniversary of his Summer Ballet, artistic director and former principal with the Royal Danish Ballet Alexander Kølpin presented a ballet version of Vladimir Nabokov's controversial 1955 novel, *Lolita*, at Bellevue Theatre, his seaside venue just north of Copenhagen. For the project, he engaged British choreographer Cathy Marston, who two years ago created a successful adaptation of *The Elephant Man* for the summertime company.

After reading the novel, Marston was fascinated by the duality of its narrator, Humbert Humbert, who somehow evokes sympathy even though the reader knows that his attraction to 12-year-old Lolita is terribly wrong. Nabokov likely intended to reflect the character's divided nature by giving him the double name, and Marston has followed the author's lead by having two dancers in the role, who mirror each other's steps and even fight to illustrate the inner struggle between guilt and lust.

Mads Blangstrup, who retired as a principal from the Royal Danish Ballet in 2013, embodied the soul-searching aspect of the split character. In his intense presence, even as he stood motionless at the side of the stage, one could sense Humbert's pangs of conscience for his forbidden attraction to Lolita. The conflict repeatedly resulted in fierce confrontations with his alter ego, danced with open craving by Gildas Diquero, from Geneva company 7273. He represented the unscrupulous side of Humbert, who married the widow (Deirdre Chapman, a London-based dancer) to get close to her daughter Lolita. Swarming eagerly around him in her pointe shoes, Chapman's widow never sensed his burning glances toward Lolita.

As their object of desire, Royal Danish Ballet soloist Ida Praetorius was ideal as Lolita. Although far removed from her work last season in the title role in John Neumeier's *Lady of the Camellias* and as Odette-Odile in *Swan Lake*, Praetorius gave a convincing representation of a fresh young girl. Dressed in light blue mini pants or a white, pleated skirt, she flitted about the stage in a mixture of innocence and provocation, which intensified as she discovered her effect on Humbert. Diquero's wound-up sexual advances either amused or turned her into a sulking, gum-chewing teenager. When Lolita eventually left Humbert, Diquero collapsed on the floor, while Blangstrup's glazed eyes expressed despair.

# COPENHAGEN!

by Anne-Marie Elmbj



Astrid Elbo from the Royal Danish Ballet, Arina Trostyanetskaya from Danish Dance Theatre and Joel Fritzon, currently dancing for Marston in London, acted as mourners and as Lolita's schoolmates. Fritzon was also the boyfriend who toward the end appeared with a pregnant Lolita before heartbroken Humbert.

Throughout, Jesper Mechlenburg's score underlined the changing viewpoints of the story, mixing both melodious and dissonant sections for violin and piano with electronic sounds and a skittish pop song. Scenographer Helle Damgård placed furniture and props hanging from the flies to be lowered when required, including a bed that swung with the sleeping Lolita in it, while the two Humberts, brazenly and reluctantly, respectively, tried to mount it to get to her. A steering wheel later cleverly turned the bed into a car. Marston's brilliant dancers succeeded in presenting the dramatic story without it ever getting overly steamy.

Also in the northern edge of Copenhagen, Verdensballetten (World Ballet), which makes an annual outdoor summer tour of Denmark, found a new venue in Sølyst, a mansion on the coast. In spite of threatening clouds that cut the program a little short, a large audience enjoyed dancers from England's Royal Ballet performing against a beautiful view of the sea. For the first time, English dancer Xander Parish, who is having a flourishing career with the Mariinsky Ballet, joined the group. The dance numbers were interspersed with musical offerings and accompanied by

virtuoso violinist Charlie Siem, pianist Caroline Jaya-Ratnam and Danish opera singers Peter Lodahl and Jens-Christian Wandt.

In the Black Swan pas de deux from *Swan Lake*, seductive Francesca Hayward tempted Marcelino Sambé, while Parish devotedly partnered Melissa Hamilton's sad White Swan. The latter couple also appeared in an excerpt from Liam Scarlett's *Asphodel Meadows* to Francis Poulenc's *Double Piano Concerto*.

Hayward and Thomas Whitehead performed a heartfelt duet for a soldier and his girl created by Kristen McNally to an instrumental version of Gabriel Fauré's song *Après un Rêve*, combined with the love poem *Côte à côte*, written and recited by the Danish Prince Consort, Prince Henrik. The artistic leader of the group, Stephen McRae, amused with his own, dazzling tap dance version of a czardas and showed joyous infatuation with the lovely Roberta Marquez in the bedroom scene from Kenneth MacMillan's *Manon*.

The 8th Copenhagen International Choreography Competition in August had 144 applicants. The winner was Po-Cheng Tsai from Taiwan with *Hugin/Munin*, the names of the Nordic mythological god Odin's two wise ravens. The duet included expressive mime and martial arts elements, and also poetic moments as a large, piece of plastic floated in different shapes in the dark space before it finally covered the dancers. First prize included a production award for a new work for Switzerland's Tanz Luzerner Theater. ▼

Two Norwegians, Sara Christophersen and Helle Siljeholm, have gone into a partnership with a volunteer organization, Sareyyet Ramallah in West Bank, Palestine. With money from the Norwegian foreign ministry, they will work to build and strengthen the region's professional dance life over the next three years of the project. As there are no professional schools there, they will teach young dancers and also help to develop new schools. Siljeholm and Christophersen, who both had contemporary dance training in London, will also arrange workshops, choreograph and produce performances. This past spring and summer, they rehearsed with five Palestinian dancers and two Norwegians, presenting their first show, *Area Y*, at the end of July in an olive grove outside Ramallah. The plan is to tour this performance next year.

Sidi Larbi Cherkaoui's *Milonga* toured to Oslo this quarter, and the audience loved it. Ten tango dancers, two contemporary dancers and five musicians who knew how to get the most out of the sensual music were onstage. Though the variations of steps in tango are limited, the dancers used them to their full potential. To give the feeling of visiting Buenos Aires, a film set there was projected on the back wall, which unfortunately took the focus away from the dance.

Some good news is that the Norwegian National Ballet has taken Ben Stevenson's *Cinderella* into the repertoire. Stevenson has taken great care of Sergei Prokofiev's score, and he gives the dancers a lot of challenging choreography. Costumes and scenography, by the late David Walker, are lovely and lavish.

Eugenie Skilnand is back after maternity leave in the title role and her dancing may be better than ever. She is sensitive in expression and seems to get under the skin of the lonely Cinderella. Skilnand is perhaps not the company's most virtuoso technician, but she is definitely the best when it comes to portraying character. The Prince, Dutch-born Douwe Dekkers, was not of the same standard. There is nothing wrong with his technique, he just did not manage to relax and dance freely, all the more obvious next to Skilnand. Kári Freyr Björnsson and Arne Kristian Ruutu portrayed the two stepsisters with a lot of humour, and seemed to be having great fun in their second act solos. The court jester, Marco Pagetti, also had the high energy needed for his role.

Recently, the company also danced a mixed bill titled *Dream Play*, featuring four ballets by four choreographers, maybe one too many. All were worth seeing, but the evening was a little too long, though which one should have been excluded would be hard to say. The bill started with a premiere by house

choreographer Jo Strömngren, *Lamentate*, titled after the music by Arvo Pärt. There was a lot of lamentation in the music, and also some in the choreography, but it did not really balance out. The work dwells vaguely with feelings among and between the 16 dancers onstage and, while interesting, is not among his strongest works.

Second out was Nacho Duato's *Without Words*, a piece with fantastic musicality that one could just sit back and enjoy. The way Duato follows the music and transfers it to movement is extraordinary. Not many choreographers are able to keep the movements continuous, and *Without Words* must be one of Duato's best in this way. It is set to music from Franz Schubert that flows like balsam in the air and melts together with the dancers' bodies. They operate in couples, and the last duet between charismatic Maiko Nishino and Gakuro Matsui was a joy to watch. This was maybe the highlight of the evening, but there was more good stuff to come.

Swedish choreographer Johan Inger contributed *Dream Play*, made for Netherlands Dans Theater in 2000. Set to Igor Stravinsky's *Rite of Spring*, Inger uses this familiar score in a fresh way. One man is onstage, happy enough on his own, when a woman passes by and he loses control, then two women and three men are onstage and these men, too, lose control, and it is clear that the theme is the confusion that can happen in relationships. There is a lot of humour in the dancing, and also in what happens between the different couples as Inger takes the audience into a dream sequence where anything is possible.

The fourth piece, which came as a light dessert to the evening, was *Skew Whiff* by Sol León and Paul Lightfoot, danced to Rossini's overture to *The Thieving Magpie*. Not only the music, but also the dancing, ensures we have a jolly good time. Nishino, Dekkers, Matsui and Ruutu gave absolutely deadpan performances, increasing the humour of this ballet, and they all danced athletically with elasticity, impressive energy and glints of trickery in the corner of their eyes. Great fun. ▼

Norwegian National Ballet's Maiko Nishino, Gakuro Matsui and Arne Kristian Ruutu in Sol León and Paul Lightfoot's *Skew Whiff*  
Photo: Erik Berg



by Fredrik Rütter

Oslo,

# Melbourne

by Jordan Beth Vincent



The Australian Ballet's marketing machine has branded 2015 as the Year of Beauty, with beauty predominantly explored through the romantic medium of the story ballet. New interpretations and traditional remounts have vied for attention, with performances of *Giselle*, Alexei Ratmansky's *Cinderella*, Graeme Murphy's *Swan Lake* and Frederick Ashton's *The Dream* exploring the many facets of ballet as beauty.

The centrepiece of the season was the premiere of *The Sleeping Beauty*, staged by Australian Ballet's artistic director and former principal artist David McAllister. Over his years at the helm, McAllister has not followed the model of the combined choreographer/artistic director. In his debut choreographic work, *Overture*, premiered as part of the 50th Anniversary Gala in 2012, as with this production of *Sleeping Beauty*, he sought the integration of clean, classical technique with the frosting of spectacular, glittering tutus. It might sound like a risk for someone to take on the mammoth task of producing a new story ballet when their choreographic experience is so limited, but McAllister is standing on the shoulders of masters, with most of Petipa's choreography retained (interspersed with his own supplemental sequences, with dramaturgical direction by Lucas Jervies), and Tchaikovsky's score.

Not surprisingly, public interest in this production has focused on the elements that provide a point of difference from previous versions of the ballet that exist in the company repertoire, which includes productions by Maina Gielgud,

Dame Peggy van Praagh and Stanton Welch. Those differences include a third act trimmed down by roughly 20 minutes, and an entirely new and spectacular look.

*The Sleeping Beauty* is widely reported to be one of Australian Ballet's most expensive productions to date, and you need only look to the detail on the costumes and sets to see where the cash has been spent. Set and costume designer Gabriela Tylesova has embraced the goal of unrepentant fairy-tale opulence, crafting a golden world brought to blinding illumination by lighting designer Jon Buswell.

It's hard to know where to start in analysing the dancing beneath such breathtaking decoration. The Fairies' tutus are exquisite, with detailed bodices and skirts formed from folded tulle petals, opened to the sky like the face of a dahlia in full bloom. On their backs, the dancers wear iridescent wings. Each of the Fairies wears a slightly different design, with intricate beading and sequins on the costumes topped off with a spectacular wig resplendent with supernatural sparkles. In Act I, the dancers of the Royal court wear ombré pink and mint ruffled dresses festooned with flowers so vivid they look practically edible.

Former principal artist Lynette Wills returns to the stage as Carabosse, and squeezes every dramaturgical possibility from the role. With a dress made of green-tinted black feathers and surrounded by a posse of rat servants (who wear military jackets and tails), she makes for a commanding evil force — every bit the fairy-tale villain the ballet

deserves. Unfortunately, there is little scope for Wills to actually dance much, but she imbues every gesture and side-long, scheming glance with malevolent intent.

Lana Jones (Princess Aurora) and Kevin Jackson (Prince Désiré) are a formidable pair and offer a combination of controlled technique — clean lines, elegant upper bodies, strong jumps — and good acting skills. The warmth between them radiates from the stage and grounds the work in a nice way.

In fact, McAllister has cast the entire ballet beautifully, including Amber Scott, who is elegant as the Lilac Fairy, and Benedicte Bemet, who sparkles through the youthful quicksilver steps as the Fairy of Musicality.

Wisely, McAllister cuts short the third act. He retains the Bluebird and Princess Florine's pas de deux (spectacularly performed by Chengwu Guo and Ako Kondo), but introduces the other fairy-tale characters, including Puss in Boots, Cinderella, and Red Riding Hood and the Wolf, as party guests for the masquerade ball.

Throughout the production, Tylesova's designs draw, unapologetically, from eras of aristocratic excess. The baby princess sleeps in a cradle that seems modelled after a Fabergé egg; later, an even more lavish version hugs the princess as she passes her sleeping century. The final scene begins with the rising of three ornate, diamond chandeliers topped with hundreds of candles, and pays homage through costume and imagery to the court of King Louis XIV, with the monarchy of the 17th-century French court celebrated with representations of the sun.

This final scene also invokes the excesses of Marie Antoinette's Versailles, and, uncomfortably, there is more than a little of a "Let them eat cake" attitude about this production. Though the company has reported that at least part of the ballet was supported through crowd-funding efforts, it premieres at a tough time for the small to medium sector of Australian arts, currently suffering from severe austerity cuts and a devastating funding restructure. In this complex environment, the glittery indulgence of this new spectacle might seem a little gauche. Beautiful though it may be, this *Sleeping Beauty* seems blind to stirrings of revolution outside the theatre, clinging to the golden world of the classics. ▼

# Singapore!

by Malcolm Tay



In August, two festivals and other standalone shows pulled dancers in all directions. Samarpana – The Asian Festival of Classical Dance opened with *Sūr Gati – The Universal Rhythm* at the Esplanade Concert Hall, which featured two stars in their respective fields: odissi dancer Sujata Mohapatra, who has earned local and global praise as a top exponent of the Indian classical idiom, and playback singer Kavita Krishnamurthy, who has lent her dulcet soprano to many Bollywood films since the 1980s. Each gave a short solo program before sharing the stage in a rare collaboration.

Accompanied by three musicians and a vocalist, Mohapatra proved to be an expert at the pure dance and storytelling aspects of odissi. In her second piece, she displayed a lively interplay between her upper and lower limbs as she carved rippling shapes in space and stamped her feet in reply to the quartet’s musical questions. She also gave an expressive account of the Hindu god Krishna’s boyhood feats, her face flaring in rage as she depicted his battles with demons. As his foster mother Yashoda, her eyes popped in shock and wonder when she peered into his mouth and saw the universe. With Krishnamurthy, Mohapatra painted a sensuous portrait of the goddess Radha yearning for Krishna, describing her misery from being apart from him, and in the final item showed fleet footwork to mirror the music’s

vivid rhythm. Mohapatra and Krishnamurthy offered an evening bright enough to make the heavens smile.

The three-day Samarpana festival overlapped with the six-week Singapore International Festival of Arts (SIFA), which opened with *Returning* at the Drama Centre Theatre. For this premiere, dance pioneer Goh Lay Kuan led four Singaporean choreographers from different backgrounds to create an evening-long work for 22 dancers; its score was jointly written by six composers and played live by a dozen musicians. This massive team effort evoked the open-air concerts of the 1960s, in which artists of Chinese, Indian and Malay origin performed alongside one another to promote cultural integration across the nation. Unlike those early variety shows, *Returning* had a more consistent structure and design, yet it was shot through with the same spirit of cross-cultural partnership.

*Returning* ostensibly took the salmon’s unique life cycle (a subject that Goh previously tackled in 1993 in *The Homing Fish* for Guangdong Modern Dance Company) as a metaphor for self-reflection and the common struggle for existence. The choreography, in effect, was a largely literal take on the anadromous fish. In their costumes and steps, the dancers suggested each phase of the salmon’s life: from alevins that hatch from red-pink eggs and hide in gravel to become fry, which grow into

fingerlings that migrate to freshwater, turn into silver-coated smolt and mature in the ocean, which they leave to spawn and die in the streams where they were born. The dancing, infused as it was with the gestures and contours of traditional Asian forms, sustained the narrative pace, but it never quite broke the surface to make a greater statement.

SIFA’s lineup included more than 10 acts from India and Japan, mostly at non-theatre venues, offering a cross-section of contemporary dance in those countries. At the now-defunct Tanjong Pagar Railway Station, the audience sat on white plastic chairs in the main hall for *Real Reality*, Tokyo-based choreographer Mikuni Yanaiharā’s essay on technology vis-à-vis the body.

Keisuke Takahashi’s video projection covered the tall, pale walls with rows of people dangling with a noose around their necks. “I have no story ... I really don’t know anything,” they intoned in shrill voices. This gave way to landscapes of undulating dunes, changing numbers and scuttling sheep multiplying in flocks. Against this looming backdrop and a stark, electronic soundscape by sound designer Skank, Emi Oyama and Jun Morii tussled with each other and fell repeatedly. In a key moment, they appeared as a rhythmic gymnast and a badminton player, highlighting their shortcomings as Oyama fumbled with a rubber ball and Morii flogged the air with a racket. How all this hung together felt unclear.

At the revamped rice warehouse known as 72-13 that houses arts group TheatreWorks, Chennai-based dance artist Padmini Chettur spread her *Wall Dancing* across the entire ground floor, a wide canvas of space interrupted only by a few columns. Over three hours, viewers could come and go as they pleased, as long as they were barefoot and kept their belongings in numbered trash bags, with portable toilets available outside. They could sit or stand where they wished, watching the cast from various angles or discovering the performers seated among them.

Movement was pared down to its essentials as the dancers proceeded slowly in small, shifting units. They pushed their hands against a pillar, even as they twisted their torsos away from it. As a chain of five, they rolled from shoulder to shoulder or revolved outward



from a wall, bodies glued together, like a door opening. The silence that cross-cut Maarten Visser's ambient score of measured thumps echoed the show's pervading calm, which allowed the eyes to wander and soak up every incidental detail as part of the performance.

Meanwhile, Singapore Dance Theatre premiered François Klaus' *Midnight Waltzes* during a triple bill at the

Esplanade Theatre. This throwback to late imperial Russia had reportedly been commissioned to boost the stylistic range of its repertoire. Set in a high-society ballroom, the piece patched together a few stereotypes — the pining girl, the bored beauty, the gawky nerd and the charming prince — and resolved their love tangles via balletic duets; Chihiro Uchida also had to fend off the advances of three persistent friends who, thankfully, knew when to stop. In between, the stage was flushed with 12 waltzing couples, the women's pastel ankle-length gowns churning to a mix of Strauss and Khachaturian. *Midnight Waltzes* ultimately turned out to be a sweet romantic comedy that showcased some of the company's younger members in lead roles, but on the whole did little to stretch the dancers and seemed too trifling to be revived.

Siong Leng Musical Association held an altogether more solemn affair at the Esplanade Theatre Studio, where viewers rinsed their hands with ladles of water and sipped bowls of tea before they took their places. This cleansing ritual

of sorts defined the tone for *Soul Journey* — *Nine Songs*, a theatrical setting of a poem cycle from China's Warring States period. Initially sung by shamans to seek blessings from the deities, minister-scholar Qu Yuan's poems were rendered into nanyin, an old form of instrumental and vocal music that originated in the southeastern Chinese province of Fujian. It provided the basis for the work's quilt of spare, refined tunes embroidered with contemporary arrangements and polyphonic singing. Three performers trained in Liyuan opera — a dramatic tradition native to Fujian — guided the action in trailing robes and played the divine figures invoked in the text. Like nanyin, Liyuan opera tends toward the gentle and modest, with movements inspired by string puppetry. At one point, the Xiang River god sang wistfully as he traced the stage in a languid arc while, at some distance away, his consort gestured with orchid-like fingers, her gliding gait flecked with quick, mincing steps. Who was following whom? By the end of his song, they remained out of each other's reach. ▼

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## Bengt Jörgen / *The Sleeping Beauty*

You might have been expecting a dumbed-down *Sleeping Beauty*. After all, Toronto's Ballet Jörgen took this grand 19th-century work and reimagined it for a chamber touring company that travels mostly to smaller communities across Canada. Well, you'd be wrong. In spite of some dramatic excesses, this production, which had its October premiere at the Burlington Performing Arts Centre, is a charming, easy-to-follow and child-friendly version of the great Petipa-Tchaikovsky classic, choreographed by artistic director Bengt Jörgen.

Jörgen has found ways of retaining essential iconic dance moments and still expunging narrative and decorative diversifications not necessary to telling the story. Inspired by a legend about how the rose got its thorns, he sees the work more simply as an allegory, a battle between Summer and Winter. In his scenario, darkness and light are conflicting forces embodied by the coldness of Carabosse and the warmth of the Lilac Fairy. Prince Florimund, for his part, represents the essential rebirth of Spring after the bleak Winter. For me, the most exquisite moment was Jörgen's Vision Scene, with the Lilac Fairy urging Florimund to cut away the dead brambles — an ensemble of dancers — to reveal the sleeping Aurora, a budding pink rose, wrapped in Winter white.

And purists need not fear. The Bluebird Pas de Deux, pleasantly if not thrillingly danced by handsome Gustavo Hernandez and pretty Annelie Liliemark, is intact. And the Grand Pas de Deux for Aurora (Saniya Abilmajineva) and Prince Florimund (Daniel Da Silva) is there, complete with the excitement of what generally passes for the original Petipa choreography.

Jörgen has cleverly reimagined the story to incorporate some magical moments. His collision of dark and light, with Carabosse and the Lilac Fairy struggling for supremacy, is dramatically sound. The dancing of a band of black-clad tormenters who support Carabosse's darker spirit is beautifully staged, and, when Aurora and her Prince are joined in love, the band passes between them, a reminder that darkness is always present even in joy, and that the beauty of the pale pink rose will always need its sharp protective thorns.

Abilmajineva, a 29-year-old dancer who came to Canada from Tashkent, Uzbekistan, to dance with Ballet Jörgen, is a radiant Aurora, suggesting in her early moments the youth, promise and adventurous spirit of a girl on the verge of womanhood. However, more passionate rapport was needed between this Aurora and her Prince, danced by the solid and reliable Da Silva, a muscular veteran who has played many leading roles in Ballet Jörgen productions.

Also, Abilmajineva struggled with the fiendish Rose Adagio, awkwardly placing her foot on the floor between balances

and failing to build tension. She was not helped by suitors encouraged to behave like comic bunglers. Hernandez, Kirill Poselyanov, Adrián Ramírez Juárez and Igor Voloshyn didn't look comfortable with the comedy and it was difficult to believe these men were cavaliers longing for the hand of Aurora.

Jörgen's King and Clea Iveson's Queen went too far with their histrionics when Aurora is sent into Winter suspension after pricking her finger. Their performances were old-fashioned and overblown for the rest of the production, too, though it was good to see Iveson onstage again (after 20 seasons as a dancer with the company, she is now their education manager).

Hiroto Saito, a spirited Carabosse, beautifully executed his tours en l'air and never lost the momentum of Jörgen's airborne choreography. Hannah Mae Crudas made a stunning Lilac Fairy, finding every nuance, dancing with radiant perfection, suggesting the heart and soul of a creature who inspires love.

Jörgen's idea that the ballet is propelled by the seasons is a good one and was suggested simply, without unnecessary visual representation. Designer Camellia Koo set the work in a single setting, a common ground that is surrounded by vines and edged with tattered leaves and thorns. Their burnished silver tone is highlighted as shadows play across them evocatively.

Koo's costumes for the dancers portraying the thorns and for Carabosse were perfect, but the Suitors are dressed in vivid hues at odds with the production's visual subtlety. The biggest visual misstep is the bizarre brown, tree-like costumes for Jörgen and Iveson that look like something wrenched from a 1930s Flash Gordon serial, giving an otherworldly feel to Koo's Garden of Eden setting. Tutus are exquisite and move beautifully, no doubt thanks to Anne Armit's expert involvement as "tutu co-ordinator and cutter."

All in all this is a good production with its own intriguing point of view, proving that with imagination you can reimagine a classical warhorse without trying to rival the big company productions. It tours across Canada, with a break for Ballet Jörgen's annual *Nutcracker* (a Canadian-themed production also choreographed by Jörgen), through to the end of April.

— GARY SMITH



## Ochoa, Thatcher, Wheeldon / Millennials

The Joffrey Ballet freshened its look with a program dedicated to younger choreographers. On offer were two new pieces along with Christopher Wheeldon's *Fool's Paradise* from 2007, adding up to a solid, diverse program that pointed in the direction the company is heading.

Annabelle Lopez Ochoa and Myles Thatcher provided the new works. Belgian-trained Ochoa took composer Michael Gordon's driving, twitchy *Weather One* and produced *Mammatus*, a propulsive work named for a cloud formation that portends a storm. To start, dry-ice fog lathered the floor, and a sculpture of fluorescent tubes crackled like lightning. The dancers, sleek in black tops with gloved hands, long black socks and bare thighs, stood in a tight knot with their backs to us.

Ochoa's moves were spidery; her phrases led with the head, the neck craned forward and attracted to an elbow as if by magnetism. Yet with *Mammatus* she created a largely abstract workout where the legs did much of the talking. Ochoa responded to the endless drive of the minimalist score; the women, three or four at a time, moved in tight steps that busted into jumps or huge, open balances. The men raced across the stage, then exploded into turning leaps. But there were slashes of a more dramatic style when the dancers brought their splayed hands together like crunching jaws.

Punctuating the swarm of the corps, different couples and a trio danced, but the interludes were similar as each woman was stretched, slid, dragged or swung by a partner. At the close, the crowd dispersed like droplets and a new couple dressed in white entered to the sound of thunder in the distance. Their pas de deux could have gone on forever, but it didn't; after a few dreamy minutes, the curtain slowly descended.

Like the music, *Mammatus* was a juggernaut of energy. There was more journey than destination — dancers entered and exited rather than stayed. Ochoa is a skilled craftsperson with sure theatrical instincts, but it was a relief that *Mammatus* ended when it did — the onslaught was exhausting as well as exhilarating.

Where *Mammatus* concentrated on movement rather than personality, *Passengers*, to pieces by Steve Reich, was driven by character and psychological analysis. The work, by Thatcher, a young San Francisco Ballet dancer who's rocketed into prominence, looked at characters on an unspecified journey. *Passengers* felt retro, like an 1980s film with a flashback to the 1940s. Nine souls in period clothing entered carrying suitcases, and some of them didn't want to give up their baggage.

The train was indicated by a series of window frames and the suitcases became the steps into the train's carriage. The journey was sketched, too; the dancers shuddered as the music chugged into motion. More stories were threaded in. A husband and another young man have a liaison, and are discovered by the wife.

Yoshihisa Arai and Derrick Agnoletti shared the role of the young man. Arai played him as an innocent, with an airy, classical quality. Agnoletti, the company's most go-for-broke dancer, took the rhythms of the movement and shaped the bouncing phrases in his solo with pop dance flavour. Yet like a large-cast film, there wasn't enough time to depict more than caricature: the sad lady with the purse, the nervous man in the topcoat. It's good to see Thatcher exploring more than steps; the trick will be finding the balance between movement and narrative.

Rounding out the program, Wheeldon's *Fool's Paradise*, to chamber music by Jody Talbot played live, emphasized atmosphere. Here, a trio of dancers

wasn't a conflict, but a design. This paradise was a netherworld of golden smoke and a gentle rain of petals, yet something emotional happened when Temur Sulushvili rubbed his hands down Victoria Jaiani's body and she shivered.

The Joffrey name — and brand — may be something of more concern to those who knew the company in New York rather than Chicago, where they relocated in 1995. Eight years into his tenure, artistic director Ashley Wheater seems to be creating San Francisco Ballet, Junior. He had a long career there, from dancer to artistic staff. You can see the bloodlines and the transfusions: San Francisco Ballet dancers Rory Hohenstein and Nicole Ciapponi have found a home in Chicago, commissions include Thatcher and San Francisco Ballet choreographer in residence Yuri Possokhov. The bodies are more homogeneous than in the New York Joffrey days: the women are all long-legged with highly arched feet. But the men's lines still get wonky when they're fatigued.

After this season, Wheater is canning Robert Joffrey's version of *The Nutcracker* in favour of a new one by Wheeldon. The older production, based on the Ballets Russes de Monte Carlo's, may have been dusty, but it was lovely, and now the Joffrey Ballet dances nothing by Joffrey. That's the company's dilemma as "The Joffrey" rather than "The Chicago" Ballet: can it move forward without cutting all ties to the past?

— LEIGH WITCHEL



## Lusk, Tirrell, Wallich, Conner / Mixed Bill

For its 45th year, the Bumbershoot arts festival in Seattle included a showcase of local talent from Velocity Dance Center's roster of choreographers. Velocity is dedicated to artist development and fostering the creation of contemporary dance with residencies, classes and performances, and the diverse choreographic styles of Kim Lusk, Dani Tirrell, Kate Wallich and Anna Conner positioned the centre — and the city — well on the contemporary dance map this September.

On Labour Day weekend in a square, white-walled room of the Seattle Center Pavilion, a dance floor was taped down to provide a stage, and three rows of chairs were lined up against three walls. The space wasn't fancy, and the rudimentary lighting seemed too bright, but the choreographers didn't need any frills to let their work speak for itself.

Lusk, who studied dance at Connecticut College and has presented her choreography since 2010, opened. Her strong ballet technique and purposeful movement were on display in *The Full Bounty*, a hair-flinging, galloping romp around the stage. A simple outfit of burgundy capris and an orange top added to the solo's playful tone. Paired with Ryan Hume's mix of uplifting country and dance instrumentals, Lusk was a joy to watch.

Lusk's second piece, *Bang Bang*, a duet with Erin McCarthy, is structured in an elaborate canon, with one dancer always a beat behind the other. In simple pink and grey outfits, Lusk and McCarthy alternated as the lead; the transitions were so smooth it was never immediately apparent when they switched. A steady beat helped them keep time, and echoing the precision of the music, Lusk's choreography was full of straight lines and meticulous, piecemeal steps.

Originally from Detroit, Tirrell formed Dani Tirrell Dance/Color Lines Dance Ensemble in 2011 to represent dancers of colour. In *The Beautiful*, his hard-hitting solo exploring social norms around gender and identity, Tirrell took the stage as a projection of the American flag fluttered on the back wall and began to lip synch to *The Star-Spangled Banner*. This patriotic opening set the tone

for the piece as he worked to deconstruct what the song meant for him as a gay, black man living in America.

In a yellow hooded sweatshirt and silver shorts, Tirrell moved with ease to the rhythmic house music as a voiceover discussed issues of identity, gender and sexual orientation. His gangster stroll was juxtaposed with a feminine strut, presenting these mannerisms as a common gender marker. When Tirrell removed his hoodie and shorts to reveal a very short stars-and-stripes dress, I could sense some discomfort in the audience. James Nylon's splicing of house music and patriotic songs blended in the background as "land of the free, home of the brave" was repeated like a mantra, raising the question of whether everyone in the land is genuinely free and who is truly brave. After trading his high tops for high heels, Tirrell mixed vogue, whacking and house styles, and marched and saluted with resolve.



With an abstract, Gaga-inspired movement style, Wallich performed a solo from her upcoming work, *Industrial Ballet*, commissioned by Velocity. Wallich founded her company, The YC, in 2010, and has worked with other Gaga-inspired choreographers in the past, for instance performing in Danielle Agami's *Sally meets Stu* in 2012. The Gaga influence could be seen in the instinctive, introspective quality of Wallich's movements. In a sheer black shift, she teetered on tiptoe with the lightness of a bird about to take flight and moved through slow balances and long, extended lines. She gradually began to fill the stage as her self-aware movements grew more expansive and she swayed back and forth, seemingly reaching for something just out of her grasp. One of the aims of Gaga is to do more with less, and Wallich's small movements contained a large amount of emotion that filled the space. The dark tone of the work was intensified by metallic scraping sounds that seemed to be the industrial ingredient referenced in the title.

Conner, named as an artist to watch in Berlin's *Kaltblut* magazine in 2014 when she had a residency in Germany, presented an excerpt from her upcoming *Exercises for the unrested: the kingmaker*. There was an aggressively erotic quality to the choreography for five dancers, who wore long, see-through dresses with nude undergarments.

The subtle suggestion of nudity was crudely contrasted with their forceful, insistent movements. This tone was intensified by the tension present in the floor work for the two men, who pushed and pulled one another. A feeling of urgency ran through the piece and was added to by the women who relentlessly bounced from one foot to the other while presenting their heels forward. They spent a long sequence repeating this awkward movement with hostile looks on their faces as the men were downstage kneeling with their heads on the floor. The dancers' determined expressions never wavered and matched the booming, base-heavy music until all five abruptly walked offstage in all directions. This sudden ending gave no closure to an impenetrable piece that seemed in search of cohesion.

— TESSA PERKINS

## Festival des Arts de St-Sauveur Gauthier, Inger, Cerrudo, etc. / Mixed Bill

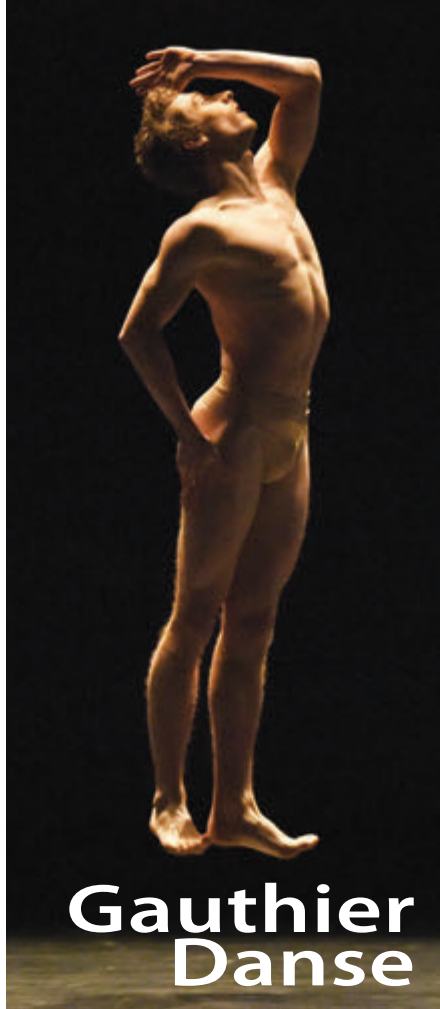
Éric Gauthier brought nine dancers from his 14-member company home to Quebec for the Festival des Arts de Saint-Sauveur this summer. Born in Montreal, trained at the National Ballet School in Toronto, Gauthier has spent most of his adult life in Stuttgart, Germany, becoming a soloist at Stuttgart Ballet and, in 2007, founding his own company, Gauthier Danse/Dance Company Theaterhaus Stuttgart.

The two-hour show, featuring a whopping nine works by disparate international choreographers, opened with Gauthier's own *Ballet 101*. The work humorously proposes a classical ballet vocabulary consisting of 101 positions: no. 25 is a full front split, no. 80 is a dying swan pose, and so on.

A dancer — Maurus Gauthier (no relation to Éric) — is directed by a disembodied voice who puts him through his paces once, then a second time at accelerated speed, and then once more in a random sequence. The audience understands that this is a ruse — Gauthier isn't actually following directions — but it's entertaining nonetheless. And it does, if gently, provoke a new way of looking at choreographed movement.

Swedish star Johan Inger's duet *Now and Now* was performed by Anna Sühleyla Harms and Florian Lochner. The work is an inventive expression of love, from first cataclysmic recognition through periods of tenderness and tension to, for whatever reason, its loss. I found the connection between the dancers truthful and Inger's scenographic choices uniquely effective. In one beautiful sequence, the lovers crawl over each other's bodies in a wide, circular progression on the ground. With each pass, more of their clothes come off. The lights flicker. The mood becomes melancholy — and when the pair gets dressed again, it's in each other's clothes.

As the lights went down on the work's poignant final image of Lochner on his knees, moving as if he still holds his partner in his arms, I found myself in raptures, and anticipating the exponentially more exciting and challenging works that were doubtlessly on the program ahead.



That feeling held all the way through Alejandro Cerrudo's delightful *Pacopepepluto*, which so perfectly suited the Gauthier company's golden men. Set to songs by crooner Dean Martin, the work is a barrage of expansive leaps, runs and jumps, danced with great virtuosity by Luke Prunty, Lochner and Juliano Nunes. Sassy and exhilarating, with a slightly ironic tone inspired by some very goofy lyrics ("when the moon hits your eye like a big pizza pie, that's amore," for example), *Pacopepepluto* is a showstopper.

And yet the program continued. I had problems with almost all the works that followed, including Itzik Galili's *Cherry Pink and Apple Blossom White*, an athletic duet for Anneleen Dedroog and Rosario Guerra. Laced with mugging and slapstick humour, it tells a high-energy story of vamp meets nerd. Sadly, that's all you need to know to imagine the dance.

Cayetano Soto's group dance *Malasangre* is a dark homage to Cuban singer La Lupe, whose familiar singing (especially of *Guantanamera*) comprises the score.

On a stage littered with black silk butterflies, eight performers dressed in skirts and knee socks dance angrily together and in pairs; at times, it felt like Soto was straining to match the songs with non-stop frenzied movement.

After intermission, Alexander Ekman's duet, *Two Become Three*, was clever enough, but by this point, I was weary of the evening's reliance on the push me/pull me sexual dynamic that typifies so much of the humour in dance — you know, the bum-slapping, jolly leering and pushing around meant to symbolize the reductively so-called "battle of the sexes." It's irritating to watch when you know that the artists going through these motions are capable of much more subtle representations of inter-personal relations. If that's curmudgeonly of me, so be it.

*Floating Flower*, by Taiwan's Po-Cheng Tsai, relied on a billowing white skirt costume and an exceptionally strong hidden partner to send Garazi Perez Oloriz wafting about the stage. In the work's second half, Maurus Gauthier, also clad in a long white skirt, becomes visible and they have some lovely moments together. It's all very sweet and highlights the fluid movement quality of this pair, but it's also fairly unsubstantial.

Marco Goecke's *I Found a Fox* is another slight work, a brief solo performed by Guerra. Its use of Kate Bush's *Suspended in Gaffa* is apt; like the song, all creativity here veers to the whimsical and surreal. To what end remains unclear: for all the fun of Guerra's "foxy" movement, the action doesn't take us anywhere.

The final offering of the night was Hans van Manen's celebratory ensemble work, *Black Cake*, originally made for Nederlands Dans Theater's 30th anniversary in 1989, but in the repertoire of ballet and contemporary companies around the world since then. Its ubiquity is understandable, because this piece just works, using forms such as tango and waltz married to a more balletic vocabulary. The party devolves as the participants fall out of their proper ballroom holds and get tipsy, but it's all done with elegance and wit. It was a satisfying end to a somewhat lightweight evening of dance from a truly spectacular company.

— KATHLEEN SMITH



## Les Ballets de Monte Carlo

### Lidberg, Horecna, Verbruggen / Mixed Bill

In celebration of Monaco's Year of Russia, honouring 150 years of cultural collaboration between the two countries, the lobby of the tiny principality's famed opera house was filled with giant photo cutouts from one of the most glorious epochs in ballet, that of Serge Diaghilev's Ballets Russes. And Jean-Christophe Maillot's daring choreographic choices for this triple bill for the company he directs, Les Ballets de Monte Carlo, presented in the Salle Garnier in July, echoed the vision of the famous impresario.

Maillot commissioned work from three newcomers: Sweden's Pontus Lidberg, who has won numerous awards for his filmmaking and choreography; Natalia Horecna, from Slovakia, who recently won a Taglioni Award for Best Young Choreographer; and Belgian-born Jeroen Verbruggen, a first soloist with the company, for whom he has created several works.

Lidberg's *Summer's Winter Shadow* started light as a summer breeze against a cerulean sky dotted with clouds shaped like darts. To the allegretto section of Franz Schubert's fourth *Impromptu*, five women in soft dresses the colours of macaroon confectionary moved playfully, soon joined by five casually clad young men.

The flowing dance that followed was all effortless lifts, ending in gentle drifts to the floor or lovely lunging poses. The random exits and entrances and swift

changing of partners echoed the freedom in the music, at least until the entrance of a sixth man holding a blank page cast a shadow over the gathering; his duet with one of the woman was fraught and bitter.

The other dancers returned, now clad in deep grey-blue as the melodious piano score was fractured by the dissonant chords of incidental music by Stefan Levin, ushering in a mood of anxiety and fear. When the music reverted to its lyrical beginnings and the dancers to their light clothing, each folded a piece of paper and tossed it like a dart. The man tore his paper into pieces and as he threw them on high, the clouds above scattered and fell like white rain. This is a beautifully nuanced work — Lidberg uses subtle dance imagery to suggest, rather than push home, the lightness of being and its inevitable underlying darkness.

If you like ballet that contains a strong dose of the bizarre and the erotic, and don't mind a haphazard confusion of characters, then Verbruggen's *True and False Unicorn* is definitely up your alley. Occupying the last slot of the evening, I found it a tedious mixture of the weird and the banal. Verbruggen's program notes were as convoluted as his creation. Man's cruelty to animals, and ignorance giving rise to superstition, is the leitmotiv; alternatively, it could apparently also be the way artists are treated by society at large.

Based loosely on a book of poems by James Broughton after which the ballet is titled, the text is used as a backing to

much of the action itself. When Queen Elizabeth I is drawn into the proceedings — apparently due to her fascination with the mystic unicorn and her sexual complexities — the plot thickens. Sigmund Freud makes an appearance, a virgin (alluding to Elizabeth's nickname "Virgin Queen") grapples with the true and the false male unicorns, and a corps called "unicornucopia" shed their hoods and tops, revealing the women's bare breasts complete with stripper tassels. The silliness might have been passible (just) if it had been laced with a touch of humour. Verbruggen, however, takes himself very seriously indeed, and his dance invention, in this piece at least, is uninteresting and inorganic. Pointe work consists of floor-stabbing and frantic relevés, and there is a great deal of trotting (for the unicorns) and erotic coupling (for all).

The meaty middle slot went by the lengthy title *Tales Absurd, Fatalistic Visions Predominate*. Pompous maybe, though Horecna's work is anything but; this young woman (an ex-Nederlands Dans Theater and Hamburg Ballet soloist) deserves her growing renown. The vivid, eclectic theatricality of *Tales Absurd* is underscored by highly original dance and a musical montage (Stano Paluch, Aphex Twin, Kronos Quartet, Max Richter and more) in perfect sync with the subject matter. Horecna conjures up shades of Bob Fosse's iconic film *All That Jazz* or Cocteau's scenario for *Le Jeune Homme et la Mort*, with a sensuous female Death-figure stalking a man destroying himself because of his fatalistic tendencies.

The absurd takes the form of the man and his partner's alter egos (flabby man in boxer shorts, woman in curlers who descends from the flies on a platform) and four sexily clad simpering female hoofers (his subconscious desires). Death, in a slinky mauve dress, has a supporting cast of four athletic men sporting black eye patches and bare chests, who dog the man in demon-like fashion. Alvaro Prieto's haunting interpretation of the lead character, whether twisting his limbs inwards or standing motionless in a silent scream, dragged us with him on this torturous journey until his final inevitable release left the audience drained of emotion.

— JUDITH GALEBROWN

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# Triptych with Birds

Luc Petton



Above: Aurore Castan-Ain in *La Confiance des oiseaux*  
Photo: Alain Julien

Left: Luc Petton in *Light Bird*  
Photo: Alain Julien

Below: Marie Sinnaeve in *SWAN*  
Photo: Laurent Philippe

In 2000, I plunged into a new adventure: bringing birds and dancers together onstage. Human beings are not at the centre of Creation, and I didn't want to have them at the centre of my creation. I began these works with a "maître mot" (main idea) that is "laisser-être" (to let be), a position that gives as much place to the bird as to the dancer in the creative process. That process always starts with what I call the impregnation protocol, a relationship that goes from egg to stage, nurtured daily for more than a year.

In *La Confiance des oiseaux*, for four dancers, I wanted to show the beauty of our own environment, our own neighbourhood, by having everyday birds onstage: a crow, five magpies, four jays, five starlings and 12 parakeets. *SWAN*, for six female dancers, and six white and two black swans, creates ambiguous situations where the frontiers between animal and human are blurred, a time of metamorphosis. *Light Bird*, for six Japanese cranes, and two European and two Korean dancers, plus one musician, enhances the concept of tolerance between humans and splendid but dangerous cranes, and also between very different dancers, who range in age from 19 to 59.

— LUC PETTON



*French choreographer Luc Petton has a background in martial arts and modern and postmodern dance. His triptych with birds has brought him national and international recognition.*  
[www.lucpetton.fr](http://www.lucpetton.fr)

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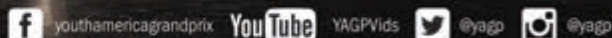
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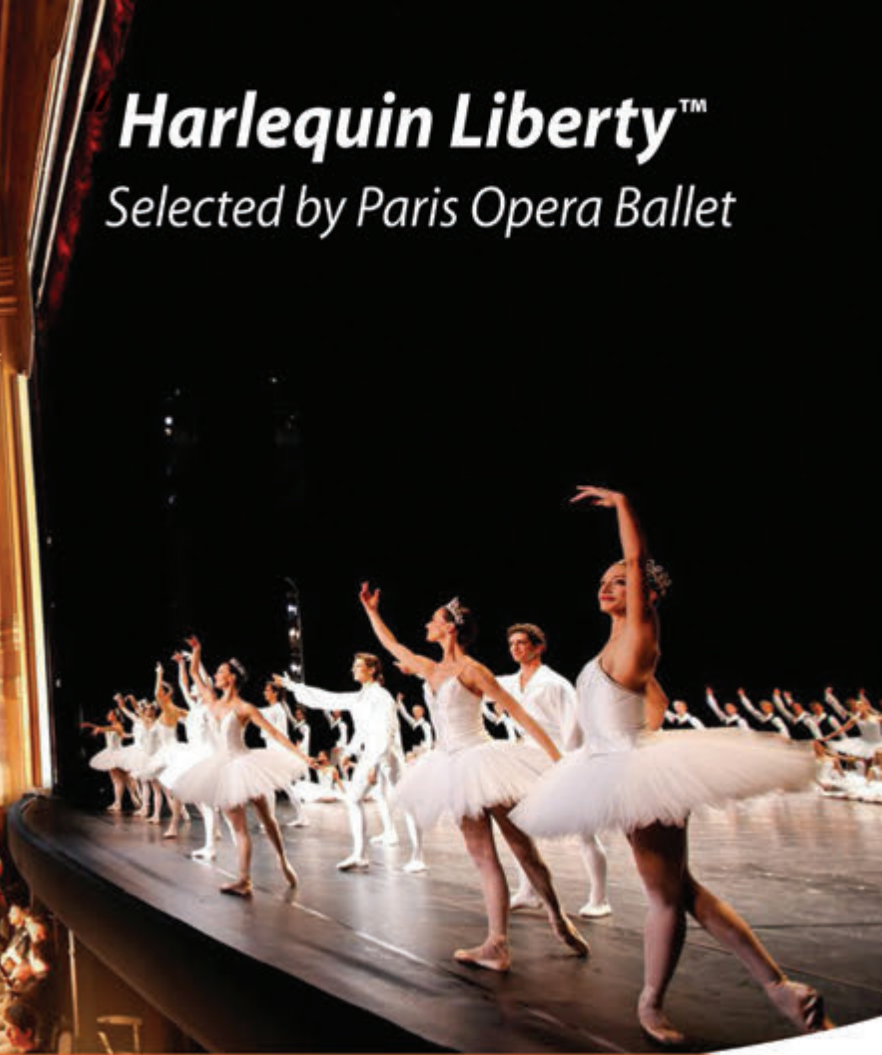


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