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*Journey to Soif*

**A New**  
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Photo: Steven Lemay



Shakespeare's *Romeo and Juliet* features a female lead who goes through an intense emotional journey within the story's tight time frame. The essential Juliet is about tempestuous first love, but the enriching details are up to the actress/ballerina playing her.

The two ballet productions I've seen so far this year had memorable Juliets. The Royal Winnipeg Ballet's delicate heroine — in Rudi van Dantzig's 1967 version — was made even more ethereal by pink satin pointe shoes, whether danced by Amanda Green, Elizabeth Lamont or Sophia Lee (yes, I saw all three casts, on tour in Vancouver). By contrast, on my recent visit to Dresden, the Semperoper Ballet's Julia Weiss — in Stijn Celis' 2013 contemporary telling — was a thrillingly grounded young woman in white shirt, shorts and shoes.

Holly Harris covers the Royal Winnipeg Ballet's production in more detail in her Winnipeg report, and we investigate two more *R and J*'s in the review section: Ballet du Grand Théâtre de Genève's version by Joëlle Bouvier, reviewed on tour in Victoria, Canada, by Robin Miller; and the Royal Ballet of Flanders' version by Slava Samodurov, seen in Gent, Belgium, by Judith Delmé, who drove up for the show from her home in Antwerp.

**Too many *Romeo and Juliets* for one issue?  
Maybe, but ballet does passion so well!**

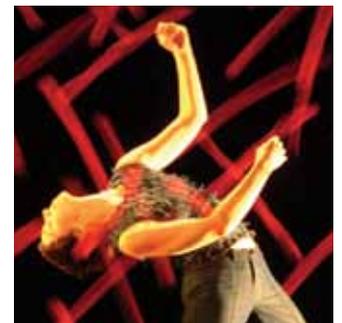
Have any Shakespearean ballets come your way in 2014, the 450th anniversary year of the Bard's birth?

I know I'd go to another *Romeo and Juliet* in a heartbeat!

*Kaija*

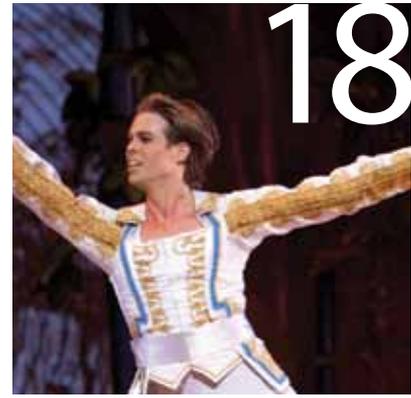
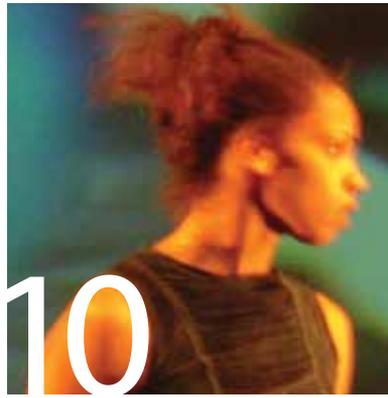
Kaija Pepper  
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Catherine Viau in Ginette  
Laurin's *Passare*  
Photo: Ginette Laurin



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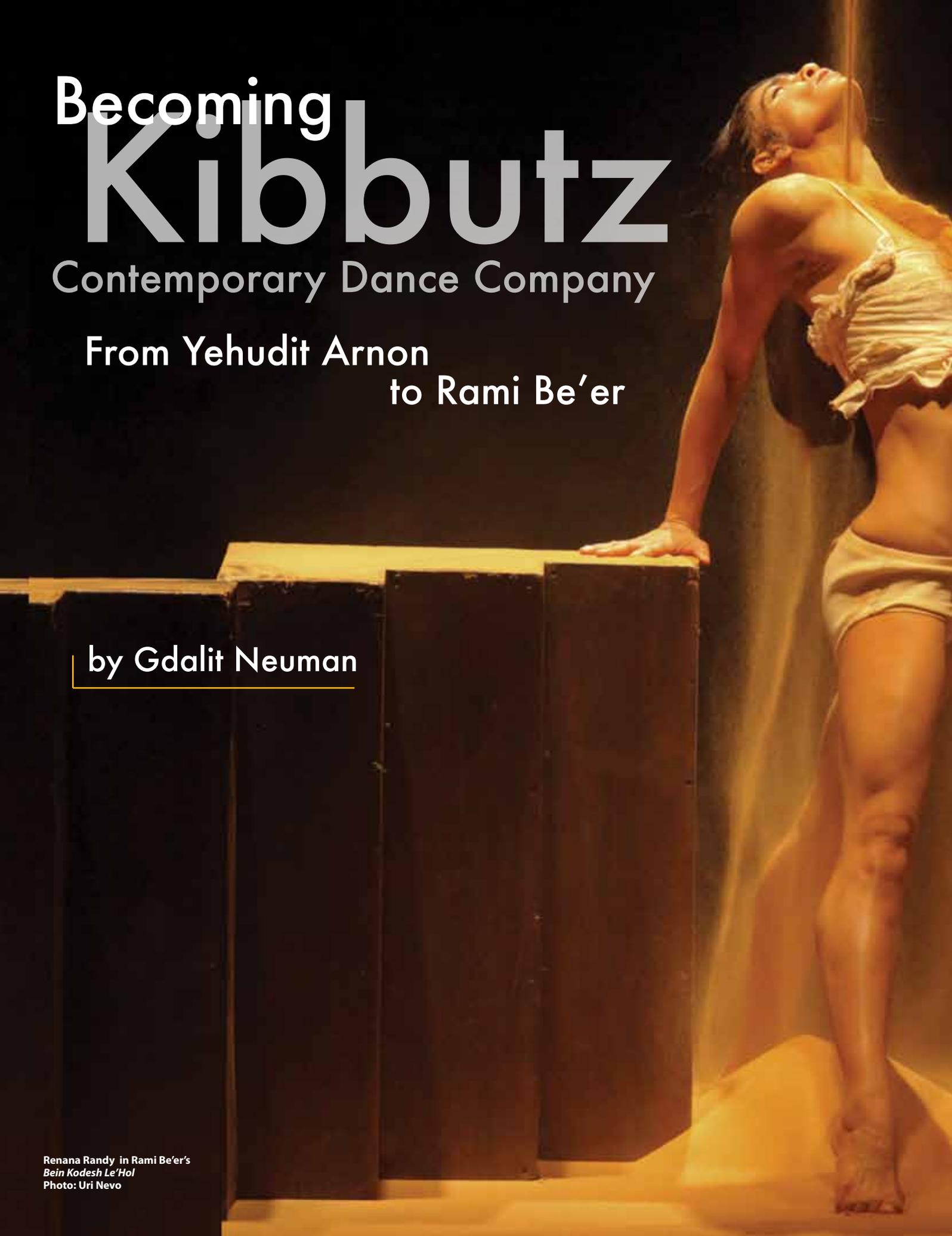
La Monarca  
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# Becoming Kibbutz

Contemporary Dance Company

From Yehudit Arnon  
to Rami Be'er

by Gdalit Neuman



Rami Be'er and  
Yehudit Arnon  
Photo: Courtesy of  
Yehudit Arnon Archive



Kibbutz Contemporary Dance Company operates out of tiny and remote Kibbutz Ga'aton in the Western Galilee of northern Israel, a stone's throw away from neighbouring Lebanon to the north. Kibbutzim (plural for kibbutz) are traditionally agricultural collective settlements that were fundamental to the Zionist ideology of settling the land in the periphery of the country, thus dictating the borders of the newly established state of Israel.

Over the years, Kibbutz Contemporary Dance Company — one of Israel's most established dance groups — has functioned under several names and only two artistic directors. The story of how the first, Yehudit Arnon — who received the Israel Prize in 1998 and passed away in August 2013 at the age of 87 — founded KCDC is closely tied to the Israeli Kibbutz Movement, which, from the beginning of the 20th century, was tremendously active in the production of new Israeli culture. The arts were highly valued and well developed, and Kibbutz Ga'aton — which Arnon helped found in 1948 — was, in particular, home to many artists.

Arnon was interested in developing modern dance activities on the kibbutz and she honed her expertise by travelling to Haifa, the closest major city, to study with important Israeli dance artists Gertrud Kraus, Mia Arbatova and Yardena Cohen. She was confronted with some resistance to her work as the socialist kibbutz ideology favoured folk dance, in which everyone could participate no matter their talent or skill level. Eventually, Arnon managed to convince her kibbutz of the importance of modern dance, which she taught along with her usual kibbutz duties. In 1959, she formed the Ga'aton Dance Company, which represented the Kibbutz Artzi, a national movement, and was exclusive to kibbutz members from all over Israel.

"The original company members were only Kibbutznikim [members of kibbutzim]," recalls Noa Kaplunik, a Ga'aton native. "After I returned to dance with the company, following army service, there was already a framework in place whereby professional dancers [from the kibbutzim] were allocated three days in which to dance." For the remainder of the week, the eight company dancers were integrated into various agricultural jobs on their kibbutzim.

In 1970, the group was renamed Inter-Kibbutz Dance Company, which a few years later became Kibbutz Dance Company. Under Arnon's leadership, the company developed a unique repertoire that featured her choreography as well as that of leading Israeli dance artists such as Oshra Elkayam and Hedda Oren. *Three*, choreographed in 1979 by Arnon, showcased the bold physicality of three of her male dancers. The fact that they were also farmers and soldiers in addition to being professional dancers was not overlooked by the audience, who appreciated this specifically Israeli circumstance. It contributed to a unique muscular aesthetic, associated with the demands of kibbutz life, which distinguished Kibbutz Dance Company from others working at the time. A powerful and daring movement vocabulary is still a signature of the group today.



Etai Peri in Rami Be'er's  
*Aide Memoire*  
Photo: Uri Nevo

Arnon brought Israel's finest teachers and choreographers to the kibbutz, and she didn't stop there. In the 1980s, she invited the most distinguished international choreographers to work with them. Jirí Kylián set *La Cathédrale Engloutie* and *Stoolgame* on the company in 1980 and 1982 respectively. Mats Ek staged *Down North* in 1986 and *Fireplace* in 1987. In 1989, Ek agreed to set his *Soweto* free of charge, on the condition that Arnon herself dance the role of Mother Earth. That was the year the company's name changed once more to the one it goes by today: Kibbutz Contemporary Dance Company. Other major choreographers who have worked with them include Susanne Linke, Anna Sokolow and Kei Takei.

By the time Arnon retired in 1996, she had not only succeeded

in creating a professional modern dance company in rural and remote Israel, but she had raised generations of dancers along the way, some of whom are currently well-respected choreographers in their own right, both in Israel and abroad. Arnon's successor, Rami Be'er, is a perfect example.

Be'er was born on Kibbutz Ga'aton. His parents were among the settlement's founders. Be'er's father, an architect by trade, designed Kibbutz Ga'aton's communal dining hall, today one of Kibbutz Contemporary Dance Company's largest dance studios. Growing up in a family of musicians, Be'er studied the cello and took dance classes with Arnon. "She identified my potential and knew how to develop it," Be'er told me during an interview when I visited Ga'aton this past November. Following army service, he joined the company in 1981 and in addition to dancing, was drawn to choreography early on.

Under Be'er's directorship, Kibbutz Contemporary Dance Company has undergone significant changes. Importantly, he opened up auditions to dancers from all over Israel and the world, not only the kibbutzim. "I spoke to Yehudit about opening it up to all dancers. It was logical. With such a small population to choose from, the selection was too limited." This evolution reflects the privatization trend of kibbutzim all over the country, which began in the 1980s, and during which the kibbutz's entire ethos was put into question. Be'er's first full-length work, *Real Time* (1991), explores these tensions.

Never one to shy away from difficult themes, several of Be'er's pieces tackle key Israeli issues. In *Reservist's Diary* (1989), he used Israeli writer Zvika Sternfeld's poetry to help articulate a soldier's inner struggle. Sternfeld's poem describes the tone of the work: "it is unclear ... who is chasing, who's chasing after whom and who's the one being chased after; the chase itself is what rules." Be'er's provocative work presented a mirror onto Israeli society at a time when political tensions had reached a boiling point.

Be'er is the first to recognize the influence his environment has on the work he produces. "I believe that, in one way or another, we are all the product of the landscape of our childhood and our homeland," he told me. "I research ideas that concern me and that relate to our existence and our experience as human beings. There is great power in dance and art to build bridges between cultures and nations and, in a modest way, make the world a better place in which to live. Not that art and dance can change the world in that [they] can [directly] affect politics or society, but the individual audience member can leave a performance with more questions and points of reflections than they had going in."

The company's current repertoire is substantial and diverse. In addition to work by guest choreographers, Be'er's contribution includes more than 50 pieces. Perhaps the most iconic of these is *Aide Memoire*, which he choreographed in 1994 while still under the tutelage of Arnon. In this work, Be'er contemplates his own experience as a child of Holocaust survivors. The silence that surrounded family histories and the pain that was nonetheless tangible characterize Israeli collective memory. His latest creation, *Undivided Void* (2013), premiered at the Israel Festival in Jerusalem. Here, Be'er illuminates our aspirations for completeness in our lives, for what is whole and what is missing. He investigates relationships: the individual within, partnerships, the individual versus the group, the individual versus society.

When describing his role as choreographer, Be'er uses the image of a sponge that soaks up many different elements as sources for inspiration: music, sound, design, plastic arts, nature, people,

animals and movement itself. These ideas, according to Be'er, pass through a prism and float, until they manifest in the studio through movement exploration and a unique collaboration with the dancers.

Bold physicality, theatricality and sensitive musicality characterize Be'er's choreography. Often described by Israeli dance scholars as a "complete artist," Be'er's creative choices encompass all aspects of the production, including elaborate set design, lighting and costuming. He often incorporates props into his choreography, such as giant pears and moving bleachers in *Real Time*, and sand in *Bein Kodesh Le'Hol* (Between Sacred and Secular). His titles are poetic and many times incorporate double meanings in Hebrew. An example is *Haser Ha-Shalem*, which literally translates to The Missing Whole, though its English title is *Undivided Void*.

Today, Kibbutz Contemporary Dance Company is a multifaceted organization. The main company presents Be'er's repertoire both nationally and internationally. The second company, KCDC 2,

performs locally, and a third troupe specializes in programs designed for children. The International Dance Village of Kibbutz Ga'aton, where the dance company is based, also hosts a regional dance school and workshops for advanced dancers, as well as long-term programs and summer intensives for international students. Additionally, the company is involved in community outreach initiatives such as workshops for at-risk youth, new immigrants and people with special needs. Company members teach movement workshops in public schools and work with young dancers from surrounding Arab villages. Dance workshops for adults, tours, seminars and performances are regular occurrences in the International Dance Village.

Kibbutz Contemporary Dance Company continues to be relevant to global audiences by exposing universal themes, all the while representing something particularly local and Israeli. And, yes, even Rami Be'er worked in agriculture while dancing professionally for the company in those early days. "I worked in the avocado grove," recalls Be'er with a smile. ▼

## YEHUDIT ARNON'S REMARKABLE JOURNEY

Jewish Diaspora as a reaction to the Zionist movement, which propagated a return to Israel and the creation of a Jewish national homeland.

In June 1944, after six years of Nazi occupation over Czechoslovakia, Arnon and her parents were sent to Auschwitz concentration camp in Poland. She was immediately separated from her parents and taken to work along with the other young people. Arnon entertained the 1,000 women in her barrack by performing acrobatics, pantomime and dance, thus providing them with a few moments of escape. The Nazis soon heard of her talents, and Arnon was summoned to perform for them during their Christmas party in December 1944. When she refused, the Nazis tied her up and left her to freeze outside for several hours, wearing only a thin dress. It was then that Arnon decided to dedicate the rest of her life to dance, should she survive the war.

Following liberation in 1945, Arnon worked in Budapest at a camp for child Holocaust survivors run by Hashomer Hatzair (The Young Guard) Zionist youth movement. One of her greatest achievements was orchestrating a dance pageant for 350 children, called the Pageant of Victory. While in Budapest, Arnon spent a few intense days with Irena Dückstein, who was the dean of the Faculty of Movement Arts at the Budapest Academy of Physical Education, and had worked with Kurt Jooss, the founding father of German tanztheater.

Arnon, accompanied by Yedidya Arnon, who was soon to be her husband, left Budapest with 100 child Holocaust survivors from various countries of origin. Two years later, in 1948, they arrived in Israel, joining their friends from Hashomer Hatzair once more. Soon they were among the founding members of Kibbutz Ga'aton.

— GDALIT NEUMAN



Yehudit Arnon was born Yehudit Schischa-Halevy in 1926 in Komárno, Czechoslovakia (today's Slovakia) into an orthodox Jewish Hungarian family. Her older siblings played music and she demonstrated a natural gift for movement from an early age, but was not allowed to take formal dance lessons due to the emphasis placed on modesty in the Jewish religious tradition. Instead, Arnon attended popular Zionist youth movement activities, where she participated in folk dancing. These groups, which were both social and political in nature, sprang up throughout the

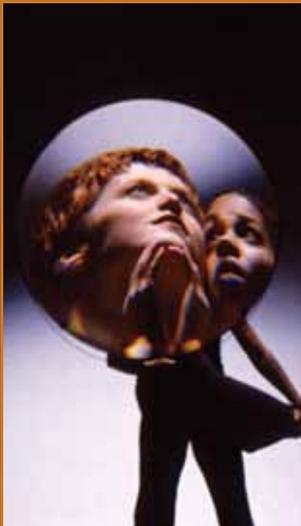
# Mapping Ginette Laurin's 30 years at O Vertigo



Mélanie Demers in  
*La résonance du double*  
(Installation #5: Le fantôme)  
Photo: Ginette Laurin



*La Vie Qui Bat*  
Photo: Guy Borremans



Anna Riede and Mélanie  
Demers in *Luna*  
Photo: Benoit Aquin



Wen-Shuan Yang in *KHAOS*  
Photo: Laurent Paillier



# Journey to *Soif*

by Paula Citron



Audrey Bergeron and  
Robert Meilleur in *Soif*  
Photo: Ginette Laurin

Background: Mélanie  
Demers in *Passare*  
Photo: Ginette Laurin



It is 1986 and Vancouver's Expo is in full swing. Montreal choreographer Ginette Laurin and her O Vertigo Danse have just debuted her latest skewering of pop culture called *Chevy Dream*. Onstage is a vintage Chevrolet, which a male and female dancer athletically manoeuvre over, around, under and through. Although O Vertigo is only two years old, Laurin has made such a splash on the Montreal dance scene that *Chevy Dream* is an Expo commission.

Flash forward to 1992. The set of *La Chambre Blanche* is a monolithic white room, with a roof, walls and cornices, all in realistic detail. The confined space evokes, at different times, a bedroom, a mental hospital, even a fortress. It is a haunting piece about the marginalized, the dispossessed and the mentally ill — a drastic shift from the lighter *Chevy Dream*.

Skip to the present day, and Laurin is working on something entirely new. Her upcoming piece *Soif*, which means “thirst,” reflects Laurin's own thirst for creating choreography her way.

In the intervening years, Laurin, who turned 59 in January, has become a formidable Canadian dance icon with a much-lauded international reputation, whose works have been performed on four continents. This year is also a milestone because O Vertigo is celebrating its 30th season. With the benefit of hindsight, it is clear that Laurin's glittering career has been built on a carefully plotted series of creative stepping stones. The route from *Chevy Dream* to *La Chambre Blanche* to *Soif* represents a choreographer carving her own distinct pathway.

Jim Smith, producer of Vancouver's DanceHouse series, says: “Ginette is all about integrity and authenticity. The world may change around her, but she has always been true to herself.”

Before Laurin was a choreographer, she was a sensational dancer, blessed with a petite body of enormous strength that could propel through space with breathtaking speed. The seeds of her dance career began in gymnastics when she was eight. With no dance classes in her small town (Le Gardeur, about an hour east of Montreal), gymnastics was the only activity available for the hyperactive child. Laurin explains that her company name, O Vertigo, comes from a nervous disease that causes excessive movement in horses. “I used to jump around so much when I was younger,” she says, “that my mother complained I suffered from vertigo.”

Laurin picked up ballet and modern dance classes at Les Grands Ballets Canadiens when she was 15. Although she loved dance, it was never meant to be a career. After high school, she enrolled in a pure science course at a Montreal college, hoping for a future in genetics. Her life changed, however, when she saw an ad in the paper offering professional training for dancers, which is how Laurin, at 18, joined Montreal's modern dance Le Groupe Nouvelle Aire. The company was a hotbed of creativity that produced a whole generation of rugged dance individualists, among them Paul-André Fortier, Louise Lecavalier, Daniel Léveillé, Édouard Lock and Laurin.

After five years as an independent dancer/choreographer, in 1983 she and Léveillé formed Léveillé Laurin Danse. When that relationship ended, Laurin founded O Vertigo Danse, in 1984. “I had never planned to have a company,” she says, “but

I discovered it was a great tool. I could explore my own choreographic ideas with dancers that were with me for a set period of time. I could work with scenographers and composers. Having a company turned out to be a great gift.”

Almost from the onset, O Vertigo began touring both nationally and internationally, which makes Laurin’s personal life all the more surprising. Her marriage to Mario Ouellette when she was 22 produced two sons, Simon, an industrial mechanic, now 36, and Remi, 32, a dancer/choreographer. A third son, actor Samuel, 24, came from her liaison with company dancer Kenneth Gould. How did Laurin run a company and raise a family at the same time? “I had kids because I wanted them,” she explains. “In fact, I couldn’t see myself without children. It was very complicated to do both, but possible.”

It’s significant that on the O Vertigo website, the section devoted to Laurin’s choreography begins with *La Chambre Blanche*. Of obvious interest, then, is what caused her choreographic shift in the 1990s, with its move away from short, ironic, humorous works with their daredevil, risk-taking physicality, to large scale, full-length, abstract epics that tackled weighty philosophical and psychological themes.

According to Laurin, there were several drivers. “Initially, I was fascinated by U.S. pop culture,” she says, “but having children introduced a sense of seriousness into my life. The big themes of the human condition — love, life and death

the world meditation built around the element of water, *En Dedans* (1997), which featured state-of-the-art mobile lighting while presenting the secret world of the senses, and *La Vie Qui Bat* (1999), an awesome sound and light show of brute force set to composer Steve Reich’s *Drumming*. The works of the 1990s also reflected Laurin’s growing interest in the fusion of technology and dance. Says Laurin: “I wanted the dance and the environment to be of equal importance. For me, dance is three-dimensional. I work with movement, time and space. My large dance works are more like cinema than stage productions.”

By the 2000s, Laurin’s choreography was becoming more spiritual and interior, and the sets more minimal. The death of partner Bernard Côté in 2001 from cancer introduced a darker tone to her work. At the same time, these works were dominated by a more complex use of science and technology.

*Luna* (2001), a musing on the mysteries of the night, featured cameras installed beneath the dancers’ dresses that projected images on a screen from an unusual perspective. The set included large standing magnifying glasses that distorted the dancers as they passed behind. The multimedia *Passare* (2004), a melancholy treatise on memory, was notable for its complex relationships between live cameras and previously shot film. In *Onde de Choc* (2010), the body as a machine was depicted through hidden microphones that captured breathing, heartbeats and the sound of feet on a wooden floor.

## Her upcoming piece *Soif*, which means “thirst,” reflects Laurin’s own thirst for creating choreography her way.

— are all connected with being a parent.” Laurin also became interested in collaborating with other artists, particularly in exploring the images that could be evoked with the added theatricality of sets, lighting and music. “I didn’t want to create choreographies with a strong message,” she explains. “Rather, I wanted to create impressionistic pieces that allow the spectators to write their own stories.”

The giddy, virtuoso mayhem of her early works is characterized with what Laurin calls accessories, like the chair in *Olé* and the car in *Chevy Dream*. “I was experimenting with how props impact on how we move in space,” she says. Both *Chagall* (1988) and *Don Quichotte* (1989) contain more complex sets and lighting. In the former, the dancers as couples seem to fly through the air over the whimsical Russian village below. In the latter, inspired by Picasso’s famous painting, they ride four gymnastic horses with a wild fury and a flamenco flavour.

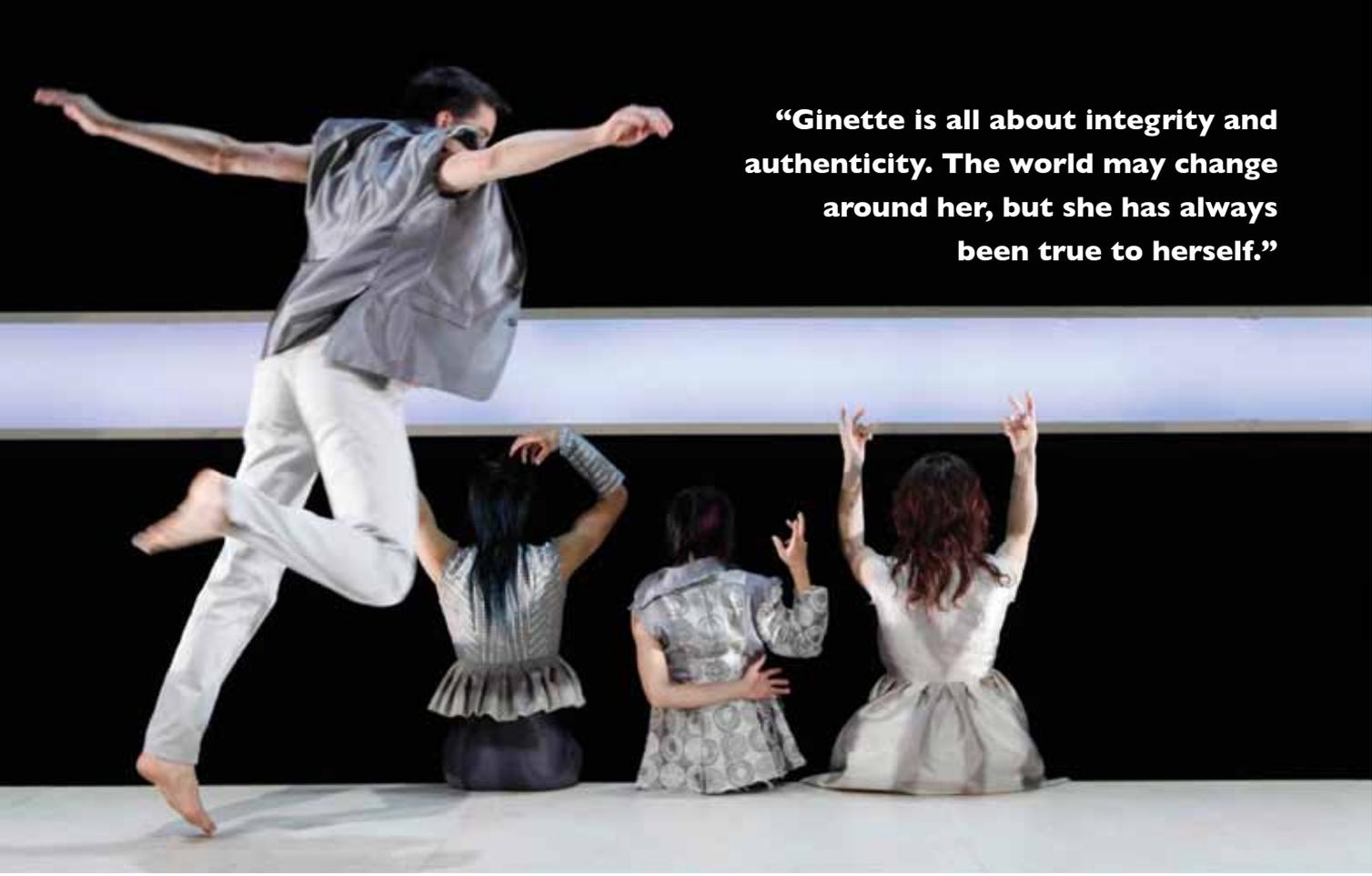
*Train d’enfer/Broken Wings* (1990) was Laurin’s first full-length piece and a genuine attempt to create theatrical characters with a deeper delving into drama and emotion. Gone are humour, satire and whimsy. Instead, nine dancers surrounded by suitcases explore the terrifying world that lies between the known and the unknown. Says Laurin: “I wanted to get closer to the fragility of humankind, and to play with that beauty.”

*La Chambre Blanche* was a logical follow-up to *Train d’enfer* with its focus on the isolation that produces craziness, boredom and promiscuity. It opened the doors to the massive productions that would follow, such as *Déluge* (1994), an end of

Standing out from these high-tech works were two pieces that showed Laurin’s growing predilection to put the human condition front and centre. *Angels* (2006) was an intimate portrait of the dancers and their personalities, dreams and fantasies, while *Étude #3 Pour Cordes et Poulies* (2007) was an obstacle course of ropes and pulleys that allowed Laurin to focus on the vulnerability of the dancers in the face of external forces they did not control. They can be seen as precursors to Laurin’s last piece.

*Khaos* (2012) certainly contained technology, with the sound and lights activated by the dancers’ own movements. Of interest here, however, was Laurin’s surprise foray into social commentary with images of oppression, border zones, jails and refugee camps. A specially designed computer system linked all the elements together and the cacophony of sound represented the tensions in today’s society. Clothilde Cardinal, co-producer of Montreal’s *Danse Danse* series, says: “Ginette continues to surprise us. *Khaos* actually showed a more socially engaged choreographer with its reference to the Arab Spring.”

Laurin’s new work *Soif*, which will debut in the fall, treats the word thirst on a broad level — a thirst for something new, or a desire to go further. The stage will be completely empty with the prime focus on the movement of the body. For the first time, Laurin is creating to music, to a score by Michel F. Côté. Also new is her work with impulse, the beginning of an action that becomes a phrase. Says Laurin: “There is nothing between me and the dancers.”



**“Ginette is all about integrity and authenticity. The world may change around her, but she has always been true to herself.”**

While her production focus might have changed over the years, Laurin’s choreographic signatures have remained a constant. When asked to describe her style, Laurin says that she’s attracted to movement that displays both fragility and strength at the same time, and which is expressed through agitated and unco-ordinated phrases, detailed gestures, specific body language and intricate footwork. Critics tend to agree with Laurin’s own assessment that her finest moments in any piece are her duets with their inventive partnering.

As she points out, her movement style at the beginning of her career was dynamic physicality. Now she sees her vocabulary as more refined and less acrobatic because she is more interested in interpretation. Cathy Levy, dance producer for Ottawa’s National Arts Centre, describes Laurin’s choreographic language as tricky, layered, muscular and precise. Says Levy: “Ginette creates opportunities for dancers to explore the limits of their physicality.”

And from Montreal dance writer/filmmaker Philip Szporer: “There is a psychological dimension alongside her probing physical focus on the body. Ginette, in her work, seems to answer the question, How do you choreograph in a troubled world?”

As for her dancers, first and foremost they talk about the incredible physical demands of Laurin’s movement vocabulary. James Phillips is in his fifth season with O Vertigo. He stresses the deep collaboration between Laurin and the dancers. “Ginette’s choreography doesn’t come easy,” he says, “because it’s one movement after another, action upon action upon action. You have to be superhuman.” Robert Meilleur has spent 14

years as an O Vertigo dancer. “In earlier days, we created more theatrical characters,” he explains. “Now Ginette is getting closer to the body. Her work is more raw. She is more interested in the human within the body.”

Mélanie Demers, now a well-known Montreal choreographer in her own right, spent eight years with O Vertigo. She describes Laurin’s creative process as experimentation. “Ginette would have us create shapes, and then we had to figure out the movement between the shapes. This gave the dancers a lot of freedom. She never talked to us about what the pieces were about. We discovered meaning by living inside the work. Ginette wanted instinct over brain.”

Thirty years on, Laurin is no longer the trailblazer who helped stamp Montreal as a recognized dance hub and to define Quebec and Canadian dance for the rest of the world. In fact, Laurin is very realistic as to her current standing in the dance firmament. “O Vertigo still has a place,” she says. “We may no longer be avant-garde, but we’re respected. We can still play big theatres. We have a following.” Laurin’s forays into filmmaking, photography and art-gallery installations are a direct result of her need for new challenges. She also plans to accept more commissions from both other companies and independent dancers.

When asked to summarize her career, Laurin states: “I’ve always been more of a freestyle choreographer, preferring to work on projects. I’ve been doing this for over 30 years, but I’m still researching new ideas. I’m continually developing my creative process. I’m proud that I resisted turning dance into a recipe for success by repeating myself.” ▼

“O Vertigo is celebrating its 30th anniversary this year, and I’d like it to go on for another 10, 20 or 30 years, eventually maybe without me. It’s pertinent now to think about preparing the next generation by sharing our resources and bringing in next-generation artists.”

— Ginette Laurin



## The Administration of Space



## O Vertigo’s Creation Centre

by Victor Swoboda

O Vertigo’s move into a cavernous space in Montreal’s Place des Arts in 2005 was a two-edged sword. Its main thrust aimed at establishing the well-regarded company in a superbly equipped, spacious studio within Quebec’s most prestigious performing venue. At the same time, company founder Ginette Laurin took aim at another target — opening a Centre de Création or Creation Centre that would welcome visiting choreographers, host dance workshops and foster choreographic research.

The idea had been ticking away in Laurin’s mind for years.

“We had a research lab at our former studio that offered instructional courses, but the place wasn’t designed for labs. My wish was to develop this more here,” said Laurin, seated in her tidy, well-organized Place des Arts office, one of several O Vertigo offices that adjoin the dance studio. “Our new space was more or less designed with both O Vertigo and the Creation Centre in mind. It’s designed for lighting research, for film work, and it’s really well equipped acoustically and in terms of lighting.”

During the first three years, eight labs were held.

“We did labs with architects dealing with spatial concerns, on sound with acoustical engineers, on lighting with German lighting engineer Pipon, and with French choreographer Christian Rizzo,” says Laurin. “Sometimes the labs involved our dancers and sometimes outside dancers who would put on an informal show in the studio.”

The Creation Centre has also offered two-week residencies to a host of choreographers, beginning in the first year, 2005, with Danièle Desnoyers, founder/choreographer of Montreal-based Le Carré des Lombes. Subsequent years have generally seen about four choreographers in residence annually. Almost all have been Quebec-based dancemakers either in the early or middle part of their careers. A few choreographers from outside the province have come, too, such as Dana Gingras, then one-half of Vancouver’s Holy Body Tattoo, and Heidi Strauss from Toronto. So far, there has been only one international residency, Antje Pfundtner of Germany. Laurin would like to see a stronger foreign presence.

“I’ve talked with Place des Arts about collaborating in bringing in foreigners. The *Danse Danse* series brings foreign shows to Place des Arts and maybe after their shows, they could stay a big longer and collaborate with us.”

Laurin made a clear distinction between the labs and residencies.

“Residency allows a choreographer to do whatever they want. If they like, I can come and offer my comments, but sometimes they simply want to be alone to finish their new work. In the labs, my dancers and I are really implicated in the artist’s work. In the last couple of years, the labs that were offered had links to O Vertigo’s creations. They were less open to totally free research.”

For its first several years, the Creation Centre also held a variety of workshops led by local choreographers. Regulars included Montreal’s most prominent proponent of improvisation, Andrew de L. Harwood. O Vertigo, too, often held workshops. But in the last few years, the sole workshops offered were technique classes by the Quebec dance organization, Regroupement Québécois de la danse.

Laurin believes that arts councils are not providing enough support for creative research.

“I would certainly like to emphasize research more. It’s really important to invite artists from all disciplines to come and collaborate,” she says. “Our artists have a wide range of interests dealing with images — photo, video, digital, lighting

lighting. We need these kinds of centres,” says Poulin-Denis, who has also held creative residencies in Berlin and Vancouver.

Laurin admits that her initial dream of a Creation Centre has been only partially fulfilled.

“The idea was to maximize the use of the space. I had hoped to finance the Centre as a separate entity, but the arts councils didn’t like that idea. The councils wanted subsidies to go to O Vertigo, who would in turn develop the Centre. But we didn’t get enough money for that. This limited the scope of our activity. So, unfortunately, for lack of money, we haven’t attained our goals and created a self-standing centre. We’ve tried to develop self-financing activities like instructional courses, but it hasn’t been possible to offer self-sustaining labs.”

Laurin has looked for other ways to exploit the studio. Attempts to rent the high-ceilinged, 3,800-square-foot studio for corporate events, receptions and film shoots have had little success. Although the studio’s setting is unique and its location in downtown Montreal is ideal, the studio is often unavailable during the day or for longer periods, which makes it unattractive to renters.

Other Montreal companies and studios are sharing or renting their facilities, too. In complete contrast to O Vertigo’s windowless, black-box studio are the airy, sun-filled, second-floor studios of Compagnie Marie Chouinard, which occupy a beautifully renovated school building in the shadow of Mount Royal. Circuit-Est operates two separate studio locations,

## **“Residency allows a choreographer to do whatever they want. If they like, I can come and offer my comments, but sometimes they simply want to be alone to finish their new work.”**

techniques — and with different ways to create movement. In our recent works, our team has had to master how to transfer the material into digital forms. Now the lighting and sound in our shows are computer managed. With a setup like ours, we can take time to master the techniques and invite specialists.”

Indeed, the studio has an impressive array of sound and lighting equipment, including a separate video recording and editing room, which visiting artists may use. Visiting choreographers are allowed use of the studio, the equipment, and dressing and shower rooms, and can receive mentoring from Laurin if they so desire.

Choreographers in residence are responsible for paying their dancers and for any other costs related to their production. There can be unexpected additional costs, too.

“I had to pay a technician to uninstall O Vertigo’s lighting setup and then re-install it after I’d finished, which was an added expense,” relates Montreal dancer/choreographer Jacques Poulin-Denis, who had a residency in 2011. “Plus I had access to the studio only during business hours. If someone wants to work in the evening, they have to pay for the security guard.”

Poulin-Denis recalls that after his application was accepted, he had to wait a few months before finally getting word about when his residency would begin. For a choreographer trying to organize a group of dancers, such a delay can be annoying.

“Despite some frustrations, I’m still very grateful and, in the end, I was happy to work there. It’s a great setup, fantastic

including the former home base of the late choreographer Jean-Pierre Perrault in a renovated church. The size and height of the church studio along with its sophisticated technical setup rival O Vertigo’s.

Laurin is considering changing the residency format. Instead of a two-week residency for individuals, she is toying with the idea of naming a creative collective of artists who would have access to the space when it’s available for a period of one year. In this way, artists would have more time to fulfill their projects.

For the time being, residency applications are considered twice a year by a committee that includes Laurin, O Vertigo’s general director, a veteran company dancer and the rehearsal mistress. Information about applying can be found at [www.overtigo.com](http://www.overtigo.com). The number of residencies each year depends on the studio’s availability. During O Vertigo’s creation year, 2011, there was only one residency. In 2013, there were only two.

“We try to choose artists with whom we feel some kind of affinity,” says Laurin. “I think residencies are important for the next generation and we’ve been able to help young choreographers in whom I have a lot of faith. O Vertigo is celebrating its 30th anniversary this year, and I’d like it to go on for another 10, 20 or 30 years, eventually maybe without me. It’s pertinent now to think about preparing the next generation by sharing our resources and bringing in next-generation artists.” ▼

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# A Rare Breed

Danseur noble Matthew Golding on the world stage

by Michael Crabb



Matthew Golding in Dutch National Ballet's *Nutcracker*  
Photo: Angela Sterling

Call them the ones that got away: Canadian-born exemplars of that rarest of ballet species, the danseur noble, who've ended up somewhere else.

It's not entirely a new phenomenon. Think of Montreal-born Wayne Eagling or before him Winnipegger David Adams — though he at least devoted the early part of his professional career to his homeland. Not so with a more recent generation of emigrants such as Jason Reilly and Evan McKie, both stars of Stuttgart Ballet whose director, Reid Anderson, also happens to be Canadian. Now add to the list a handsome, almost six-footer who turns like a top, jumps like a gazelle, partners superbly and speaks nobility with every muscle and bone in his body.

His name is Matthew Golding and although the Regina-born 28-year-old has won critical acclaim across Europe, it was only last November that he finally made his official professional debut in Canada as a guest of the National Ballet, partnering senior company principal Greta Hodgkinson in two performances of *Swan Lake*. And even that happened almost by chance.

National Ballet of Canada artistic director Karen Kain has many fine male dancers in her company, but only a handful have the combination of technique, stature and elegant bearing to be a convincing classical ballet prince. The retirement from princely roles of Hodgkinson's frequent partner Aleksandar Antonijevic and the approach of a season loaded with *Swan Lake* performances meant Kain needed to find Hodgkinson a partner from the outside. It was the ballerina herself who suggested Golding.

In January 2013, the two, each lacking a suitable partner, had

have followed a typical Saskatchewan lad's dream to become a hockey star. Warned off all contact sports, Golding instead set his sights on musical theatre, but discovered his voice was not equal to his Broadway aspirations. Following a cousin's example, he found an outlet for childhood energy at the Sitter School of Dance in Saskatoon, where his family had resettled. "It was mostly tap and jazz with some ballet," says Golding, "but I guess I must have shown potential and Eloise Sitter really taught me how to perform."

Feeling the need to advance, at age 11 Golding moved to another Saskatoon academy, La Danse School of Dance Arts, where he came to the attention of Hazel-Ann Stark. "She was really my first ballet teacher," Golding recalls fondly. Stark has equally warm memories of young Matt.

"He's probably the most natural dancer I've ever taught, boy or girl," says Stark. "He has instinctive musicality."

She also remembers him as a delightful person, a description that's followed Golding into adulthood.

"He was always a really great kid," says Stark, "polite, enthusiastic and friendly. He always had lots of respect, but also this burning desire to get ahead. But he's always stayed in touch and would come visit when he was home. He even still wants my opinion!" No surprise that Stark journeyed to Toronto to see Golding dance. "I felt so proud of how far he's come."

With strong support from his mother, a nurse, and from his elementary school-teaching father, Golding entered the Royal Winnipeg Ballet School in 1999 at age 14. By that Christmas

## His guest engagements have since taken him across Russia, including the Mariinsky, and to leading European companies, including the Royal Ballet and English National Ballet.

been paired to dance the *Giselle* Act II pas de deux for a *Ballet's Greatest Hits* video produced by the Youth America Grand Prix. Hodgkinson knew little about Golding, but discovered that he'd spent a year in the professional division of the Royal Winnipeg Ballet School. Hodgkinson consulted her friend, former Royal Winnipeg Ballet prima Evelyn Hart, who'd been following Golding's blossoming career. Reassured, Hodgkinson flew to Tampa for the shoot and quickly found that Golding was a partner made in heaven.

"We'd never met," says Hodgkinson, "and only had three whirlwind days of rehearsal, but everything just clicked. Matthew is simply a wonderful partner, so attentive and so attuned to what a ballerina needs."

Reunited for *Swan Lake* in Toronto, Hodgkinson and Golding's stage chemistry made for a dazzling performance. And then he flew back to the other side of the Atlantic, leaving Toronto ballet fans wondering if there might not be a way to keep him around.

Alas, there is not. On February 22 Golding made an earlier-than-scheduled debut as a member of Britain's Royal Ballet, stepping in for the injured Rupert Pennefather to partner Lauren Cuthbertson in *The Sleeping Beauty*.

Where Matthew Golding is concerned, the ballet world should be grateful for a circumstance that by any other standard would be considered a grave personal misfortune. At age seven, Golding had to have a defective kidney removed. But for that, he might

he'd earned his first created role performing Julien in the Royal Winnipeg Ballet's new Nina Menon/Galina Yordanova production of *The Nutcracker*. The premiere was at the National Arts Centre in Ottawa.

"There's quite a bit of real dancing for Julien," says the Winnipeg company's artistic director André Lewis. "Matthew danced it extremely well."

Like Hart, Lewis has kept an eye on Golding and they remain in contact. "In every way, he really is quite extraordinary," says Lewis.

Hart recalls watching Golding in class. "At that time he was a mini blueprint of a danseur noble — tall, handsome, lithe, musical and an extraordinary turner. Watching him, one simply knew he was in a unique category of talent."

Feeling a need for more intense training, Golding moved in 2000 to Washington, D.C., to study under Russian masters at the Kirov Academy, a North American outpost of the famed Vaganova institution in St. Petersburg.

Says Golding: "I always had this feeling inside that I wanted to travel to learn from different people. The academy had a strong group of boys and allowed me to learn Russian discipline."

As Golding relates, however, his by-the-book Russian teachers were not as supportive as he'd hoped. They discouraged him from entering the 2002 Prix de Lausanne, a top-level international contest for dancers between ages 15 and 18 that historically has been a career booster for those who do well.



“They told me I had no chance of winning, but I was a young eager kid and just knew I had to advance myself, so I went anyway. I even had to make up my own solo and I’m no choreographer.”

A 16-year-old Golding disproved his teachers by winning a \$14,000 scholarship in Lausanne. Still ignoring his unhelpful teachers, Golding then entered himself in the Youth America Grand Prix in New York. He won the top prize.

The scholarship allowed Golding to study in London at the famed Royal Ballet School where he got his first glimpse of a ballerina who was to figure more significantly in his life than he imagined — Tamara Rojo, then a Royal Ballet principal. He remembers being assigned a walk-on role in *Swan Lake* and watching Rojo and Carlos Acosta burn the stage. “I never imagined I’d be dancing with her one day,” says Golding.

He graduated top of his class, then crossed the Atlantic again to enter American Ballet Theatre’s junior Studio Company. It was then directed by John Meehan, in his dancing days not unlike Golding in his ability to combine elegance with excitement. Golding had always set his sights on American Ballet Theatre and joined the main company in 2005. Three years later, Golding was hired by American Ballet Theatre star Angel Corella for a touring troupe he’d established in his native Spain.

“Angel needed a tall guy who could partner his tall sister,” says Golding almost self-deprecatingly. His first show was a gala performance for Queen Sofia.

Although Golding says his time with Corella’s company was a valuable learning experience, after a year he was ready to move on and was looking for a more settled professional base. He’d already made contact with Het Nationale Ballet director Ted Brandsen at

Youth America Grand Prix and parted with a “if you’re ever looking for a job, call me” invitation.

“So, I resigned from Angel’s company and drove up to Amsterdam,” Golding recounts. “Ted said he didn’t have anything for me at that moment so I said, ‘Well, I’ll take Stuttgart.’ Reid Anderson had already made me an offer. Then Ted found me an opening.”

Golding joined Het Nationale Ballet as a second soloist in 2009 from which moment his star soared. After being picked by choreographer Alexei Ratmansky for the big dancing role of Basilio in a new production of *Don Quixote* — check for video excerpts online — Golding vaulted to principal rank in 2010. His guest engagements have since taken him across Russia, including the Mariinsky, and to leading European companies, including the Royal Ballet and English National Ballet where he has partnered Rojo on several occasions.

Golding says he will always feel a deep loyalty to Ted Brandsen and Het Nationale Ballet, where he will continue appearing as a guest artist. With an off-stage ballerina partner in the company, Golding even plans to maintain his primary residence in Amsterdam — a condominium in a reclaimed industrial building that he spent a year converting to his personal taste. “Amsterdam is less than an hour’s flight from London,” he explains.

But now his professional focus is on the meaty repertoire of major roles the Royal Ballet has to offer. “It’s like a dream come true,” says the soft-spoken, naturally easy-going star. And Canada?

“Believe me, I’m still a Canadian boy at heart. I still root for the Rough Riders [football team]. And I’d love the chance to dance with the National Ballet again. They only have to ask.” ▼

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# Dancenotes



Photo: Jo Grabowski

**Tom  
Weinberger**



Photo: David Cooper

**Josh Martin**

## Solo Dancers

The winners of the 18th international Solo-Tanz-Theater Festival Stuttgart are Tom Weinberger (Israel), Josh Martin (Canada), Annamari Keskinen (Finland), Shannon Gilen (U.S.), Jann Gallois (France), Jain Souleymane Kone (Burkina Faso) and Hemabharathy Palani (India). This year's prizewinners can be seen at a gala in November in TREFFPUNKT Rotebühlplatz in Stuttgart, which marks the beginning of a tour through Germany.

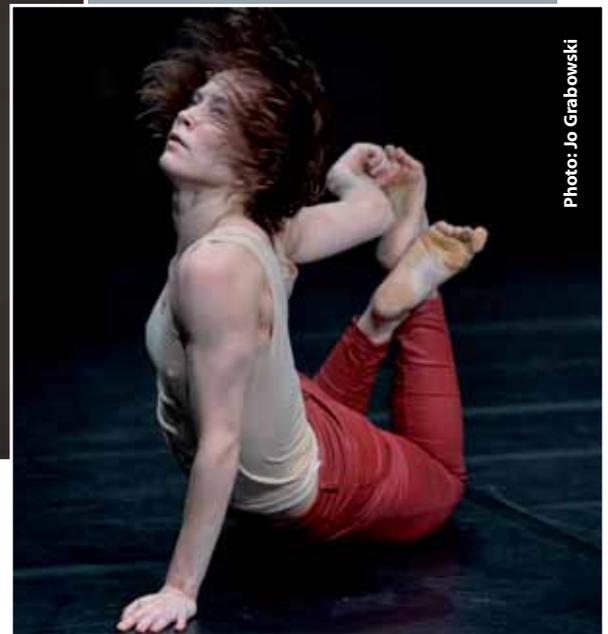


Photo: Jo Grabowski

**Annamari Keskinen**

## Vancouver's Lola and Isadora

Dancer and choreographer Su-Feh Lee, co-artistic director of battery opera performance, is the recipient of the biennial Lola Award, established in memory of the late choreographer Lola MacLaughlin. The Lola Award, administered by Vancouver's Dance Centre, is designed to encourage and facilitate the work of mid-career and senior choreographers.

Ziyian Kwan received the Isadora Award for Excellence in Performance in recognition of her outstanding career as a dancer, spanning more than 25 years.



**Su-Feh Lee, Dance Centre executive director  
Mirna Zagar and Ziyian Kwan  
Photo: Chris Randle**

# GG Winners

**Anik Bissonnette**

**Louise Lecavalier**



Photo: Massimo Chiaradia

Photo: Peter Morneau

Anik Bissonnette and Louise Lecavalier have been recognized with a Governor General's Performing Arts Award for Lifetime Artistic Achievement.

Bissonnette, artistic director of L'École supérieure de ballet du Québec, was a principal dancer with Les Grands Ballets Canadiens de Montréal for more than 17 years.

Contemporary dancer and choreographer Lecavalier is best known for her work with Montreal-based La La La Human Steps. Today she is artistic director of Fou Glorieux dance company.

## Encore, Lecavalier

Louise Lecavalier also received the 29th Grand Prix du Conseil des arts de Montréal. The jury recognized her achievements as an ambassador for Montreal's artistic vitality, as well as for her legendary contribution to contemporary dance.

Photo: Glenna Turnbull



Corps de ballet member  
Nadine Drouin

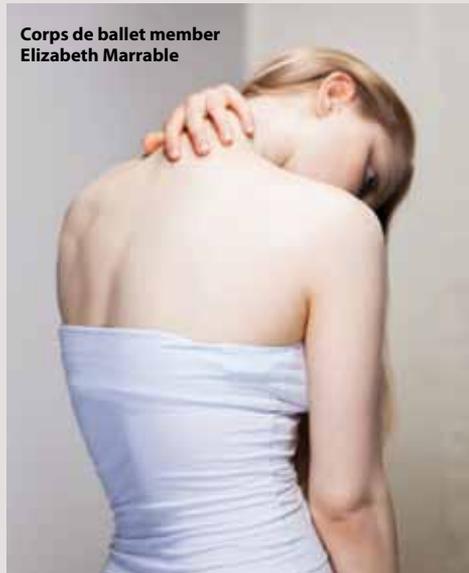


## Till We Meet Again

After 23 years with the National Ballet of Canada, Aleksandar Antonijevic retires from dance in June 2014. Born in Yugoslavia, he joined the company in 1991 and became a principal dancer in 1995. Artistic director Karen Kain has called him, "One of the finest dancers in the history of the company. He possesses a natural elegance and versatility onstage as well as a great work ethic and generosity toward his partners and colleagues."

Antonijevic plans to continue his burgeoning career as a photographer. His latest exhibition, *Till We Meet Again — A Love Letter*, a tribute to artists from the National Ballet, is on display in Toronto at Berenson Fine Art in May.

Corps de ballet member  
Elizabeth Marrable



Second soloist  
Chelsy Meiss



## Portraits by Aleksandar Antonijevic

## LaHay's Finale

One year ago, Ballet Kelowna's board of directors announced the company's demise due to financial challenges. But the local community rallied round the six-member troupe, founded in 2002 in British Columbia's Okanagan Valley. A fundraising concert with present and former company dancers, most of the local dance schools, the Okanagan Symphony, Opera Kelowna and more generated the funds to continue, and Ballet Kelowna membership tripled.

Today's healthy situation makes it easier for founding artistic director David LaHay to follow through on retirement plans. LaHay, a former principal dancer with Les Grands Ballets Canadiens, gave his last pre-show curtain speech in Kelowna in April.

Under LaHay's leadership, Ballet Kelowna has toured through 62 communities, entertained 150,000 audience members, launched the professional careers of 39 dancers and commissioned 11 new ballets from Canadian choreographers.

The new artistic director will be in place by September 2014.



Above: Hannah Stilwell and Michèle Moss in Vicki Adams Willis' *Dancers in Love* (1984)  
Photo: Anne Georg

## FOUNDER IN RESIDENCE

Vicki Adams Willis at Decidedly Jazz Danceworks



Photo: Trudie Lee

Thirty years ago, Vicki Adams Willis co-founded Calgary's Decidedly Jazz Danceworks, where she created an immense amount of repertoire and, as artistic director, built a respected profile for the group. Recently, Willis, who is 63, found herself drawn to other, less high-profile aspects of dance, especially teaching and mentoring. Also, she admits, as "the rules of the game" have been changing so radically with new technology and social media, she felt the company needed someone who could embrace those changes. So, last June, Willis handed over the reins to Kimberley Cooper, DJD dancer, artistic associate and resident choreographer, who has been nurtured under Willis' regime.

"One of our main motivations when we founded the company," explains Willis, "was to honour the African American roots of jazz, and to explore the infinite possibilities inherent in its massive root system. Kimberley understands the form at a deep level and is a major creative force."

Willis didn't want to retire, but rather to redirect her energy — and came up with the new position of founder in residence. With DJD in the process of constructing a seven-studio space — due to open in 2015-2016 — and with all the extra programming that will

become possible, Willis wanted to identify and mentor the organization's future leaders. "That is my main priority as founder in residence," she says.

She is also involved in coaching the company's seven dancers. Willis was particularly happy to be on hand as they prepared for their March show, a retrospective of her work. The evening was titled *Dancers in Love* after one of the first duets Willis choreographed for DJD, set to Ellington music of the same name, and remounted for the event.

Other founder in residence projects include expanding DJD's Professional Training Program to a full-time, two-year curriculum. And she's teaching, too, both the students and company on a regular basis. "This means I have the time to really explore my burgeoning theories about improvisation," Willis says. She also teaches Parkinson's patients in a program that has a formal research element.

"I thoroughly enjoy my new role, and am really happy with how Kim has taken ownership of hers," Willis says. "Yes, DJD will be different in the future, but I know the differences will very much honour the roots upon which the company was founded. And I will be there doing my best to ensure Kim is supported by people who really get what we're all about."

— KAIJA PEPPER

## Meaningful Movement by Ageless Dancers

Since September 2013, Naomi Brand has been in residency with a group of women who are non-professional movers over the age of 55 known as the Ageless Dancers — a title they chose for themselves. Once a week, at Vancouver's Roundhouse Community Arts Centre, the group participates in a collaborative process, working toward the creation of a work to be presented in June 2014 as part of LINK, an annual community dance series.

"As we work together, themes are emerging around these women's age and their particular stages in life," says Brand, who is 31. "They are interested in what it means to move in an older body and how aging has affected their relationships ... My job is to pay attention to what is emerging and figure out how to create dance that serves them in meaningful and satisfying ways."

For Brand, the synergy involved in creating a performance brings the group together with a shared goal. Working individually and collectively, the women explore movement through structured improvisations and choreographic tasks guided by Brand. The dancers develop movement vocabulary by mapping their bodies, recalling past or present injuries and pains, and other physical memories, finding gestures or abstract movements that comment on these stories of the body.

Brand also sets improvisational scores designed to build a sense of ensemble and community. Shirley Fineblit, a 75-year-old participant, says, "Naomi brings out our strength and creates an environment to touch, hold, support each other and ourselves to the maximum of our individual abilities. We can see through the appearance of love handles, jiggles, the odd flat foot or awkwardly posed arm to the joyous, soaring heart behind the moves."

"It is immensely satisfying to work with a group of women who are at very different stages of life than me," says Brand. "The Ageless Dancers fearlessly embrace who they are." They dance because they love it, finding pleasure in exploring movement without judgment.

Brand, who also works in the high-stakes professional world as an independent dancer, finds their perspective refreshing, and a reminder of the reason why many of us began dancing in the first place: for the joy of it.

— HILARY MAXWELL

# Dancers in Court



*Arguendo*  
Photo: Joan Marcus

New York experimental theatre company, Elevator Repair Service, presented its original work *Arguendo* in March at MCA Stage in Chicago. The production — which uses a verbatim court transcript of a landmark 1991 United States Supreme Court case — investigates the tension between the freedom to express oneself without fear and the moral code of the larger society.

The play recreates the case of go-go dancers at the Kitty Kat Lounge in South Bend, Indiana, who claimed a First Amendment right to dance nude. The production is a humorous and intelligent debate about the definition of dance, nudity in opera houses versus nudity in strip clubs, and whether erotic dancing is an artistic expression or a crime.

## In Brief

*Test* is a new dance film written, directed and produced by dancer **Chris Mason Johnson**. It's set in San Francisco in 1985, and explores dance and homophobia through the character of Frankie (Scott Marlowe), who confronts the challenges of being a gay dancer in a dance world built around an aesthetic of male-female romantic tension. The dance sequences were choreographed by Sidra Bell.

**TutuMUCH**, the feature documentary that follows nine young ballet students through their grueling audition process for highly coveted spots at the Royal Winnipeg Ballet School, is now available on DVD internationally. For more about the film, directed by Elise Swerhone, visit [tutumuchmovie.com](http://tutumuchmovie.com).

**Chan Hon Goh**, director of Goh Ballet Academy in Vancouver, is taking her new Canadian Master Class Series across the country. Students will receive training and coaching focused on artistic expression.

**Guillaume Côté** succeeds Anik Bissonnette as the Festival des arts de Saint-Sauveur's artistic director in 2015. The 2014 edition, July 31 to August 9, will feature a new creation by Côté to music by Leonard Cohen, as well as works from Martha Graham Dance Company and La Compagnie Marie Chouinard. Côté is a principal dancer and choreographic associate with the National Ballet of Canada.

The crisis in Kiev delayed Ukrainian dancer **Katja Khaniukova's** move from Kiev Ballet to English National Ballet, which she joined at the end of March, by two months. The processing of her visa paperwork was held up alongside hundreds of others desperately trying to flee the country.

The **Paris Opera Ballet** and the **Google Cultural Institute** have announced an ambitious partnership to promote the history and heritage of the Palais Garnier, which includes a virtual exhibition of photographs of the company's étoiles, a virtual tour based on Street View technology and an ultra-high resolution image of the ceiling painted by Marc Chagall.

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Alberta Ballet Company Artist Mariko Kondo. Photo by Paul McGrath.



# INSIDE ED

## Creative and Together at German Biennale

by Kaija Pepper

“The creative spark can only ignite the things that are there,” remarked Rainer Holm-Hadulla, a professor at the University of Heidelberg, during his keynote address at the fourth German Dance Education Biennale. His comment is a good argument for the broad-based creativity that this year’s Biennale — held in Dresden, February 15-23 — was designed to encourage. Teachers and students from nine German schools and, for the first time, four international ones, interacted closely all week, sharing technique, ideas, inspiration.

Jason Beechey, rector at the Palucca Hochschule für Tanz, the 2014 host institution, spoke over lunch about how ballet today is seen more as a technique rather than as a particular, sacrosanct style. As Olga Melnikova — Vaganova-trained, with a career at the Kirov and the Dresden Semperoper behind her, and now on the Palucca school faculty — put it: “The more knowledge a dancer has about ways to move, the more possibilities they have.”

Each day started with a range of ballet and modern technique classes. It was fascinating to watch the students, with their variety of training, representing their country and their school, but also — if they’re really good — being fully themselves, too. This need for individual expression is something Aaron S. Watkin, the Canadian director of Dresden’s Semperoper Ballet, encouraged during his

guest ballet class by demanding a sense of musicality from each student. To be truly responsive to the music, you have to bring yourself to the steps.

Teachers from the various academies watched classes to pick up new ideas and also, as one admitted, to see how fast his students could pick things up. “It’s good for them to have this experience,” he said. “Today’s dancers need many styles. It will also help them with auditions.” His only complaint was not being allowed to watch the workshops, run by members of the Forsythe Company, Sasha Waltz and Guests and others, which were student-only creative hothouses.

The highlight of two evenings of student performances, held at the Semperoper, was Pina Bausch’s 1972 *Tannhauser-Bacchanal*, danced with a sure sense of physical and emotional weight by students from the Folkwang University of Art in Essen. Also memorable were excerpts from a new piece by Demis Volpi, its playful sense of line and rhythm an ideal vehicle for four young dancers from Canada’s National Ballet School.

An unexpected delight came when I was welcomed into the studio where Ludmila Valentinovna Kovaleva, a former Mariinsky ballerina who is now a teacher at the Vaganova Ballet Academy, was coaching her students. First I watched rehearsals for their Biennale performance (a *Nutcracker* excerpt and a modern piece by Ksenia

Zvereva). I was drawn back two days later when I heard Kovaleva was coaching Nika Tskhvitaria as Princess Florine from *Sleeping Beauty*, in which the young dancer (who is still a student) would be making her Mariinsky debut in a few days’ time. The infinitely expressive body of 74-year-old Kovaleva, and the intense trust and grueling concentration of 17-year-old Tskhvitaria, were touching to witness. By the end of the session, Tskhvitaria had etched the details of timing, and the quality of hands, feet and face, into a precisely nuanced whole. Though not a scheduled part of the Biennale, the experience is a perfect example of the creative surprises found throughout the week. ▼

## Participants

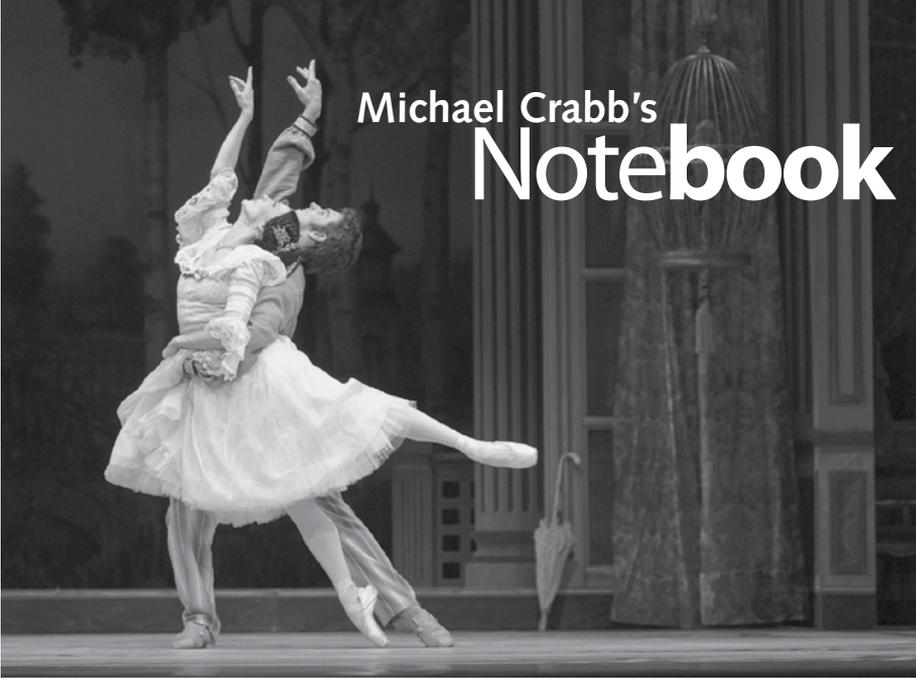
### The German schools:

Palucca Hochschule für Tanz Dresden; Folkwang University of the Arts Essen; Frankfurt University of Music and Performing Arts; University for Music and Dance Cologne / Centre for Contemporary Dance; Inter-University Centre for Dance Berlin; Mannheim University of Music and Performing Arts / Academy of Dance; State Ballet School of Berlin; University of Music and Performing Arts Munich, Ballet Academy; School of the Hamburg Ballet John Neumeier

### The international schools:

Amsterdam School of the Arts; Codarts – Rotterdam; Canada’s National Ballet School, Toronto; Vaganova Ballet Academy, St. Petersburg; Houston Ballet Academy ▼

# Michael Crabb's Notebook



When is a ballet a classic? When is it a period piece and when is it simply outmoded?

These questions preoccupied me, inconclusively, as I watched Toronto's National Ballet of Canada perform Frederick Ashton's compact adaptation of Turgenev's rather long-winded mid-19th-century play, *A Month in the Country*, the tale of a charismatic young tutor whose charm disrupts the emotional torpor of a rich Russian household.

Ashton choreographed *A Month in the Country*, at the age of 71, for Britain's Royal Ballet in 1976. With one notable critical dissenter — Nancy Goldner — it was hailed at the time as a late masterpiece. Unlike several Ashton ballets that had begun to trickle from Covent Garden into other companies' repertoires, the Royal Ballet guarded it closely.

It was almost 20 years before then National Ballet artistic director Reid Anderson convinced Anthony Dowell, his counterpart at the Royal Ballet — to whom Ashton had bequeathed the rights to *A Month in the Country* — to allow another troupe, namely Reid's Canadians, to perform it.

As Dowell explains, he was swayed by a number of factors, including his affection for the National Ballet, with whom he had appeared as a guest artist on several occasions, and for Karen Kain, for whom *A Month in the Country's* plum role of Natalia Petrovna was destined.

That was in 1995. The National Ballet revived the ballet in 1997, the year Kain retired as prima ballerina. Then it was stored away — the company had actually built its own reproduction of Julia Trevelyan Oman's elaborately realistic designs — until its 17-year slumber was finally broken in February.

Although the National Ballet's Aleksandar Antonijevic had danced the male lead, Beliaev, in 1997 and fellow principal Guillaume Côté made his debut in the same role with American Ballet Theatre just last November, the Toronto company essentially came to *A Month in the Country* anew. Most of the dancers were thrust onto a quick learning curve to absorb the delicate perfume of Ashton's understated, intensely musical and famously plastic style.

So could this explain why, for all the ballet's obvious qualities and the company's earnest attempt to revivify it, albeit undermined by some aberrant tempi from the pit, the ballet failed to work its magic on me, as it had done in 1976 and even again in the mid-1990s? Or had I fallen into the trap of rose-tinted nostalgia?

Deep down, I like to think I had always been aware that *A Month in the Country* was a sunset ballet, more a brilliant restatement of Ashton's successful narrative devices than a work of fresh invention. Yet given the superb artistry of its original Royal Ballet cast, including Dowell as Beliaev, Canadian-born Lynn Seymour as Natalia and Wayne

Sleep as the son, Kolia, the ballet's spell was irresistible. It possessed a quality Ashton greatly prized — allure.

Memory, as we all know, is a notorious trickster, yet I do believe the original success of *A Month in the Country* was closely tied to the very particular gifts of its first cast — and, as has often been remarked, Ashton rarely thought much beyond his first casts.

Anyone who dances Natalia is confronted with choreography that is the very embodiment of Seymour's extraordinarily expressive arms and upper body; anyone who dances Beliaev, with Dowell's unmatched clarity, precision and acute musicality. Even the awkward gait of Natalia's older husband, Yslaev, echoes the arthritic limitations of its then 50-year-old originator, Alexander Grant.

Of course, this is of no consequence to those encountering the ballet for the first time, but it might partly account for the more guarded response it tends to generate with today's audiences than those of 30 and more years ago. As I overheard one twenty-something sitting behind me declaim: "It's OK, but it's so old-fashioned."

But what is "old-fashioned"? You could argue that *Giselle* and *The Sleeping Beauty* are old-fashioned, yet we acknowledge them as classics in the sense that they established benchmarks in the evolution of ballet. That's not quite the same as saying they are period pieces, which I'm inclined to think Ashton's *A Month in the Country* may be.

It was, after all, choreographed during the so-called Ballet Boom when stars of the era enjoyed a popular celebrity almost unimaginable today. Audiences still liked their narratives served straight up, something Ashton's younger colleague Kenneth MacMillan attempted to defy.

*A Month in the Country* was calculated to please, and it did in 1976, but I wonder if younger audiences today are as susceptible. For that matter, are they beginning to tire of narratives that all too often feature the privileged lives of archaic stereotypes? Is, in fact, *A Month in the Country* outmoded?

It won't be while dancegoers my age and older are around to relish it as an artifact from an era we recall with nostalgic longing. As to the future, it's an open bet. ▼



Fredbjørn Bjørnsson as Petrushka  
Photo: Martin Mydtskov Rønne

# STAYING POWER

## CRITICS AND DANCERS REMEMBER UNFORGETTABLE PERFORMANCES

Dance International asked a handful of critics from its stable of writers, as well as two dancers, to share a few moments of dance from their past. Here's a glimpse of the dance that still plays inside their heads.

### THE CRITICS

One performance that stays in my memory was the 1968 jubilee of character dancer Fredbjørn Bjørnsson, celebrating his 25th anniversary dancing with the Royal Danish Ballet. He first portrayed the psychotic ballet teacher in Flemming Flindt's *The Lesson*, then a moving Petrushka, and finally a hilarious, stiff-legged general in David Lichine's *Graduation Ball*, of which a critic wrote that if Bjørnsson were any funnier we'd all have stomach cramps.

Bjørnsson celebrated his 40-year jubilee as the shy, loveable troll Viderik in Bournonville's *A Folk Tale*. He was a true bearer of tradition, as was his wife, Bournonville specialist and dancer Kirsten Ralov.

The last time I saw Bjørnsson perform was in 1990 as Dr. Coppélius in *Coppélia*. Toward the ballet's end, when Dr. Coppélius' world is shattered, I recalled photos from his youth that show him as a sprightly Franz, the male romantic lead in the same ballet, and it was impossible for me to enjoy the happy dances that followed. He died three years later.

— ANNE-MARIE ELMBY

**T**he *Fountain of Bakhchisarai*, Mariinsky Ballet, 1995. Altynai Asylmuratova was in the autumn of her dance career, transforming the hokey role of rejected harem favourite Zarema in the stilted Soviet ballet *The Fountain of Bakhchisarai* into a drama of Shakespearean grandeur.

*L'histoire de Manon*, Paris Opera Ballet, 1998. Paris étoiles Isabelle Guérin (in her late debut in the title role) and Manuel Legris sent the notion of “Gallic froideur” to the realm of myths while upgrading Kenneth MacMillan’s period drama into a timeless tragedy — every step and gesture had a compelling intensity and I have never seen the climactic ending this devastating.

*Don Quixote*, Bolshoi Ballet, 2006. Young Natalia Osipova’s supercharged Kitri reached unimaginable heights — the stuff of legend you only heard or read about from long gone generations and never expect to see in your own lifetime. Later generations will be lucky if they will be able to see anything similar.

— **MARC HAEGEMAN**



Natalia Osipova’s supercharged Kitri reached unimaginable heights — the stuff of legend ...

**E**arly-1970s performances of Balanchine’s *Concerto Barocco* stand as key to my “getting” choreography as a distinct art. Dancer-wise, I recollect performances by Suzanne Farrell in Balanchine’s repertory, all thrilling and unforgettable for their prodigious daring, luster and impact.

From the same period, which is when I first watched ballet, were memorable views of Margot Fonteyn and Rudolf Nureyev, the “It” duo of the time, beautifully complemented by other Royal Ballet partnerships between Svetlana Beriosova and Donald MacLeary, and Antoinette Sibley and Anthony Dowell.

My acquaintance with Russian/Soviet ballet shines with memories of Maya Plisetskaya, Nina Timofeyeva, Yuri Soloviev, Mikhail Baryshnikov, Nadezhda Pavlova, Nikolai Fadeychev and, later, his son Alexei Fadeychev, Vladimir Vasiliev and Vyacheslav Gordeyev, all decidedly expert and fearless performers. Americans Merce Cunningham, Paul Taylor and Mark Morris as choreographers and dancers also tower.

Lately, the happy arrival of new ballets by Alexei Ratmansky, starting auspiciously with his gripping and yet witty *Russian Seasons* for New York City Ballet in 2006, continue to keep me happy to be in the audience.

— **ROBERT GRESKOVIC**

**1** 968: I still remember sitting captivated high up in New York’s Metropolitan Opera House, watching my first live ballet — *Swan Lake* with guest stars Erik Bruhn and Carla Fracci, presented by American Ballet Theatre. I experienced how ballet could transport audiences to another world.

1971: At Toronto’s O’Keefe Centre, I saw what star power meant when the Bolshoi’s Maya Plisetskaya performed *Dying Swan* — those arms were unearthly — and when Vladimir Vasiliev soared like a rocket.

1972: For stage presence, Rudolf Nureyev was unique. Simply standing motionless in his production of *Sleeping Beauty* for the National Ballet of Canada, Nureyev held the eye.

2000: Mikhail Baryshnikov was riveting, too, dancing with White Oak Dance Project in Montreal, subtly sculpting moves, every gesture filled with meaning.

2004: Also in Montreal, Lin Hwai-min’s *Moon Water* performed by his Cloud Gate Dance Theatre was a profoundly touching meditation on precious life’s fragility.

2006: Deeply moving, too, were Mats Ek and Ana Laguna in their duet, *Memory*, performed at the Havana International Ballet Festival. In 10 minutes, they encapsulated a lifetime’s romance.

— **VICTOR SWOBODA**

When I saw Rudolf Nureyev dance in the seventies, I was an ardent fan. Even when he stumbled during a demanding classical variation as the Prince in *Sleeping Beauty*, at Montreal's Place des Arts with the National Ballet of Canada in 1977, I had no thoughts about declining technique (he would have been 39 by then). In the eighties, with Paris Opera Ballet on tour in Manchester, I found the charismatic Russian even more brilliant in the character role of Petrushka. Nureyev's broken-hearted puppet with a soul oozed equal parts desire and defeat. A Petrushka of human and mythical proportions!

Also to cherish: young Karen Kain's startling freshness and, toward the end of her dancing days, her serenely transcendent *Giselle*. Evelyn Hart's intense musical abstraction of any role. More recently, Crystal Pite's delicate and sometimes terrifying power. Like the macabre solo from *Uncollected Work* (2003), danced with her head in a noose, full of low-slung twitches and jerks.

— KAIJA PEPPER



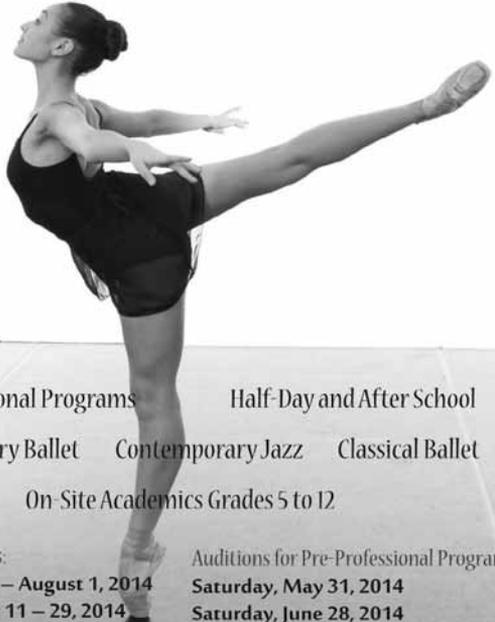
My most vivid dance memory is of seeing the Martha Graham Dance Company at Jacob's Pillow when I was a teenager, and realizing this was a living part of American modern dance history. I was also lucky enough to see the Mark Morris Dance Group on their nearly annual tours of my hometown of Seattle, marvelling at the play between movement and musicality. Since moving to Melbourne in 2004, some of my favourite memories are of international visitors: Hofesh Shechter's company in *Sun* and *Political Mother*, and Akram Khan in his solo, *Desh*. The novelty of an appearance by somebody famous gave way to awe for the attention to detail, virtuosic skill and their unapologetic willingness to use dance to offer a larger cultural and political comment. Recently, from local artists, I enjoyed the extravagance of Chunky Move's site specific *An Act of Now*, which placed dancers in a tiny glass box under an open sky in the centre of Melbourne.

— JORDAN BETH VINCENT



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When Mikhail Baryshnikov danced in October 1974 with the Royal Winnipeg Ballet after defecting from the U.S.S.R., I was wowed by his explosive leaps and dazzling charisma in the *Don Quixote* pas de deux. He performed with new partner Gelsey Kirkland, then with New York City Ballet.

In 1988, Tedd Robinson was the artistic director of Winnipeg's Contemporary Dancers. At the climax of his *He Called Me His Blind Angel*, the Gas Station Theatre's doors flung open and the Heather Belle Pipe Band burst in. The sheer theatrical force of that moment has never been forgotten.

During Israel's International Exposure 2009 in Tel Aviv, I saw nearly 50 shows over eight days and was exhausted. Yet when Barak Marshall's company, including his mother, the great Margalit Oved, hit the stage for his *Rooster*, the whole crowd was energized by this synergistic melting pot of vintage American jazz and Israeli folk dance.

After 75-year-old Canadian modern dance icon Rachel Browne came onstage in 2010 at the Gas Station Theatre in Stephanie Ballard's *Homeagain*, she stretched her arms outward and it felt as though she were embracing the entire dance community she had helped create. There were loud sobs in the audience!

— HOLLY HARRIS

# THE DANCERS



A highlight of my time with the Royal Winnipeg Ballet was dancing in 1951 for England's Princess Elizabeth (later Queen Elizabeth II) in *Ballet Premier*, choreographed by my partner in the piece, Arnold Spohr (later the artistic director of the company), and set to Mendelssohn. The National Film Board of Canada filmed the occasion as part of *Royal Journey*, a documentary about the visit of Princess Elizabeth and the Duke of Edinburgh to Canada and the United States.

The stage curtains were left open to accommodate the filming process, and we dancers were straining to get a glimpse of her regal entry while waiting to go onstage. Finally, the princess entered the theatre, her diamond tiara glowing under the klieg lights, her pale yellow gown glittering with diamanté scattered over her billowing skirt and with a white ermine wrap around her shoulders. When the theatre darkened and our music began, I realized that the sequins on my tutu had become so entwined with those of the dancer standing beside me that we couldn't be separated. After a good tug, we freed ourselves and made our entrances on time, as unruffled as possible!

Princess Elizabeth was gracious when she came backstage afterward. For me, she was the star that evening.

— **JEAN STONEHAM ORR, VANCOUVER BALLET SOCIETY  
BOARD MEMBER / FORMER DANCER**

*The 54-minute Royal Journey — including footage of the ballet — can be watched online at the National Film Board of Canada's website at [www.nfb.ca/film/royal\\_journey](http://www.nfb.ca/film/royal_journey).*

It was 2007, my first year at the John Cranko School in Germany and my first performance with Stuttgart Ballet. They were doing *Swan Lake*, and I was jumping in as one of the Swans for someone who had twisted her foot only a day before the show.

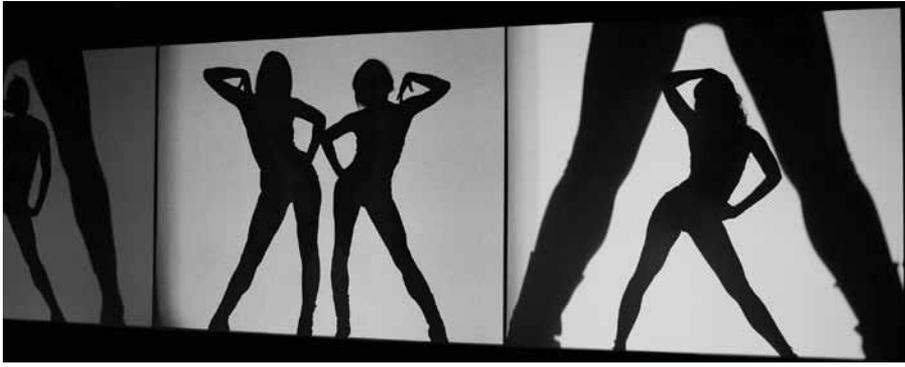
The White Act music starts. Little swans go out first. I'm one of the tallest girls so I have a couple more seconds to say my prayers and hope for the best. All I can tell myself to keep from running away right here and now is that I'll feel much calmer once I'm out onstage.

I'm wrong. Being onstage only makes it worse! I'm concentrating like crazy on the steps, the placement and, oh yeah, on stretching my feet! What have I gotten myself into? If this is what it's going to be like every time, I don't think I'm cut out for dancing! Thankfully, somehow my body knows what to do; I must have switched onto autopilot.

The first act ends. I wait backstage for some feedback from the ballet masters. A little smile and "Good," is all I get from one of them; it's all I need. Then I see the company's artistic director, Reid Anderson, coming straight at me. Oh no, I must have screwed something up! He stops right in front of me, smiles and says, "I'm going to give you the best compliment I could give to any corps de ballet dancer dancing in *Swan Lake* for the very first time ... I didn't even notice you."

— **DAISY LONG, FREELANCE  
DANCER, LONDON / FORMERLY  
WITH STUTTGART BALLET**





# Crazy Cabaret Girls

Chloe Bardos, Hippy Bang Bang and Thea d’Ora

by Victor Swoboda

Three young Canadians who never expected to be showgirls are finding excitement performing in the world of Paris cabaret and Montreal neoburlesque. Chloe Bardos dances at Paris’ famous Moulin Rouge. Since childhood, Bardos studied at Montreal’s Cameron School of Dance, competing in group dance contests; her team spirit shone at her Montreal audition for *Moulin Rouge* last year. Another Montrealer performs in Paris at *Le Crazy Horse* under the stage name Hippy Bang Bang. A hip-hop dancer for 10 years, her upbeat personality helped win the job.

In Montreal in January, burlesque fans discovered a new stage personality, Thea d’Ora, whose gowns, makeup and hairstyle reflect elegant 1920s’ fashions. D’Ora, a Vancouverite who studied ballet in childhood, was a university student when she began seriously taking burlesque classes. Five years ago, she launched her first burlesque personality, Lady Josephine, at Montreal’s *Blue Light Burlesque*.

“Their show was retro, tease and 1950s style,” recalls d’Ora. “Josephine’s style is more theatrical, boundary pushing, aggressive. I was interested in character and storytelling.”

Although Lady Josephine still appears, notably at Montreal’s recently opened burlesque cabaret, the *Wiggle Room*, Thea d’Ora is becoming the performer’s preferred act, which is why that name is used here. (Like many burlesque performers, d’Ora prefers to be known publicly only by her stage name.)

“My audience is predominantly women,” she says. “It’s not often men come unless it’s a bachelor party. We definitely attract the girls’-night-out market. It’s hard to convince guys that the artful presentation of burlesque is the best thing on girls’ night out.”

For d’Ora, burlesque presents an ideal of female sensuality and sexuality.

“Burlesque’s return in the early 1990s was definitely a reaction to nudity as the norm [in nightclub shows]. The response was to look for the opposite. We find that sexuality in burlesque today is often linked to a healthy dose of laughter.”

D’Ora loves audience reactions. “The hooting and hollering is a big part of why I do it. The whole point is to be in touch with what the audience is feeling. It’s selfish in the sense that it’s an incredible rush for me, but I can’t do my best if I don’t feel anything back from them.”

As an independent performer, d’Ora finds gigs herself, whose number varies from week to week. She travels on the Canadian burlesque circuit, notably Toronto and Vancouver. To supplement her income, she teaches burlesque.

Parisian cabaret dancers have regular schedules, mostly at night. Hippy Bang Bang (who only uses her stage name in articles and publicity while under contract to *Le Crazy Horse*) and Bardos typically perform six days a week, two shows a night. Both get home after 2 a.m. and rarely rise before noon. Their first weeks were tough.

"I arrived in Paris and the next day I was rehearsing the can-can on the Moulin Rouge stage. So it was 'Hi! Start kicking!'" recalls Bardos, who put her university studies on hold in order to be one of the cabaret's four new foreign recruits. "We had three weeks to learn the show, six days a week, five to six hours a day. Two hours of can-can, then the other numbers."

The third day, Bardos could no longer manage the can-can splits.

"After the first week, my legs were so sore I was putting muscle cream on and taking aspirin. Then the third week, my legs magically just got better!"

Learning the showgirl choreography was challenging, she says. "I wear a 10-pound backpack with huge pink feathers that light up. I stand on a step and have to manoeuvre in mid-thigh boots. A bigger feather pops up when you pull a strap. If you don't pull the right way, it doesn't pop up. The first time, I was off balance, walking in heels. I was so nervous with everyone around me. Now after many times, it's easy."

Moulin Rouge has around 40 female and 20 male dancers, with about 40 onstage during any particular show. The majority of the dancers are Australians — auditions are big there. Most others are European. Some audition more than once before they're hired. New dancers work in costumes. Later, some are invited to perform nude, the first step toward becoming a soloist or principal dancer.

"Many soloists have stayed eight years or more. One has stayed 18 years!"

Bardos loves her nine beautiful costumes. With practice, she mastered the two-minute costume changes.

"Dressers are everywhere taking care of costumes, putting on feathers, sewing. Once my beaded costume popped open sending the beads rolling into the audience!"

Le Crazy Horse's setting is far more intimate than Moulin Rouge's — a few hundred seats compared to 900. The 12 dancers who are featured in each show are highly visible on the small stage.

"The goal is uniformity," says Hippy Bang Bang, who dyed her hair blonde and has the characteristic Crazy Girl bangs. "It took several shows before I began to relax because the stress is always there. Honestly, the pressure came mostly from me. I wanted to perform well."

She received three months' training to learn the highly refined Crazy Horse choreography, and says, "It was tough on the body — a lot to assimilate. Regardless of someone's training, they deconstruct the dancer to create a 'Crazy Girl.' It's actually good to have less technique because it's easier to construct the technique they seek."

Hippy Bang Bang is one of five foreign dancers. The other 15 are French.

"Some have been here 10 years. The average is five or six. What's interesting are the new shows every five or so years. There are also galas and tours. And you can learn solos."

Hippy Bang Bang's first solo came in her second year — the classic "I'm a Good Girl" number in which the performer lip-synchs while weaving seductively in and out of a beaded curtain. In successive shows on any night, the same solos are performed by a different dancer.

Thea d'Ora, Chloe Bardos and Hippy Bang Bang each take pains to perform to high standards. Behind the glamour lies professionalism and hard work. ▼



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## QUOTABLE

Hapless Hooligan in "Still Moving" by Pilobolus dance company and cartoonist Art Spiegelman

**As featured in Still Moving: Pilobolus at Forty**

A film by Jeffrey Ruoff, New Boston Films, 38 minutes, [www.pilobolusfilm.com](http://www.pilobolusfilm.com)



**Martha Graham:**  
**Gender and the Haunting of a Dance Pioneer**  
By Victoria Thoms, University of Chicago Press for Intellect Ltd., 2013, \$60 US

In *Martha Graham: Gender and the Haunting of a Dance Pioneer*, Victoria Thoms offers a hopeful

account of Graham's continuing legacy. Thoms contextualizes Graham's massive career and life through the lens of feminism while applying the somewhat illusive theory of "haunting." This concept seems to suggest that Graham's legacy, based on both tangible and ephemeral evidence, is ghostly though still very present. Thoms fluidly negotiates an analysis of Graham and her art over the span of the 20th century, which included radical transformation in women's identities.

When called a women's liberationist, Graham is quoted as saying: "I had no affiliation with [the women's liberation movement], and always got whatever I wanted from men without asking." Thoms brings to light Graham's denial of a feminist stance by comparing it to the radical empowerment of women embodied in her 1930 work *Primitive Mysteries*, which continues to be restaged today.

The work featured a cast of 13 women, with Graham as the central figure in a white taffeta gown portraying the

Virgin. In this exhibit of raw physicality, she denied all previous standards of female dancing behaviour. Like all great artists, Graham had a deep awareness (whether conscious or otherwise) of the state of her world and though *Primitive Mysteries* was not a direct political statement, it did express her experience of being a woman at that time.

Thoms pays particular attention to *A Dancer's World*, the film series produced by Nathan Kroll in the late 1950s. It is widely considered that this depiction of Graham in her own work at age 62 damaged her reputation as a dancer and did not fully express the precision and power of her unique vocabulary. Graham, who struggled with aging, responded to the film by saying, "I have faced death before." Thoms points out that the medium of film for Graham could have been a manifestation of either punishment or affirmation in the face of her physical decline. (*A Dancer's World* is readily available to viewers today on DVD.)

The book takes a radical turn to modern times when Thoms discusses performance artist Richard Move, who reconstructs Graham works through cabaret and drag performances in New York. His revues are described by Thoms as a "... hilarious portrayal of a woman deeply trou-

bled by her own insecurities and mortality." Interestingly, Move was commissioned by the Martha Graham Dance Company to create *Bardo* in 2007. The solo for Katherine Crockett commemorates both the events of 9/11 as well as Graham's signature work *Lamentation*, which was a response to the crash of the stock market in the earlier part of the 20th century.

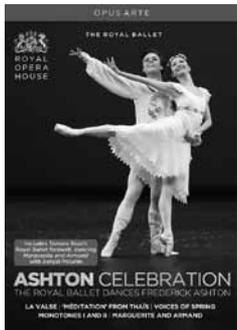
With regard to the current Martha Graham Dance Company, Thoms fails to give the full picture. Artistic director Janet Eilber is pioneering the company forward in various ways, including producing more concise variations on original ballets and bringing in choreographers at the top of their game to make new works. She is giving the company a fresh face while maintaining the integrity and essence of the Graham style.

*Martha Graham: Gender and the Haunting of a Dance Pioneer*, which comes across as an extended academic paper, is not an easy read. The heady concepts frame Graham's legacy in a unique way, yet the book does not seem to unearth any new discoveries. However, to her credit, the author's brave attempt to make sense of Graham's incredible staying power — the way her ghostly presence continues to impact our present world — does result in an intriguing portrayal of a powerful artist who was ahead of her time, one that left me wondering if perhaps we are just catching up to Graham.

— DESIRÉE DUNBAR



Photo: Joseph Meshling



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Photo: Garry MacLennan

## Big Ballet on Britain's Channel 4

February saw a new reality show on British TV called *Big Ballet*. Across three, 60-minute episodes, former Royal Ballet principal Wayne Sleep and Irish ballet mistress Monica Loughman endeavoured to transform 18 fuller-figured adults into ballet dancers for a one-off stage performance of *Swan Lake* in front of 1,000 people.

Working in jobs like shop assistants, accountants or traffic wardens, many of them had enjoyed amateur dance classes as children, but lost confidence as their bodies grew or quit after size-related abuse from other students.

Choreographer Derek Deane showed what attitudes *Big Ballet* was up against, saying, "Fat, cellulite, bums and large breasts just don't lend themselves to classical ballet." More reassuring was English National Ballet artistic director Tamara Rojo who astonishingly revealed she'd been rejected by several companies early in her career for being "too voluptuous."

Sleep himself threw a curve ball when he said in a local TV interview that his dancers "are fat and don't mind me saying it." Of course, they minded, but they responded with their own prejudices; reflecting the general mood, one dancer told Sleep at their next rehearsal: "We're real women, not the thin robots that usually do ballet."

After five months of rehearsals, tantrums and intimate back stories, the actual performance of *Swan Lake* contained rudimentary choreography and lasted only 25 minutes. The theatre audience loved it, the critics less so. Most importantly, the dancers themselves showed a new confidence and joy over what they'd achieved.

While many issues about body shape came to the fore, the reasons why professional ballet dancers are a certain size was never discussed. Aside from a few tacky jokes, the program was generally sympathetically filmed and if the upshot is that some viewers are encouraged to partake in an art form they felt alienated from, then that can only be a good thing.

— GERARD DAVIS

This DVD features six short ballets created by Sir Frederick Ashton, founder choreographer of the Royal Ballet. It was filmed at London's Royal Opera House in February 2013 as part of the commemorations of the 25th anniversary of his death. The ballets, created between 1958 and 1977, demonstrate Ashton's distinctive and challenging choreographic style, as well as his vast thematic and emotional range.

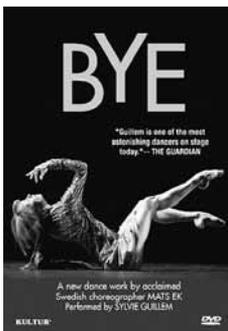
*La Valse* presents a swirling ensemble dancing to Ravel's surging score, in an evocation of a grandly elegant ballroom. Of the two featured pas de deux, the romantic *Meditation from Thais* resonated less than *Voices of Spring*, a bravura duet danced with an irresistible sense of fun by Yuhui Choe and Alexander Campbell.

*Monotones I* and *II* are regarded as two of Ashton's masterworks; in each, a trio moves smoothly through exquisite sculptural shapes in response to Satie's hauntingly beautiful music. The choreography demands perfect timing, line and balance, and along with the memorably unforgiving costumes leaves the dancers with nowhere to hide, but they pull it off with finesse.

The highlight is undoubtedly *Marguerite and Armand*, famously made for Fonteyn and Nureyev and not performed by anyone else for decades afterward. Tamara Rojo (in her farewell appearance with the Royal Ballet) and Sergei Polunin give performances of heartrending intensity in the title roles.

The quality of the dancing is outstanding throughout, and a selection of extras features informative interviews with rehearsal directors and dancers, including some who worked with Ashton himself.

— HEATHER BRAY



**BYE (AJÖ)**

Choreographed and directed by Mats Ek, performed by Sylvie Guillem, set to a recording of Beethoven's *Arietta* by Ivo Pogorelich. 39 minutes,  
www.kultur.com

Mats Ek, Sylvie Guillem, Beethoven and Ivo Pogorelich: what a fascinating, feisty quartet! *BYE* is a supremely touching solo of choreographic sense and nonsense, with great dramatic dimensions.

Guillem, in a mustard-yellow skirt and fuschia ankle socks, is part ballerina, part vaudeville comic, a waif with virtuosic capabilities who never loses her sense of character, even in the most extreme (and breathtaking) positions. The celebrated French dancer performs Swedish choreographer Ek's quirky movements (including a headstand) with such a formal understanding of line, musicality and kinetic force that it reads as magnificently as the most academically styled ballet. Pogorelich gives an occasional jazz-inflected brightness to the *Arietta* piano sonata that perfectly partners Guillem.

The production is well filmed, mostly letting us enjoy a full view of the dance but with enough close-ups, montages and special effects (involving a large glass rectangle) to make this more than a mere recording of a stage performance. There is also an informative Behind the Scenes extra, although the 22-minute solo on its own is enough to make this DVD worth paying attention to.

— KAIJA PEPPER

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# Vancouver

by Kaija Pepper

Three festivals kept Vancouver dancegoers busy over the last few months, beginning with PuSh, a decade-old international performing arts event. Dance features strongly at PuSh, usually of a wild and woolly kind designed to woo theatre people or others unaccustomed to pure movement. This year, the two dance works I saw, both from Montreal, enticed audiences through live music.

*Danse Lhasa Danse* at the University of British Columbia's Chan Centre was a tribute to singer/songwriter Lhasa de Sela, who died in 2010 from cancer at age 37. The work's creator, Pierre-Paul Savoie, assembled a strong team of singers — Bia, Alexandre Désilets, Alejandra Ribera and Karen Young — who brought strong presence to de Sela's gorgeous rhythms. Their subtle movement arose dynamically out of the demands of the songs, and I could hardly take my eyes off them to watch the dancers. For the most part, the formal dance, from seven choreographers, was too light, too illustrative. One major exception:

shoulders, or suddenly collapses on his skinny, spider legs, looking at us not in defiance, but with a kind of mischievous insolence. The music is great, especially the Brian Eno-like atmospheric and the sweet voice of Stéphane Boucher.

Chutzpah!, another performing arts festival with a strong dance presence, settled into its home at the Norman Rothstein Theatre in late February, opening with a well-programmed mixed bill by Los Angeles' BODYTRAFFIC. The first piece — Barak Marshall's *And at midnight, the green bride floated through the village square...* — was one of the American-Israeli choreographer's typically gestural works that evoke Jewish culture through movement and storytelling, an easy-to-watch, fast-moving piece for 10 dancers. The closer — Richard Siegal's *o2Joy* — was a fun romp to period jazz by Ella Fitzgerald and others.

*Dust*, the moody and subtle middle piece by Hofesh Shechter, an Israeli based in London, is like a poem, evoking and circling round a core idea or feeling. Three women in red dresses and three men in black suits traverse the

flamenco artist Myriam Allard, who opens the evening: alone, on a small square of hardwood, her powerful rhythms and sweeping movement established the same mysterious sense of desire and delight as de Sela's songs.

Another PuSh offering took place at Simon Fraser University's downtown campus. *Usually Beauty Fails* was sometimes energetic rock and roll, sometimes (deliberately) tired, late-night dancehall. Frédéric Gravel, the work's creator, is on-stage playing electric guitar or harmonica with two other musicians, and later dances, too, with the ensemble of five. In his fabulously maladroit solo, Gravel squirms and hunches his

stage with an intensely private energy, low and hunched over. Or they stand rooted to the spot, heads down, swaying with a hard thrusting rhythm that never opens up to a partner or the group. It's like they're in a crowded club, losing themselves to the steady beat of the music (a tapestry of hard noise by Shechter himself), keeping to the small territory around them. There is projected text, just enough to suggest context without invoking anything concrete, including "So many rules" and "It's all about being productive in this life." *Dust* — completed here in Vancouver during a Chutzpah! residency — builds resonance slowly but surely, and even the darkness with which it ends is full of ideas.

Even before Chutzpah! was over, the Vancouver International Dance Festival opened in early March with Guangdong Modern Dance Company on the Playhouse stage in *Voice After*, by resident choreographer Liu Qi. This cool, calligraphic piece, with dancers in pale blue silk pants and tops, is a convincing mix of acrobatic tumbles and splits, modern dance leaps and organic shapes, bringing to life the tranquil ocean waves and stormy unrest noted in the program.

Liu's *Mustard Seed*, performed with 12 company dancers and 10 dancers from Vancouver's Goh Ballet academy, closed the evening. This brightly costumed premiere was clearly a fun collaboration between professionals and students, and the stage crackled with lively energy.

And then there was Israel Galván's intensely personal and strikingly eccentric relationship with flamenco in *La Edad de Oro* (The Golden Age), at the Playhouse in late March. Showing deep knowledge of tradition and form through his powerfully percussive foot stamps and trills, and in the lyrical and sometimes brash beauty of his arms and hands, Galván gave us an adventurous version of flamenco. He hunches forward where he might be expected to arch back, and he is often enthusiastically air-borne — launching himself skyward, or suddenly extending a long leg out to the back at waist level like an accidental arabesque. The grace, beauty and humour of his performance — and of the performances of singer David Lagos and guitarist Alfredo Lagos alongside him — sent the Vancouver International Dance Festival audience home in a happy glow. ▼

Shakespeare's enduring "tale of woe" came to life as the Royal Winnipeg Ballet presented the season's penultimate production, *Romeo and Juliet*. Last staged locally in 2009, Rudi van Dantzig's inventive choreography still has as much freshness and vibrancy as it did during its company premiere in 1981. Prokofiev's modernistic score, performed live by the Winnipeg Symphony Orchestra, also ensures the timeless appeal of van Dantzig's ballet, created in 1967 in Holland.

Amanda Green in her debut as Juliet artfully crafted a regal protagonist who morphs from a young girl gleefully flitting about her nurse to a passionate woman in love with her Romeo, performed by guest artist Liang Xing. The pas de deux in which they first meet at the Capulet's ball showcased both mature artists' impeccable classical technique while their lyrical lines bonded them more strongly than simply natural chemistry. Green's chilling solo where she resolutely chooses to take Friar Laurentius' potion also showed her sizable dramatic gifts, as she became torn between a fear of death or being forced to marry Count Paris (Tristan Dobrowney).

Xing, previously with the National Ballet of China, first appears onstage as a love-sick dreamer, mooning about the village square with rugged chums Benvolio (Yosuke Mino) and lute-playing Mercutio (Dmitri Dovgoselets). He made his own emotional trajectory that finally ends when he plunges the dagger through his heart in the creepily lit Capulet tomb.

One of the production's most riveting performances belonged to Egor Zdor as Juliet's swaggering, volatile cousin Tybalt. His clashing sword-fight with Dovgoselets during their climactic showdown created a sense of real danger.

Seeing four former Royal Winnipeg Ballet principals — now all serving as company ballet masters — onstage in character roles was pure joy. Zhang Wei-Qiang (Lord Capulet), Tara Birtwhistle (Lady Capulet), Vanessa Lawson (the Nurse) and Jaime Vargas

(Friar Laurentius) added a certain gravitas, while underscoring the wealth of talent that has sprung from this company throughout the years. The youthful energy of the 16 students cast from the Royal Winnipeg Ballet School's Professional/Recreational Division spoke to the continuity of generations, as the company moves toward its 75th anniversary season.

Western Canada's only African contemporary dance company, NAfro, presented its second production of the season, *Tladi* (meaning "lightning bird"), at the Gas Station Arts Centre, February 28 to March 2. The program featured three abstract works dealing with "regeneration."

South African choreographer Vincent Sekwati Koko Mantsoe's *Tladi*, performed by Paula Blair, Hélène Le Moullec Mancini, Robyn Thomson Kacki, Alexandra Garrido, Alexandra Scarola and Ardley Zozobrado, is almost balletic in grace. Mantsoe creates tension with gestural language including percussive arm punches juxtaposed against slower, controlled pedestrian walks. At times a static quality crept in; this became somewhat mitigated by a rumbling

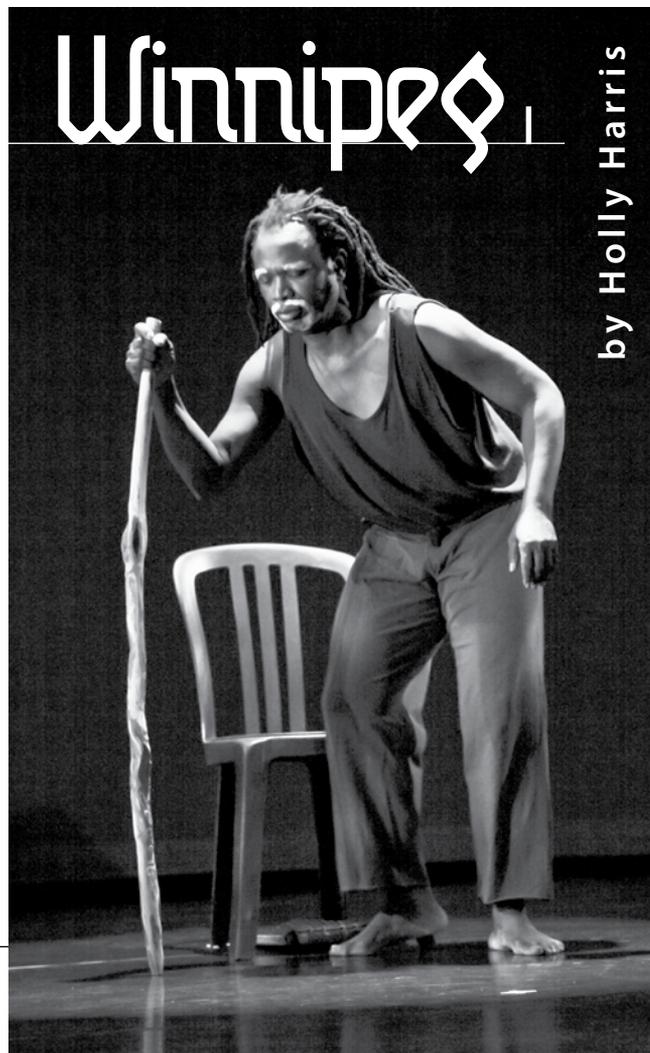
collage score that added its own post-modern ethos.

NAfro's artistic director Casimiro Nhussi's solo *Katuma* is one of his best works to date. Moving toward a wooden chair set in a circle of light, the usually high-energy Nhussi became physically transformed into a hunched, muttering old man with white whiskers and cane. He plucked a thumb piano as though lost in memory, until driving African drums called him to action. As his movement grew increasingly wild, the years seemed to fall away. Nhussi's final fist in the air punctuated this memorable work like an insistent exclamation mark, which resonates as both a statement of defiance and empowerment.

The show also included longtime company member Paula Blair's *The Guards*, in which the ensemble, in pedestrian black shirts and pants, appeared like living statues. They stood together in tightly knit formation before repeatedly breaking apart, with arms swinging, funky walks and vocalized "ha's." Particular effective were the dancers' looming silhouettes cast on the upstage wall that added further resonance.

Earlier, on January 18, Dance Manitoba held its inaugural Annual Distinction Awards for Excellence in Dance at Winnipeg's historic Hotel Fort Garry. The event, hosted by former Royal Winnipeg Ballet dancer Tracy Koga, gave Lifetime Achievement Awards to prominent local dance artists, including two who are no longer with us: Canadian dance icon Rachel Browne, founder of Winnipeg's Contemporary Dancers (1964) and the School for Contemporary Dancers (1972); and the legendary Arnold Spohr, Royal Winnipeg Ballet's visionary artistic director from 1958 to 1988, who put the "prairie fresh" company on the international map.

"The evening was a beautiful inclusive celebration," says Dance Manitoba's executive director Nicole Owens, "and we all gained an even clearer appreciation of how our unique cultural landscape came to be." ▼



Casimiro Nhussi in his solo *Katuma*  
Photo: Leif Norman

There's no second guessing James Kudelka. Who would have thought the man responsible for such spectacular National Ballet of Canada productions as *The Nutcracker*, *Swan Lake* and *Cinderella* could work his magic almost minimally in a small, undecorated studio space? Yet, this is what Canada's internationally celebrated choreographer achieved in February with *Malcolm*, a duet featuring Kudelka, a puppet and the live accompaniment of composer/pianist Dustin Peters.

Malcolm is essentially a stuffed cloth doll — pale, bald and slightly otherworldly. He was made four years ago by Nell Coleman, mother of Bill Coleman, co-founder of the show's presenting organization, Coleman Lemieux & Compagnie. Malcolm has appeared in two previous Kudelka works, but his duet with the choreographer marks an entirely new chapter in this faintly spooky character's performing career.

His status as no-strings-attached puppet rather than doll is dependent entirely on the way he is manipulated. From the moment Kudelka, barefoot and in street clothes, places Malcolm's hand on his chest to feel his vital pulse, you know this strange creature is much more than a puppet. Perhaps Malcolm is a trickster. Maybe he represents a dark side of his master-manipulator's psyche, a quasi-alter ego. Or is Malcolm a symbol of the creative spirit, always venturing dangerously into the unknown?

Brilliantly, and unsettlingly, Kudelka and Malcolm are at once adversaries and allies, and, in a shocking finale, united in spirit and fate. In its own singular way, Kudelka's *Malcolm* delivers as big an emotional punch as anything else he's made, which is saying a great deal in its favour.

Sadly, not all such brave endeavours work out so successfully. Toronto Dance Theatre, in days of yore a beacon of humanistic dance values, lost a clear identity at least a decade ago. In its struggles to define exactly where its aesthetic heart rests, it sends out increasingly confused

messages, whether regurgitating time-worn post-modernistic tropes or embarking on experiments of dubious merit. One such occurred in February when the company became the plaything of Ame Henderson.

*Voyager* took its name from two NASA probes, launched in 1977, which have been collecting and recording data without, as Henderson observed in a high-minded program note, "predetermined design." "This non-stop archiving of a constantly shifting position," as she elaborates, "inspires the central task of this performance. Here, the performers work on continuous and non-repeating movement."

For roughly an hour, singer/songwriter Jennifer Castle produced a variety of desultory sounds from the piano. The danc-

Bök's *Eunoia*, seven years in the making, falls into a niche literary category known as univocalics, a writing exercise constrained by the use of a single vowel. It's a compelling read, even for those with an understandable aversion to contemporary poetry. It's clever, irreverent, raunchy and thoughtful. And so is Fujiwara's response.

If ever a dance work played on words, this is it. As it moves through Bök's vowel-specific chapters, each with its own particular tone or character, Fujiwara's cast of seasoned performers is equally constrained by specific movement imperatives, which in their sometimes studied awkwardness or sheer whimsy are variously funny, poignant and arresting.

The work engages with the audience through bantering word play. Justin Stephenson's video effects of cascading letters and Phil Strong's unobtrusive yet slyly suggestive sound score are wonderfully complementary, as are Andjelija Djuric's colour-coded costumes. If more experimental works were this much fun — and intelligently conceived — audiences would be lining up to see them.

Meanwhile, "at the ballet" ... Aleksandar Antonijević's last officially scheduled performance as a National Ballet of Canada principal dancer is not until June, but the company opted to use the March 22 occasion of his last performance in a full-length dramatic role to celebrate his extraordinarily long career.

The title role in John Cranko's *Onegin* is the ideal showcase for a dance-actor. It is also a physically and emotionally grueling one. Even so, to the delight of a capacity Four Seasons Centre audience, Antonijević, 44, held nothing back. It was an impassioned performance from a man who had beaten the odds to continue dancing into early middle age. The subsequent standing ovation was long and loud as multiple bows were demanded and floral tributes presented. For the Serbian-born dancer, who'd spent almost his entire professional career with the National Ballet, 23 years no less, it was a triumphant moment, going out in a cloud of glory. ▼



ers spent the time mostly ignoring each other as they undertook, with mixed success but intense seriousness, their appointed task. There were vaguely playful moments, especially at incidents of near collision, and the dancers certainly proved themselves agile and plastic; but, as the long minutes ticked painfully by, the thought of root canal surgery seemed increasingly preferable.

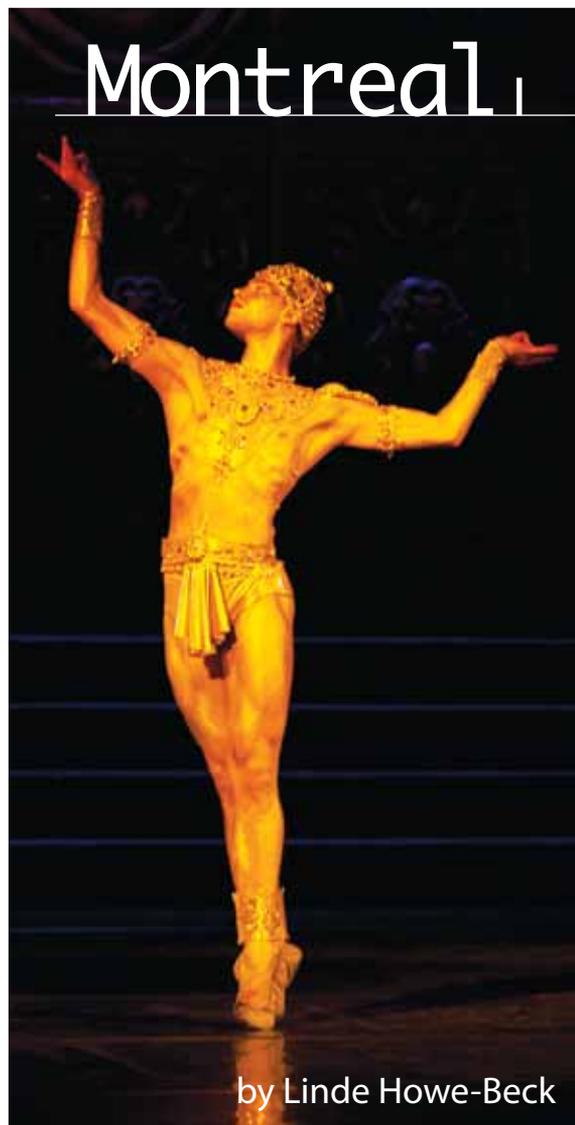
How refreshing it then was to witness another experiment of a sort, but one with strong underpinnings and a clear sense of purpose. In *Eunoia*, choreographer Denise Fujiwara set out to create a visual counterpart to 2002 Griffin Poetry Prize winner Christian Bök's now celebrated best-selling book of poems.

Montrealers waited 137 years to see Marius Petipa's *La Bayadère*. Finally, Kiev's National Ballet of Ukraine brought the 1877 Russian classic to life in four sumptuous and touching performances at Place des Arts' cavernous Salle Wilfrid-Pelletier February 20-22.

This Makarova version of *La Bayadère* was the best I remember ever seeing. Dancing was immaculate, the corps in particular was clean beyond imagining. Soloists were so brilliantly matched that they seemed like mirror images of each other. Delicately painted sets recalled old photos of Muslim/Hindu architecture and costumes in exotic combinations of saffron, orange, burgundy and the most delicate pinks captivated with subtle detail, taste and lightness. The effect was magical. Kiev maestro Mykola Dyadyra conducted Les Grands Ballets Canadiens' orchestra with the sensitivity this superb company deserved. *La Bayadère's* three hours flew by much too quickly.

Opening night featured Natalia Matsak as the temple dancer Nikiya, a vulnerable and doomed figure in love with the warrior Solor. With sickle-shaped feet and a serpentine back, Matsak oozed sensuality tinged with despair. Denys Nedak as Solor posed elegantly and soared in perfect leaps, flashing magnificent technique, yet he looked more gallant prince than rough warrior. Dramatically, he was a chameleon, seeming to grow in physical and emotional stature with Nikiya, but shrinking to a cipher in scenes with his intended, Gamzatti, danced by Natalia Lazebnikova with aristocratic flair and a determinedly bitchy edge.

Their dancing displayed classical technique at its finest. Every gesture — even the mime, a prerequisite in ballets of its day, was delivered with clarity and intent — almost bravura. The National Ballet of Ukraine, now more than 100 years old, is a world-class technical powerhouse that approaches every movement with deep understanding of classical purity and tradition. The Montreal



audience fell in love with the Ukrainians three years ago when they performed *Swan Lake*. This time, the delirious crowd had difficulty letting *La Bayadère* leave the stage.

Who could blame them? Who knows when the next sighting of such exquisite high art will occur? Hopefully, presenter Les Grands Ballets will invite the Ukrainians back again soon.

Another top quality show had a title that offered no hint of the luminosity that followed: *Get A Revolver* is Helena Waldman's tender treatise on the dreaded Alzheimer's disease.

The Berlin choreographer drew on personal experience to craft a solo for award-winning Brit Rodemund about an aged ballerina who finds solace and even happiness in the parallel world of dementia. We see her drift in and out of realities — hers and ours — as she becomes increasingly distracted by forgetfulness and the lure of the uncharted

until she comes to sweet acceptance of her new state.

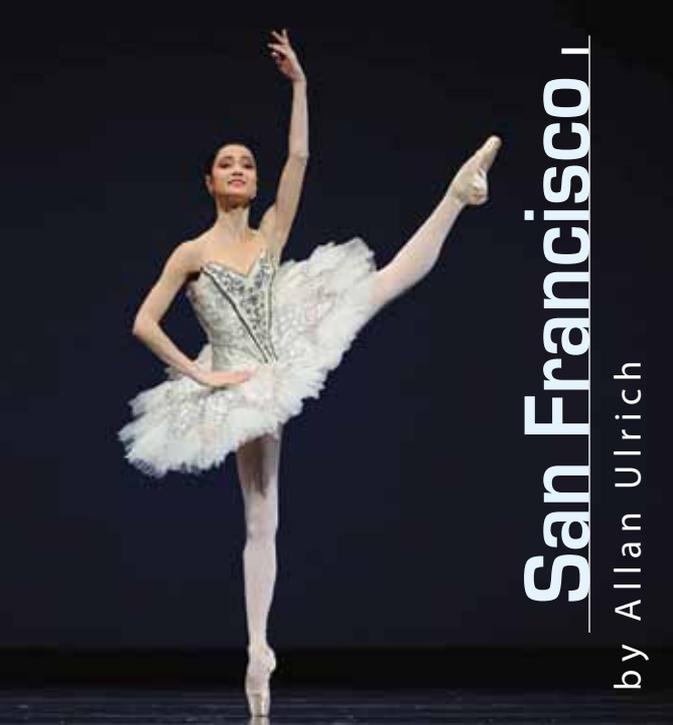
Gentle, sometimes quite beautiful and occasionally grotesque, *Get A Revolver* sees her increasingly liberated from social constraints. As videos and the soundtrack offer scientific explanations of dementia's spiral, Rodemund's nuanced and dignified gestures — including facial expressions — portray with grace and dignity the once-great ballerina's entrapment in a universe in which the simplest things, even plastic bags, bring heart-warming, child-like pleasure.

*Get A Revolver* is a revolutionary and edifying work of enormous importance by an experienced and thoughtful choreographer and its immensely talented interpreter. It pays homage to everyone suffering from Alzheimer's and shines light on the welcome possibility that the unknown may not be as fearsome as we think. Seen at Cinquième Salle, Place des Arts, February 11-15, this powerful piece was a life-changing — and life-enhancing — experience.

Earlier, on one of the coldest nights of a miserably frigid January, Danièle Desnoyers celebrated her company Le Carré des Lombes' 25th anniversary by remounting her *Duos pour corps et instruments* at the Agora de la danse.

This work is outstanding for its ingenuity and brevity. Playing to a full house of spectators on three sides, the fourth taken up by a long table of technicians and technical equipment, dancers Karina Champoux, Clara Furey and Anne Thériault perched on and slid off electronic sound boxes to which they were sometimes wired, their movements triggering grunts and groans from the equipment. Often irreverent and light-hearted, sound and movement meshed when dancers were freed from their fetters. Aside from a mincing catwalk satire, emphasis was on full, sinuous movement echoed more erotically and sensuously by a video of body parts.

At about 45-minutes in length, *Duos* was likely the shortest feature work I've seen. Desnoyers is an artist of considerable international repute. She is also that rare example of important talent who is also a keen editor. ▼



# San Francisco

by Allan Ulrich

Where novelty is concerned, the first half of San Francisco Ballet's 81st season was notoriously stingy with new works, the commissioning of which has been one of artistic director Helgi Tomasson's principal claims to fame. But at least one revival and the debut seasons of a couple of exceptional dancers spiced up the proceedings.

The premiere came from Val Caniparoli, a former dancer who, in the past decade, has become one of the world's more ubiquitous choreographers. Caniparoli works so often in so many places (not least of them Winnipeg) that he has never seemed to cultivate a personal style. You can never predict when a Caniparoli piece will soar; a chamber ballet attacking militarism surfaced on a mixed program last summer and burned deeply into the consciousness. However, Caniparoli's *Tears*, presented February 18 at the War Memorial Opera House, won't do much for this choreographer's reputation.

Of course, it had its moments. Caniparoli lives in San Francisco and still serves as one of the company's principal character dancers; he knows his colleagues' personalities and temperaments better than any of those visiting dancemakers. It was wonderful at long last to see Cuban ballerina Lorena Feijoo (dressed spiffily by Sandra Woodall) in a substantial role that was made for her. She and partner Vitor Luiz radiated sensuality in the first

of three duets at the centre of the 25-minute ballet. The pair yielded to the next two couples, the cool blonds Tiit Helimets and rising soloist Sasha de Sola; and Daniel Deivison-Oliveira and, plucked from the corps, Ellen Rose Hummel. A four-man consort crawled in under a partition.

The movement throughout *Tears* suggests the motif of water. All the dancers repeatedly offer a good imitation of a breaststroke; the sound of dripping liquid is the first thing the audience hears. The stage is bathed in moist gloom, through which we can perceive Woodall's impressive wall sculpture.

What doesn't fit is Caniparoli's choice of music, Steve Reich's early minimalist landmark, *Variations for Winds, Strings and Keyboards*. It's a jaunty, airy score, lacking in rhythmic variety and dynamic. Those shortcomings seeped into the choreography, which has none of the ritualistic repetitions of the music.

Don't choreographers think about these things or consult musician friends? One of the season's revivals, Yuri Possokhov's 2007 *Firebird*, also mismatches sight and sound. The Ukrainian-born choreographer-in-residence turns both the myth and the original 1910 Michel Fokine ballet on its ear. The eponymous avian creature comes off rather well in the person of Sarah Van Patten, but the prince (Helimets on February 20) is a yokel; the liberated princess (de Sola), an imperious narcissist; and Kaschei (Pascal Molat), a pulp villain. The atmosphere is jokey and sardonic, but Stravinsky's score is neither. The allegro ensemble at the end is no substitute for Fokine's concluding tableau.

No, the revival of the winter was Natalia Makarova's staging of the Kingdom of the Shades scene from Act 2 of *La Bayadère*. Makarova's 1980 production introduced the entire ballet to this continent, and she was a brilliant Kitri in her day. The 24 corps women descending the ramp in arabesque penchée looked as secure as they ever have at San Francisco Ballet, though a few wobbles and misjudged extensions mitigated the positive effect.

The lead dancers were terrific. Yuan Yuan Tan's tragically vulnerable Kitri and Davit Karapetyan's solicitous Solor perhaps abstracted their assignments, but the flow was undeniable. Makarova cast from strength. The first Shade solo went to Mathilde Froustey, fresh from the Paris Opera Ballet and a game changer.

Froustey dazzled in the opening night season gala performance with a pinpoint rendering of the Grand Pas Classique. Here, she aced the combinations of her assignment, a virtual ballet primer, with clarity and elegance, launching a string of fouettés one moment and cleaving the air in the next. The remaining Shades, Simone Messmer (a recruit from American Ballet Theatre) and Frances Chung, conjured comparable wonders.

Meanwhile, 80 kilometres to the south, former American Ballet Theatre superstar José Manuel Carreño launched his first repertory season on Valentine's Day as artistic director of Ballet San Jose, whose ranks the Cuban-born dancer has swelled to 36. The women worked very hard to make Darla Hoover's staging of Balanchine's *Serenade* as sensitive and musical as possible, and despite recorded Tchaikovsky, this performance augured well for the future. Corps placement and precision were pristine and the soloists exceeded past efforts.

Principal Ommi Pipit-Suksun who, inexplicably, never caught on at San Francisco Ballet, mesmerized with energy and lush phrasing as the "dark angel." Alexandra Meijer's romantic aura united with newcomer Nathan Chaney's gallant cavalier in the waltz movement.

Then, 12 dancers devalued a revival of Jorma Elo's *Glow-Stop*, though I find its deconstructionist attitude toward the classical vocabulary tiresome. It's a gift from American Ballet Theatre that this company really does not need. At least it gave the performers a chance to relish its contemporary classicism. And I found no reason for including Ohad Naharin's jokey *Minus 16*, a kind of career retrospective of the Israeli choreographer that offers movement theatre japes and the enlisting of volunteers from the audience. This company needs to dance more conventional ballets if it is to boost its technique and leave its mark, and yet Carreño needs to fill the seats of the Center for the Performing Arts. Welcome to the real world. ▼

Two events somewhat off the beaten path in New York City's winter dance season proved happily memorable. One, simply called *Sally*, offered work by three of the city's best-known dancing Sallys, who each made her name on New York's "downtown dance" circuit. Presented by the Construction Company, the succinct and engaging show took place at the University Settlement on the Lower East Side, familiar for its early 20th-century immigrant neighbourhoods.

In the second, at Brooklyn Academy of Music's chamber-sized Fisher Theater, the Ensemble for the Romantic Century presented *Tchaikovsky: None But the Lonely Heart*, a musical theatre creation. Though this was essentially a musical production based on performances of Tchaikovsky pieces with "connecting tissue" text (by Eve Wolf) that mined letters, diaries and memoirs related to the composer, the dance and dancing by American Ballet Theatre corps de ballet's Daniel Mantei, while select and spare, lifted the production to notable heights.

*Sally* showcased the dance visions of Sally Gross, Sally Bowden and Sally Silvers. Gross made her name earliest, during the 1960s, the time of New York's now historic Judson Dance Theater, arguably the birthplace of postmodern dance. Bowden came later, in the 1970s, growing out of the free-wheeling Judsonites. Silvers emerged in the 1980s and blazed her own fresh, idiosyncratic trail. Unlike Gross and Bowden, Silvers didn't dance in this show, but did appear as commentator for the program's concluding segment.

The bill might be classed as one of miniatures, but as with, say, portraiture rendered on little pieces of ivory, these artworks weren't, for all their essential brevity and intimacy, in any way slight or without compelling detail. Gross showed two companion works from 2011: *Two*, a duet with Jamie Di Mare and Tanja Meding, and *Another Three*, with Di Mare, Meding and Heather Lee. Neither dance had its performers travelling widely in the space; both projected hints of privacy and near-mystery. In slacks and tops, the women of *Two* advanced and receded, settling flat to the floor at times as Robert Poss' music gently stirred them with its vibrations, giving their presence a homespun elegance and serenity.

*Another Three* exuded a related air, with its trio in the kinds of dresses I associate

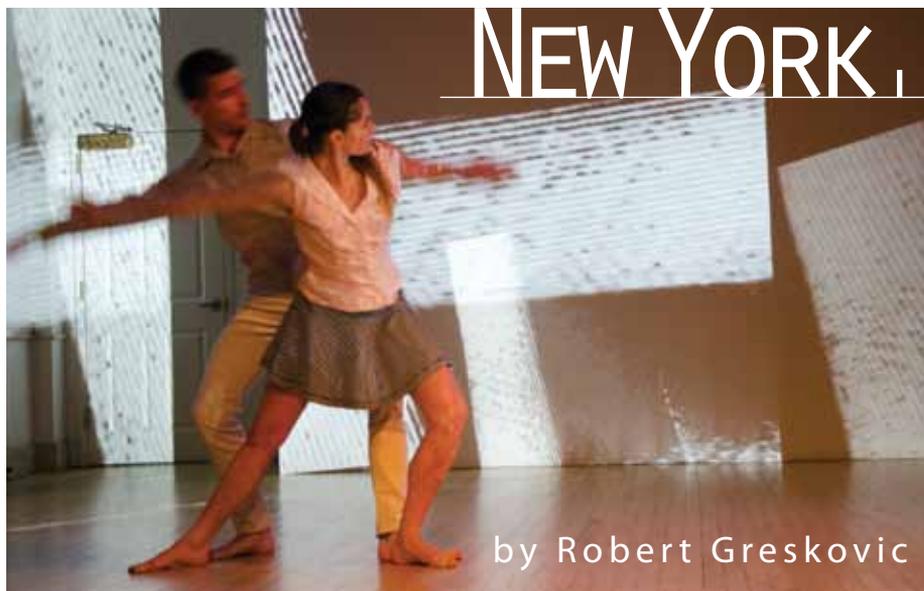
with my own Eastern European grandmothers. The often seated dancers established, with the help of Alex Mincek's gently toned score, an inner world that drew one to their measured moments, again suggesting more than meets the eye.

Gross' third dance, *Not Everything Is Seen*, revealed the lean choreographer/dancer herself as a kind of shaman. Her sly entry into the space had her accompanying herself on claves as well as with soft-spoken recitations of single, indistinct words. Gross' artful activity made for a scene both ritualistic and matter-of-fact.

Bowden's *Shifts* delivers what it says. The grey-haired woman in socks and layered, casual garments, swayed and shifted mostly in place suggesting a kind of reverie or incantation that felt hers alone, but that aimed to speak to us as well. With its col-

close-up distinction as telling expressions faintly animated their faces. Silvers' other contribution, a staged working session with Toogood and Crossman, plus Erin Cornell and Olsi Gjerci, showed how *Confected Size* might grow and evolve into an even more distinctive example of her work.

In Brooklyn, Daniel Mantei's intermittent appearances in *Tchaikovsky: None But the Lonely Heart* brought notable distinction to the two-part presentation concerning the life and art of one of Russia's most legendary composers. The work's blend of sometimes unimpressive acting by the two-actor cast and lovingly performed Tchaikovsky music (by three musicians and a singer) would have been all the poorer without Mantei's contribution. On the simple but effective set by Vanessa James, evocatively lit by Beverly Emmons, the



lage of sound and music, the witty but in no way jokey vignette played itself out straight and deadpan, making it more riveting for the effort.

Silvers' two contributions were companion pieces. *Confected Size*, a duet, takes shape as an intricate and surprise-filled interaction between youthful Melissa Toogood and Dylan Crossman. Both keen and clear dancers hail from the now disbanded Merce Cunningham Dance Company and bring to Silvers' limpid choreographic encounter a personal air. Taking atmospherics from Bruce Andrews' mix of Hitchcock movie scores, this encounter, framed by Ursula Sherrer's wonderfully skewed flickery video projections, presented its handsome couple with movie-

statuesque, white-clad Mantei became a kind of tower of masculine perfection, one that fit directly into the staging's indications of Tchaikovsky's mostly hidden passion for men as the love interests of his life.

Initially appearing in a powdered wig, suggesting Mozart's time, Mantei gave himself simple, luminous, beautifully shaped choreography, all detailed with purity tinged by spirituality that impelled him through the setting's parlour atmosphere. Especially when he detailed his smooth choreography with rich, surprising and never fussy shifts of position to the intermezzo from *The Nutcracker*, Mantei's ballet moments, backed by Emmons' shimmering cascades of light, took one deeply inside Tchaikovsky's majestic art. ▼

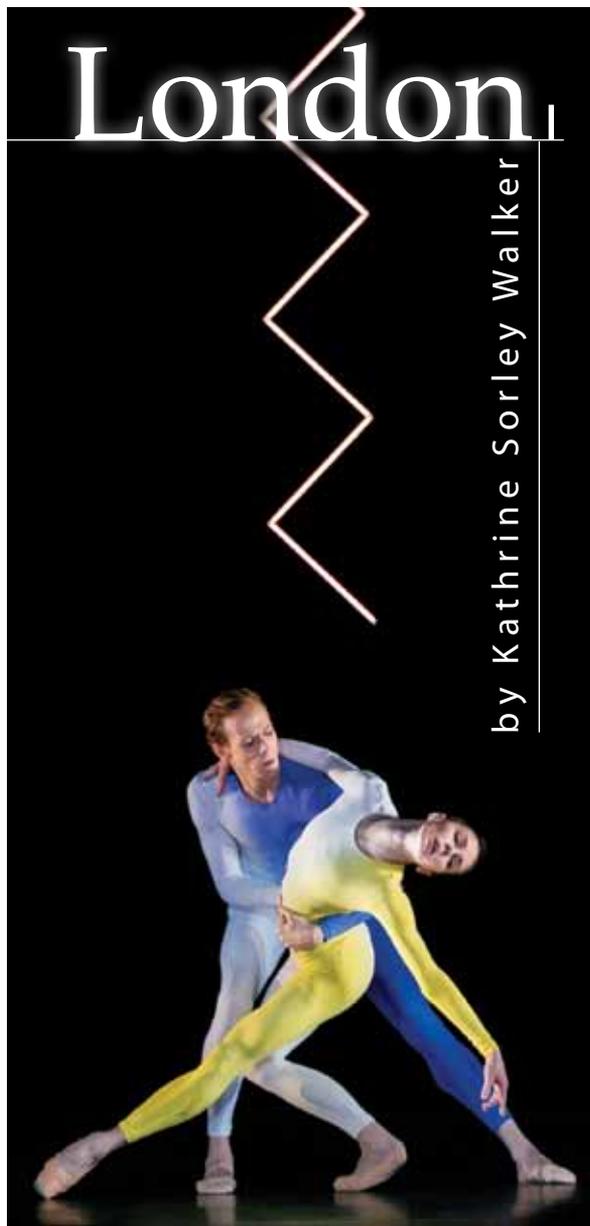
New productions of old favourites and new performances in classic roles have so far dominated the 2014 London ballet scene.

The major offering came from English National Ballet, which brought Anna-Marie Holmes' sumptuous version of *Le Corsaire* to the Coliseum in January. From intricate international origins, this staging has emerged enjoyably, stressing not only brilliant technical fireworks but comedy, too. There were excellent theatrical designs from Bob Ringwood, and a contrasted range of fine principal dancers — too many, alas, to name — was supported by an admirable corps de ballet.

At Covent Garden, *Giselle* and *The Sleeping Beauty* have recently been the Royal Ballet's ticket-sale-certainties, with such publicized draws as the newly acquired Natalia Osipova as *Giselle* — a role London saw her dance with the Mikhailovsky Ballet. She has the essential enchanting lightness and grace for this great part and lacks only the elusive identification with the old Romantic spirit that was understood by, for example, Alicia Markova and Margot Fonteyn.

In *The Sleeping Beauty*, Sarah Lamb brought good style and line to Aurora without introducing the subtle mood development that characterizes the different acts. She had an ideal partner in Steven McRae, whose stunning dance virtuosity is always linked with a true interpretation of character and music. Lamb and McRae were also brilliantly in touch, in Balanchine's *Jewels*, with the quickfire transatlantic wit of the Rubies section.

The current Royal Ballet production of *The Sleeping Beauty* purports to be closely related to the famous 1946 staging that launched the company — then known as Sadler's Wells Ballet — into the Royal Opera House. It is now, however, very divorced from that version apart from choreographic gems such as the Rose Adagio and the Aurora and Bluebird pas de deux. Among other points, it lacks the court and peasant dances in Act II —



and very little remains of Oliver Messel's original set and costume designs.

These days new creations in dance theatre all too often rely on clever graphics, intrusively “pushable-about” sets and lighting that plunges the stage into half-darkness, while the choreography remains sadly cliché-ridden and repetitive. These strictures are not the case, however, with Wayne McGregor's latest work. His confident and experienced style is very much his own, representing an academic approach that is coolly cerebral, scientific and mathematical rather than humanly histrionic. *Tetractys: The Art of Fugue*, which premiered by the Royal Ballet in February, is the result of like-minded thinking between McGregor and

his New York designer, Tauba Auerbach, satisfactorily meaningful to them both, but singularly remote in any ability to appeal to the majority of balletgoers. His hand-picked dancers related his gymnastic physical demands to Bach's music with devoted skill.

This work was a triple-bill centrepiece, programmed between Ashton's *Rhapsody* (again, a scintillating performance by McRae), and Kenneth MacMillan's magnificent *Gloria*. This exquisite and elegiac evocation of the “lost generation” of the First World War, set to Poulenc's music and memorably designed by Andy Klunder, was eloquently led by Lamb, Carlos Acosta and Thiego Soares.

British dance companies remain active and interesting, but they now contain very few leading British dancers. It is difficult to know what has altered this balance, but it was reflected in the majority of the winners in the many categories of the Critics' Circle National Dance Awards in January, when the leading dancers of 2013 were named — Osipova (a Russian) and Dane Hurst (a South African with Rambert Dance Company). The prestigious De Valois Award for Outstanding Achievement was shared between the popular and prolific (British) choreographer Matthew Bourne and, on her retirement from the Royal Ballet, the superbly versatile prima ballerina Leanne Benjamin (who is an Australian).

A series of dance-related BBC TV programs in March yielded a golden nugget in *Dancing in the Blitz*. This traced the Sadler's Wells Ballet story from its dramatic escape from a 1940 visit to Holland that chimed with the German invasion, through wide-ranging British touring during the rest of the Second World War. Admirably, and affectionately, narrated by David Bintley, with contributions from dancers such as Dame Beryl Grey and Dame Gillian Lynne, this important and well-balanced account should certainly be made available on DVD for worldwide study. ▼

In a climate of moral backlash in France, members of the National Front party have been demonstrating outside theatres trying to get a dance show banned for its male and female nudity. Little did they know that something they would no doubt have found even worse than naked men onstage was taking place at another Parisian theatre; that is, naked men offstage running amuck among the audience, straddling seats with people sitting on them or jovially jiggling their genitals at all and sundry. The show in question was by Canadian Dave St-Pierre, who was back in France with his 2006 hit piece, *A little tenderness for crying out loud*, and no one in the audience seemed to complain. In fact, I've never heard so much hearty laughter at the Théâtre de la Ville.

The two-hour piece is indeed not so much one of sexual transgression as one of exhilaratingly feral regression. It is the height of camp, schoolboy pranks and outrageous slapstick with a soothing twist. St-Pierre sees the world as hysterical pandemonium, but is a romantic at heart.

The final scene, one of the most famous among contemporary dance creations, is a vision of paradise regained that can melt the hardest pessimist.

Preceded on an earlier night by his emblematic first opus from 2004, *Bare Naked Souls*, it was followed by 2012's *Thunderbolts*, which revolves around the perils of love. *Foudres*, the title in French, refers to both lightning and Cupid's arrow that can hit you randomly as in a coup de foudre, which means love at first sight.

Nudity is par for the course here again and somehow relevant since winged angels are the main protagonists, a whole battalion of them inflicting multifarious tortures on a discombobulated couple. The message is clear: love hurts and forces one to bare both soul and body. Again the piece hits hard and outrageously. It is dedicated to more actual dancing than *A*

*little tenderness* and is less homogeneous and personal due to overt nods to other choreographers such as Maguy Marin, William Forsythe and Pina Bausch in some elements of the set designs or scenography, as well as to the work of Belgians like Jan Fabre or Wim Vandekeyser in some of the more sadistic scenes.

Of course, such references must have escaped a good many in the audience, and, well, ignorance in art, as in love, is sometimes best in order to fully enjoy the moment. Be that as it may, St-Pierre did help warm the cockles of the morose Parisian crowds and his triptych was by far one of the highlights of the Théâtre de la Ville season thus far.

Thwarted love was also at the heart of a double bill at the Garnier in February that included Agnes de Mille's emblematic *Fall River Legend* and the lesser shown *Miss Julie* by Birgit Cullberg, which entered the Paris Opera repertoire this year.

The first ends with a murder, the second a suicide, but both share a flair and inclination for dramatic theatricality. *Fall River Legend* felt a bit dated, though

it was danced very convincingly by new étoile Alice Renavand and premier danseur Vincent Chaillet.

Give or take some dispensable motifs in the staging, *Miss Julie* is on the whole a very enjoyable piece contrasting the world of peasants to that of the sophisticated landed gentry. Deep, open pliés inform the roughness of the common crowd and also brought to light how much Cullberg influenced her son, choreographer Mats Ek. She intended *Miss Julie*, inspired by Strindberg's play, to be some sort of aristocratic *Carmen*, both awesomely classy and sensually wild. Aurélie Dupond performed the trick with her usual panache. Opposite her, Nicolas Le Riche as Jean the seduced footman was simply astounding, both physically and dramatically, in his dual role of stilted valet and coarse and cowardly lover.

Cranko's *Onegin*, running alternately at the Paris Opera, marked both the leaving of an étoile and the coming of a new one.

Named late in her career, Isabelle Ciaravola has become a favourite among étoiles both at home and abroad thanks to her ideal proportions and beautiful lyricism. The role of Tatiana fits her naturally like an expensive glove. Opposite her, étoile Hervé Moreau blew hot and cold with a true Russian soul. Ciaravola's farewell performance and the longstanding ovation that followed are engraved in our memories.

Days later in the same role, Amandine Albisson, only 22, was named an étoile. In my previous report for *Dance International*, I praised Albisson for her wonderful technique and ideal physique in *Sleeping Beauty*. As Tatiana, opposite a technically impeccable though comparatively mechanical Josua Hoffalt, she danced with the vigour, innocence and passion of youth, as if her feet had wings. She is no doubt going to become one of the greatest stars of the Paris Opera. ▼



Aurélie Dupond in Birgit Cullberg's *Miss Julie*  
Photo: Anne Deniau

# Spain

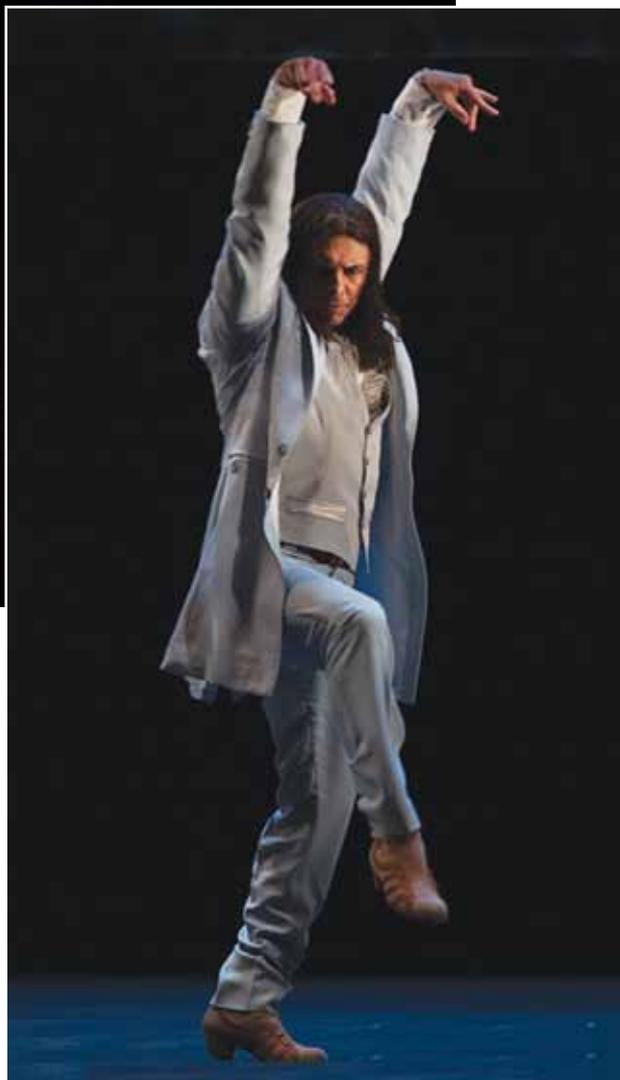
by Justine Bayod Espoz



Although their dance style and careers differ greatly, Grilo and Ortega are cut from the same cloth. Native sons of Jerez, flamenco's birthplace, both now in their mid-40s, they have almost identical artistic origins. Both studied with Jerez's most lauded maestros, Cristóbal el Jerezano, Fernando Belmonte and Paco del Río, and both began their professional careers in Jerez's Ballet Albarrizuela, where Grilo was the principal dancer, relinquishing the title to Ortega upon leaving the company in 1988. Both went on to tour the world and win important national dance competitions. However, while Grilo's fame grew quickly, Ortega's path has been more arduous.

Ortega admitted that his participation in this year's festival with his major production *El Baile Cante (The Dance Sings)* was unexpected. "In 2006, I danced at the festival and taught a course, and after all that time they never called. It's now 2014, and I didn't think I'd have this opportunity to participate again." But, in 2013, festival organizers commissioned a piece for the headlining program.

Ortega had 10 months to put together a world-class show for an international audience, and the only key direction the festival gave was that it feature traditional flamenco. "Giving them what they wanted was not difficult for me. All of these years that I had been left out of the festival and other festivals of this sort, a style of dance that was on the periphery of flamenco became popular, a sort of mix of all types



of dance. That's what was drawing all of the attention, and what I was dancing wasn't as interesting because it was straight flamenco. So, when the festival asked for traditional flamenco, I told them, that's all I know how to do."

The 18th edition of the Jerez Festival, Spain's most important annual flamenco gathering, has finally taken a much-needed change of tack. It would seem that continuing budget cuts and a dwindling audience has caused the festival directorship to re-examine its programming strategy. As a result, 2014 saw a reduction in the number of performances, but an increase in the diversity of projects and artists. Up-and-coming dancers and musicians made up a larger portion of the lineup, a change from the big names that had become the staple year in, year out.

The presence of artists from Jerez was still understandably strong. While some, such as dancer Joaquín Grilo, are international sensations who have a place in

the festival whenever they're ready to premiere a show, a few local artists who have yet to receive the serious and continued support of the festival, including Domingo Ortega, made it onto the main stage.

Ortega's flamenco is heavy, grounded and manly, sometimes dark and sombre, but at times playful, quick and crisp. "The time has come for us to once again focus on true flamenco. I'm not talking about some purist agenda. I am not one of those people who thinks that flamenco shouldn't evolve. Of course, it has to evolve," explains Ortega. "You can enrich yourself with other styles of dance, but in a festival dedicated to flamenco, flamenco should stand front and centre."

For a performance representative of the Jerez style in its current incarnation, Ortega was a solid choice that brought a fresh perspective to this year's festival.

It had been a couple of years since Grilo last performed at the Jerez Festival, and his newest production *Cositas Mias* (*Little Things of Mine*) was slated as the event's high-octane closer. An elegantly designed production, *Cositas Mias* was a brilliant showcase for guest artists that included pianist Dorantes and legendary singer Remedios Amaya, who were given ample time and space to establish

themselves as the artistic equals of the headlining Grilo, rather than appearing as mere accompanists.

"Collaborations are very expensive and hard to do under the current conditions," says Grilo. "I've had to rely on those closest to me to make this stew. I had to take the ingredients I had in my kitchen and cook, regardless of what I may have forgotten or didn't have the money to buy. What was most important was to make something that I enjoyed and that those who collaborated with me enjoyed."

There was, however, one key ingredient that Grilo was not counting on. About halfway through the Jerez Festival, on February 26, one of flamenco's most important ambassadors, guitarist Paco de Lucía, passed away from a heart attack at age 66. The shock of this loss left Grilo reeling. He'd known de Lucía from early on in his professional career and toured the world as his dancer from 1994 to 1999. Grilo dedicated his production to "my great friend and my teacher, everyone's teacher, Paco de Lucía."

The finale of *Cositas Mias* sees a physically and emotionally exhausted Grilo become slowly engulfed by his musicians. Slowly his arms rise above the dark group of bodies, a spotlight focused on the guitar gingerly gripped in his hands, and everyone sings lyrics composed in the maestro's memory: "Strings sound / cousins cry / it smells like cinnamon / the essence has left / abundant flows / inspiration is gone / de Lucía took it with him / how many moments in my memory" (my translation from the original Spanish). It was a simple and moving homage appropriate of two maestros: the one to whom it was dedicated and the one who delivered it.

Both of these phenomenal exponents of masculine flamenco dance will be on Canada's west coast in 2014. Domingo Ortega will perform in Alma de España Flamenco Dance Company's *Pasajes* in July in Victoria. Joaquín Grilo performs in November with the Vancouver International Flamenco Festival. ▼

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# ITALY

by Silvia Poletti



In this “winter of our discontent” with the crisis of ballet companies in Italian opera houses, whose existence seems more and more uncertain, some good news, like a breath of fresh air, has come from a new choreographer on the rise: Eugenio Scigliano.

A former outstanding dancer (he was a soloist with Balletto di Toscana, English National Ballet and Aterballetto), Scigliano has been choreographing for some years, but, with his latest two productions, he definitely deserves attention. What was really impressive in both is that there is always something happening that goes beyond the formal pattern and is emotionally moving.

Scigliano — born in Cosenza in 1968 — has been finding his own way to describe intimate feelings, dreams and emotions through movement that, while aware of the law of gravity, seem to always fight against it. He blends expressionistic, dramatic touches with

fluid dynamics, as in his version of *Giselle*, created for the Junior Balletto di Toscana, the company formed by the professional ballet students at the school of Balletto di Toscana. It’s a truly demanding challenge to find a new way to “tell” the story of a ballet masterpiece with very young dancers (they range from 16 to 21), but Scigliano made the right dramatic choices, staying close to the poetic sources of the original libretto by Théophile Gautier, the Romantic poet so fascinated by the mystery of death and the supernatural.

According to a program note, Scigliano was thinking about the early age of the dancers when he set the story in a Victorian college, where Giselle’s innocence is threatened by the Tutor. Despite the warnings of the Matron, who is the Tutor’s lover, Giselle (17-year-old Laura Magnetti) let herself be seduced, which causes her eventual shame and death. Scigliano’s *Giselle* recalls great themes of Romantic and Gothic nov-

elists: the ambiguous relationship between the adults, recalling Henry James’ *The Turn of the Screw*, and the Tutor’s longing for the dead Giselle so close to Heathcliff’s crying on Catherine’s corpse in Emily Bronte’s *Wuthering Heights*. This melancholic, nostalgic and unquiet mood touches all the choreography. Every gesture, glance, movement and place on the stage is used to create the feeling of an endless longing.

Far from the weightless steps of the original ballet, Scigliano uses an expressionistic body language, with all the heaviness of reality itself. The ghost brides coming out their graves slither on the ground: they cannot rise up, unable to find the co-ordination and strength of the living body. In her mad scene, alone, anguished and dismayed, Giselle expresses the annihilation she feels by lying down, armed opened as if hanging on a cross (a gesture her lover will repeat in the second part). The poetic naturalism the choreographer

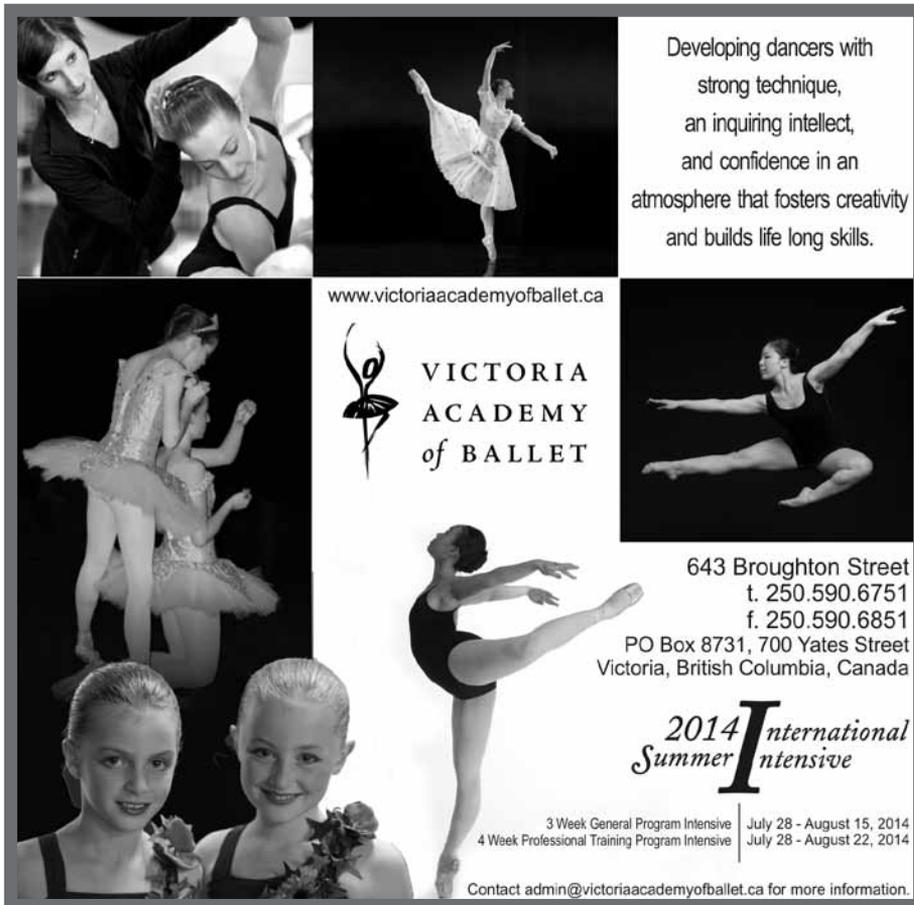
looks for is underlined also by Santi Rinciari's costumes — grey smocks and boots for the pupils, 19th-century wedding dresses for the wils — and the minimalistic gestures interlaced in the dance.

Premiered at Teatro Comunale in Vicenza last November, Scigliano's *Giselle* has been so acclaimed by the critics that *Danza & Danza* magazine called it the best Italian production of 2013.

Scigliano's next commitment was a new 47-minute commission by Aterballetto, *Don Q.* — *Don Quixote de la Mancha*, which premiered in Bolzano in January 2014. His second ballet for the company, currently directed by former Balletto di Toscana director Cristina Bozzolini, *Don Q.* was planned after the success of his full-evening *Casanova* in 2009. But this new commission had an extra meaning because, after Mauro Bigonzetti's decision to give up any creative collaboration with Aterballetto, Bozzolini wants to give more opportunities to a broader and younger range of Italian dancemakers.

Again the challenge for Scigliano was serious: *Don Quixote* is one of the most famous legends of European culture. Scigliano compares him to the artist, quoting, in a program note, Thomas Mann's statement: "Being an artist has always meant possessing reason and dreams." *Don Quixote* follows his ideals although his alter ego, Sancho Panza, tries always to lead him back to reality. The powerful opening duet describes clearly their relationship — a fight of opposite impulses and forces, persistently blasting like Kimmo Pohjonen's percussive music (suggesting the Don's rolling thoughts?). As the ballet progresses, the pair maintains this struggling relationship, the first dreaming ideals of purity (as in the dream scene, when two spirits of beauty appear to the Don like a whirling flame), the other choosing the materialistic side of life.

This short version of the ballet (a full evening will be premiered in autumn) again offers sincere emotional beauty: melancholia colours the emotional atmosphere, passing from the tensions and releases of the bodies to minimal gestures suggesting tenderness, fantasy and longing. Will Scigliano be so brave as to continue to define his own way to dance drama? ▼



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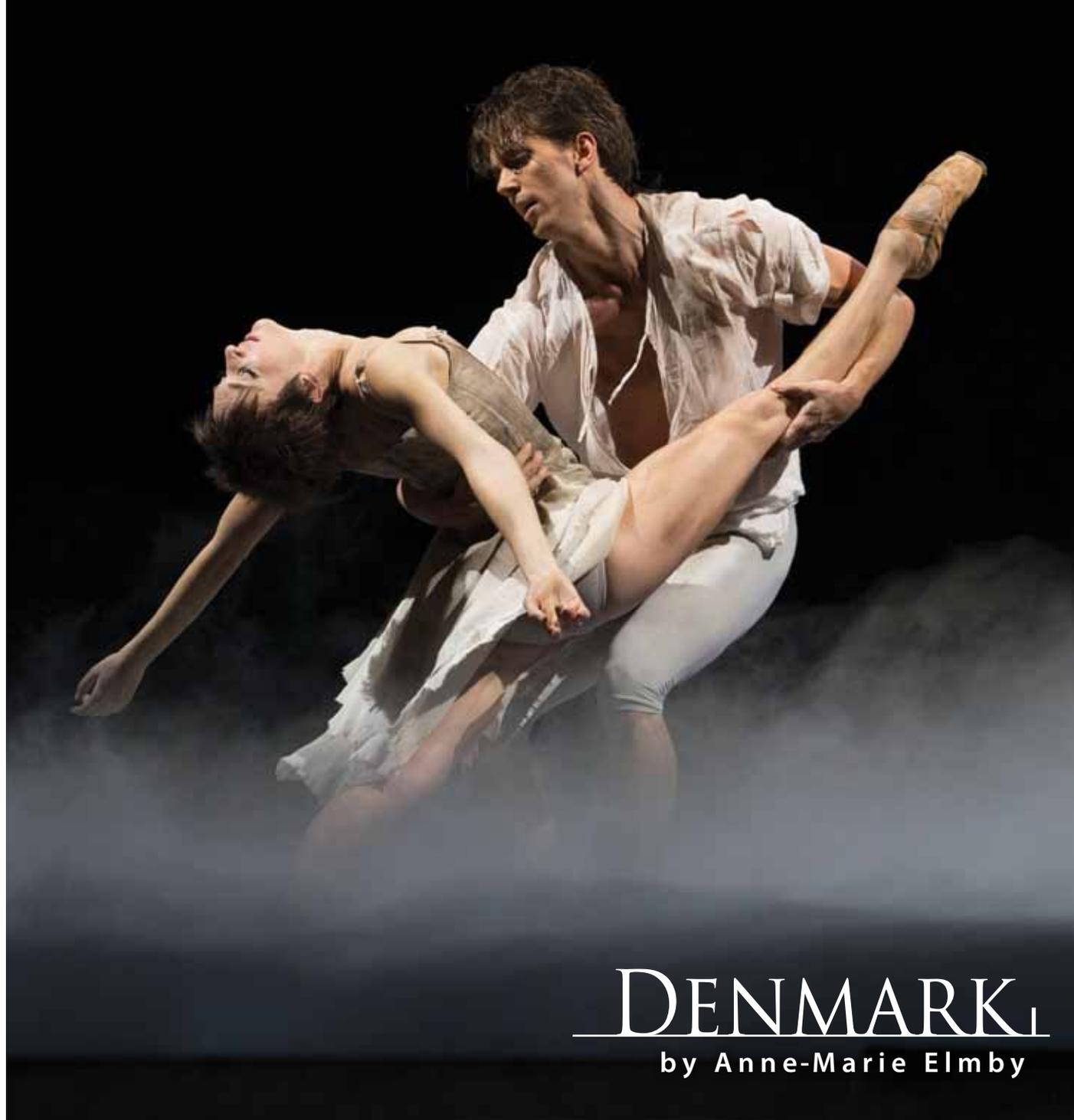
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Photo Credit: D. Brian Campsall



# DENMARK

by Anne-Marie Elmbj

**J**anuary offered a rare visit by the Mariinsky Ballet to the Royal Danish Theatre, bringing four performances of *Swan Lake* and three evenings of a triple bill of Mikhail Fokine ballets.

With its authentic ambience, *Swan Lake* was a marvel of aesthetic beauty. The poetic swan corps with their perfectly unison lines framed the leading couple. On the first evening, Evgeny Ivanchenko as Siegfried was the courteous partner to Anastasia Matvienko's

otherworldly Odette; as Odile, her flawless technique might have emitted more sparks to excite Ivanchenko's prince. The real fire was in the glittering black wings and flying jumps of Konstantin Zverev's fierce Von Rothbart, and one wondered that he could be so easily slain in Konstantin Sergeyev's version, with its happy ending.

The Fokine evening opened an exciting window to the Ballets Russes era for the Danish audience. *Chopiniana*, the epitome of a romantic ballet, begins

with a lyrical poet surrounded by posing sylphs, and it was danced with feather-light ease. *The Firebird* is a true Russian fairy tale about the fight between good and evil. Both Anastasia Petrushkova and Yulia Stepanova demonstrated clear-cut virtuosity alternating in the title role as they flew across the stage in a magnificent orange-red tutu to help the prince free his beloved princess by breaking the spell of the evil Kastlei. Igor Stravinsky's score set the scene for folkloristic round dances for the

bewitched princesses and for a frenzy of acrobatic jumps by trolls and evil spirits.

In Fokine's *Schéhérazade*, Nikolai Rimsky-Korsakov's symphonic poem and Leon Bakst's Eastern palette placed one as if in a harem from *Arabian Nights*. The central pas de deux between the Sultan's wife, Zobeide, and her golden slave was danced with intense erotic flavour by Daria Pavlenko and Andrei Yermakov. In Paris 1910, the sensual choreography and the dramatic finale with executions and suicide got an enthusiastic reception, too.

In a return visit, the Royal Danish Ballet travelled to St. Petersburg in April with August Bournonville's *Napoli* as part of the XIV International Ballet Festival *MARIINSKY*. Before that, in March, I saw the production at home in Copenhagen. In 2009, artistic director Nikolaj Hübbe, together with Sorella Englund, updated *Napoli* to a Fellini-inspired Naples of 1950 with a completely new Act II. Now Act III is also revised. A new pas de deux in Bournonville style illustrates Teresina and Gennaro's affection and the costume designs are made to harmonize with those of Act I.

Alexander Stæger is the quintessential Bournonville dancer and, as Gennaro, his fluent phrasing combined with temperament made the steps spring intuitively from his immediate emotions. Gitte Lindstrøm was a modern Teresina, who by whispering in Gennaro's ear easily persuaded him to take her out in his boat against her mother's will. As Golfo, Gregory Dean was a scull-faced prince of the deep blue sea. With tentacle arms he encircled Teresina in a beguiling pas de deux, but was reduced to a slithering snake as Gennaro's love took her back into the light.

As a new initiative to bring Royal Danish Theatre performances to the rest of the country, the last performance of *Napoli* this season was transmitted to 31 cinemas throughout Denmark.

In 2003, Kenneth MacMillan's *Manon* was performed by the Royal Danish Ballet with new costumes and scenography by Mia Stensgaard, a version that has since been shown by local companies in Berlin, London and Helsinki. Now a new generation of Danish Ballet dancers has taken over the dramatic roles. Alban Lendorf, who last summer won the prestigious Benois de la Danse prize for his performance as

Armand Duval in John Neumeier's *Lady of the Camellias*, was challenged with another young lover role as Des Grieux, who turns both cheater and murderer in his pursuit of Manon.

Alexandra Lo Sardo was perfect for the role for the young country girl Manon, who easily captured the heart of Lendorf's sensitive Des Grieux. Trusting her brother Lescaut, in the persuasive shape of Benjamin Buza, she soon discovered the power of her charms when offered to Cédric Lambrette's foot fetishist Monsieur GM. There were breathtaking moments, when Lendorf easily supported Lo Sardo's slight figure in the passionate lifts and swirls from their first spontaneous love union to the final scene, where he desperately tried to revive her slack body.

In the second cast, Ulrik Birkkjær as Des Grieux was frankly infatuated with J'aime Crandall's sweet Manon. She im-

pulsively followed him to his lodgings, where their dream duet of passionate embraces sealed their love. The carefree girl turned into a self-confident mistress floating on a wave of men's desire, which made her moral downfall all the deeper.

In February, principal Mads Blangstrup turned 40, suggesting it would be his last season with the company. In the first cast he was a brutal prison chief; in the second, he portrayed Monsieur GM as a superior aristocrat who never doubted his right to own Manon.

Two newly appointed soloists, Holly Dorger and Caroline Baldwin, put full value into the prominent role of Lescaut's mistress. Jonathan Chmelensky daringly jumped and turned in the virtuoso solo in Act II, giving a true picture of a tipsy Lescaut. In the following pas de deux, he made the audience waver between laughs and gasps for fear that he would drop his partner. ▼

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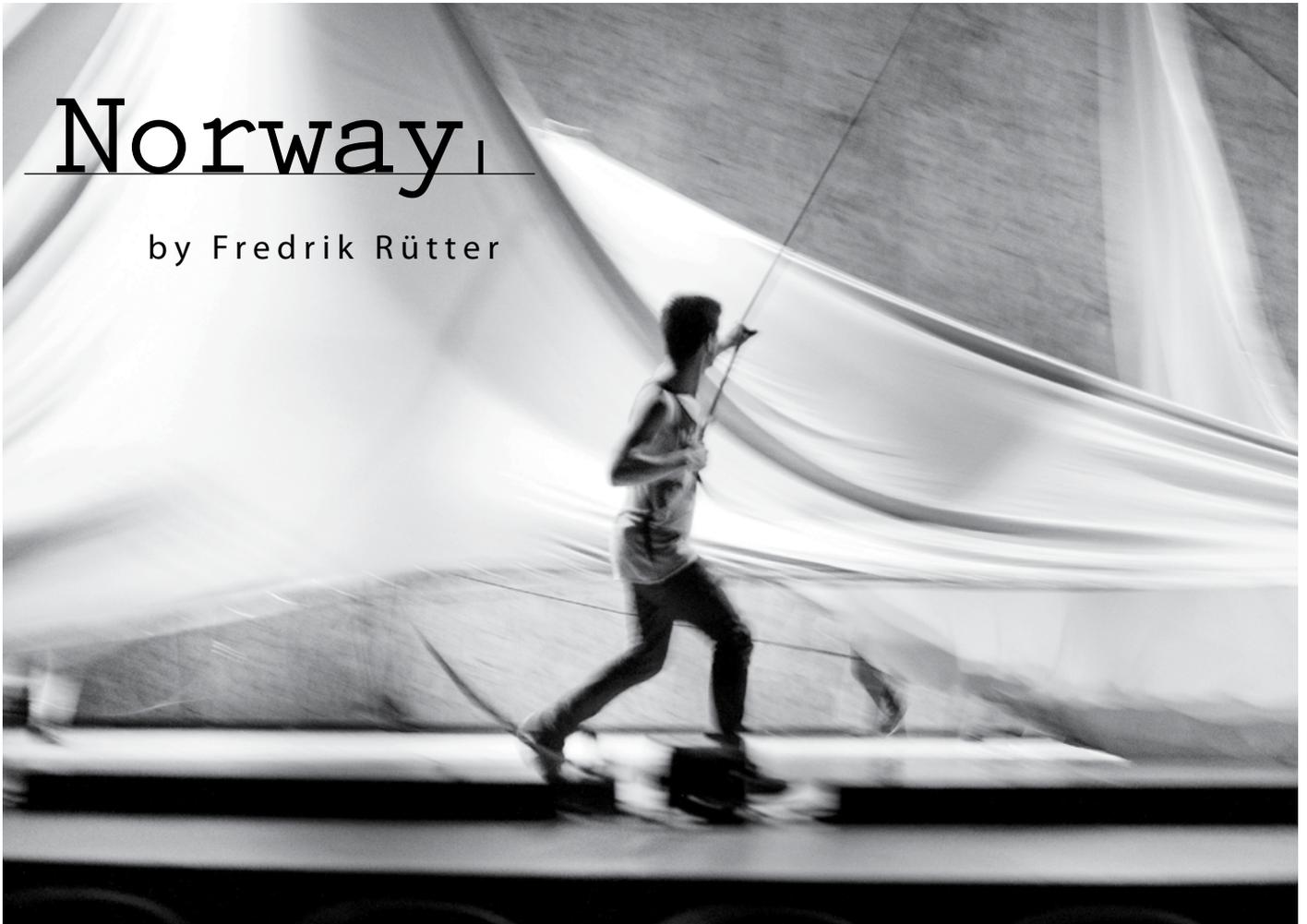


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# Norway

by Fredrik Rütter



Navid Rezvani immigrated to Norway from Iran when he was a little boy, and soon found himself entering the milieu of hip-hop. Known as B-Boy Spaghetti, he has been on *Norwegian Talents* and *Dancefever* television shows, and is a member of the dance group Kingwings, doing hip-hop and break dancing. This group recently did an evening together with soloists from the Norwegian National Ballet, showing off their different styles of dance. All shows were sold out.

Rezvani put together an evening called *Each one teach one* with himself in the main position, and toured the country, visiting more than 30 cities. The title of the evening reflects his social engagement and commitment to share his knowledge of dance with the younger generation. The performance was based on the journey of his own life

using dance, speech, film, video and, of course, a lot of music with a hard beat. He is a fantastic mover with incredible high speed; there is no doubt this was Rezvani's evening.

Oslo Dance Ensemble normally produces one big performance every year with 12 to 16 dancers. This winter they presented three pieces in a mixed bill titled *and Pop*. In Christopher Arouni's *Leap Through Gates*, three couples enter the stage through three gates: they fight to break through to be able to meet in the same area, and when they do they mingle athletically, with music and dance ending up in an aesthetic unity.

Masja Abrahamsen's piece was named *Run* and that pretty much sums up what it is all about, using high tempos with extremely intricate combinations as she draws the parallel between dance and sport.

The third work, *Pulp*, created by the

duo Subjazz, was the climax of the evening with zombies, the devil and other occult characters. Normally, the company finishes with a cane and top hat number, so this was something quite different.

In August, Hooman Sharifi will take over as Bergen-based Carte Blanche's new artistic director. Like Rezvani, Sharifi was born in Iran; he came to Norway in 1989. His background in dance also stems from street dance and hip-hop, and he has been running his own group, Impure Company, for many years. Together with Crystal Pite, Sharifi was responsible for the first jubilee performance in honour of Carte Blanche's 25th anniversary year, presented several times during the first quarter of 2014. Pite was represented with her beautiful *Ten Duets on a Theme of Rescue* from 2008, in which the dancers try to reach one another, but when they do meet,

one of them fades away, leaving their place to another. *Ten Duets* is a rather short piece, but after the audience had been through Sharifi's tedious contribution, *Shadows Remain Silent*, it was clear that *Duets* was the winner of the evening.

When it comes to work opportunities for freelance dancers, musicals are a must, and this winter/spring season has been good in that sense. First out in Oslo was *A Chorus Line*, staged by American Chet Walker, who has a long history on Broadway behind him. There was a lot of good dancing, but the performance lacked an inner nerve. Then followed a very energetic version of *Gyps and Dolls*, a great success thanks to sharp dancing with a lot of surplus energy. *Fiddler on the Roof* was also on view, by the resident company at Det Norske Teatret (the Norwegian Theatre), which first performed the piece in 1967.

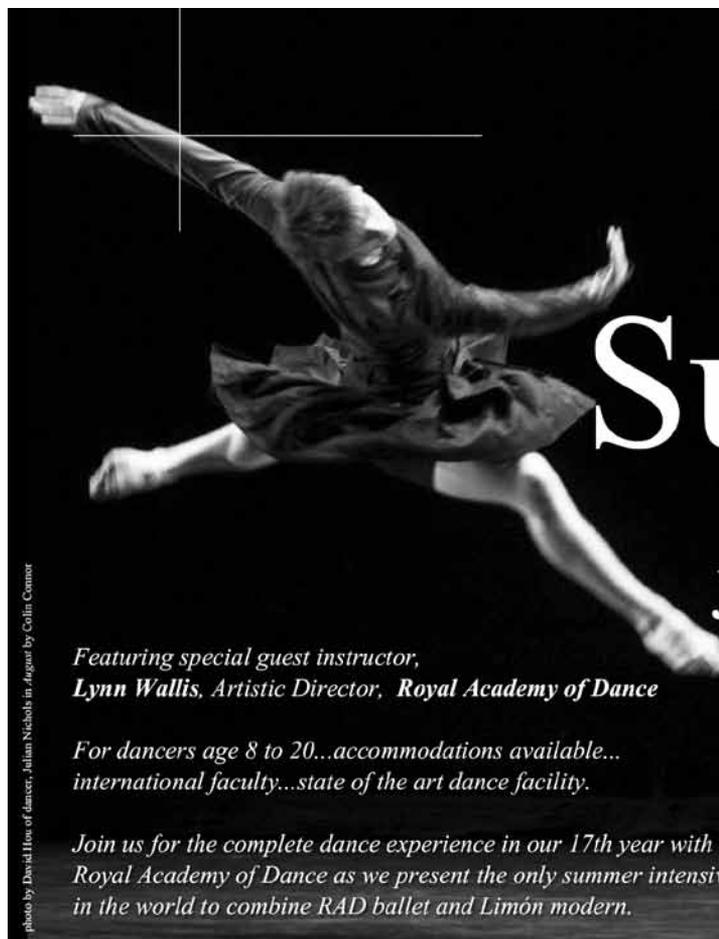
At the Norwegian National Ballet, John Cranko's beautiful version of *Onegin* has been in the repertoire since 1997, and is now finally back. This

must be one of the strongest story ballets ever put on a stage, and the way Cranko has built it dramatically is superb. You cannot do this ballet without a cast who is willing to enter into the acting parts of the characters; technique is essential since all the solos and especially the pas de deux are breathtaking, but without the ability to give yourself over to the lead roles, the ballet is lost. Fortunately, Norwegian National Ballet has the talent.

As Tatiana, Julie Gardette did a remarkable job. She is originally from Lyon, France, and debuted with the Ballet Nationale de Marseille. She has a natural aristocratic look and all the difficult technical obstacles of the piece were never visible. At the very last moment, when standing alone in the middle of the stage having refused Onegin's letter and love, she was absolutely fabulous. She had extremely good help from Cuban Yoel Carrenó as Onegin. So far, it has been his technical skills one has noticed most in his dancing with the company, not his acting. But as

Onegin he really surprised, and in the last pas de deux in the third act he was fully convincing. Lucas Lima as Lenski performed his solo in the second act before the duel with pureness and honesty. Emma Lloyd as Olga had all the energy this young girl should have. The corps de ballet followed their soloists and it was one of the greater evenings at the ballet.

Sweden's Cullberg Ballet were guests at Dansens Hus in Oslo with a new production, *Plateau Effect*, by young Swede Jefta van Dinther, who may well be the one who can give the group the new identity they really need after many years searching in the dark. Van Dinther's piece does not have much dancing, but it has enormous energy, with the dancers working with fabric as if they were handling the sails on an old ship in full storm. This company has also found themselves a new artistic director, academic Gabriel Smeets, who was formerly the artistic director of the School of New Dance Development in Amsterdam. ▼



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photo by David Hou of dancer, Julian Nichols in August by Collin Connor



## Australia

by Jordan Beth Vincent

As the opening night curtain came down in Melbourne's State Theatre, the applause for the Australian Ballet's *Manon* was deafening, with the usually laid-back local audience leaping to their collective feet in cheers. This was, after all, only a day or two after principal artist Lucinda Dunn announced her impending retirement from the company after an impressive 23 years. Dunn's departure comes on the heels of principal artist Olivia Bell's retirement in November last year, and only a few seasons behind Rachel Rawlins' retirement at the end of 2012. Clearly, there is a changing of the guard at the Australian Ballet.

Despite the fact that Dunn has been the Australian Ballet's longest serving ballerina, this was the first season she has been cast in the lead role of Kenneth MacMillan's 1974 classic. Considering the depth of emotion she brought, it is

an enormous disappointment that this was both the first and last time she will perform the role.

*Manon* was first staged in Australia by the Royal Ballet in 1988, and was last mounted in its entirety in 2008 when now-retired ballerina Kirsty Martin led the cast through this gruesome and gritty tale of 18th-century Paris and Louisiana (Dunn was on maternity leave at the time). In 2012, American Ballet Theatre star Julie Kent performed the Act 1 bedroom scene with Adam Bull as part of the company's 50th anniversary Gala celebration, bringing the tragic tale to Melbourne's stages and to television screens across the country. Kent's *Manon* was luscious and knowing — very different in her lustful abandon from Dunn's more reserved, yet no less sensual, interpretation. Dunn's *Manon* retains a kind of easy innocence, but it is *Manon* as the wronged woman, brutalized and broken, that her interpretation highlights.

Bull's 2014 performance of des Grieux's ill-fated attempt to rescue *Manon* from her fate was heart-wrenching and, when compared with his interpretation of the role in 2008 and 2012, is evidence of his maturing as a performer. Bull has a beautiful, long line, but he appeared to struggle through the first slow adagio solo, which is challenging for its exposing technical demands. He seemed to grow more confident throughout the ballet, culminating with a passionate pas de deux at the end.

Andrew Killian was perfectly cast as the mischievous and dangerously lascivious Lescaut, managing to make us want to forgive him for the unforgivable act of trying to sell his sister to the wealthy Monsieur GM. Killian also performed the role in 2008 and, this time around, was paired with Lana Jones as his Mistress, who also offered a fine performance — the perfect comedic partner for MacMillan's crowd-pleasing drunken pas de deux.

Former Australian Ballet star Steven Heathcote returned to the stage as Monsieur GM. After an illustrious career with the company, Heathcote has begun reappearing in character roles (and performed Monsieur GM in the 2008 production). The slimy Monsieur GM is a meaty role for Heathcote, as it demands strength and excellent partnering, as well as acting ability. In the program notes, Heathcote speaks of his desire to bring both humanity and magnetism to the role, even as he highlights the character's selfish, hedonistic character. Yet Monsieur GM is still a villain, his nastiness obscured by his wealth and seemingly magnanimous gifts to *Manon*. As the other villain in the piece, the cold-blooded gaoler, Brett Simon made the most of his height as he towered over and overpowered the shorn-haired prisoners.

One of many MacMillan ballets with a rape scene, *Manon* integrates gritty violence and depictions of the very worst of humanity with elegant and often light-hearted humour. Yet even the comedic moments, such as Lescaut and his mistress' inebriated pas de deux, have a backbone of unpleasantness, as we are reminded that Lescaut's cruelty toward women is drawn from his entitled sense of ownership over them. This shifting ground between explicit content, social commentary and the simple beauty in classical technique is one of the challenges of *Manon*, both from an audience perspective and, undoubtedly, from a performance perspective. In 2014, *Manon* is a kind of museum piece, hopelessly outdated and trite from the ringleader wigs to the heavy-handed narrative, and yet still with the power to connect to the audience with its tragic themes.

As Dunn stepped forward to receive her accolades at the end of the evening, she was openly weeping — whether from the aftermath of the ballet's emotional final scene or from the realization that her career as a ballerina is coming to an end. But it is not all sad news for Dunn, who also recently announced her appointment as the new artistic director of Sydney City Youth Ballet and the Tanya Pearson Classical Coaching Academy, the very ballet school where she trained as a young dancer. ▼

# Backstage at the Bolshoi by Pia Lo

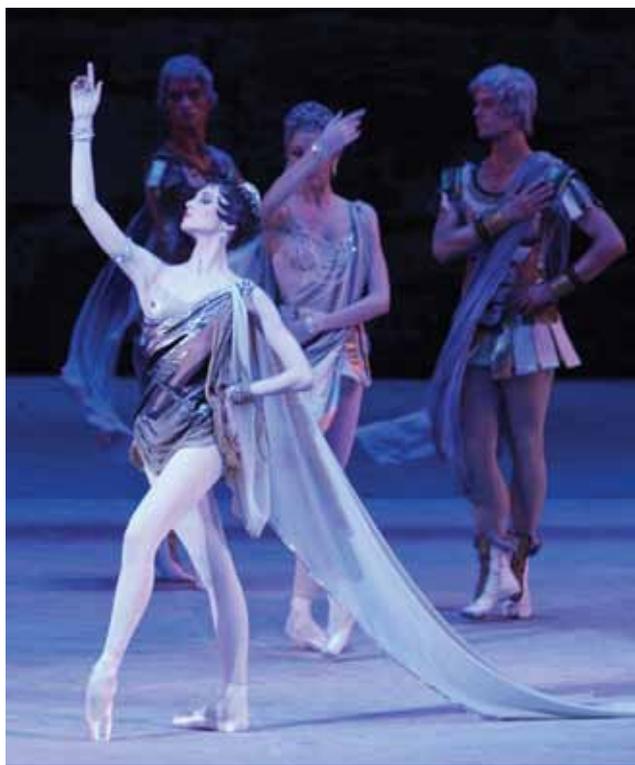
*Pia Lo took a sabbatical from her day job in risk management at an international bank in order to travel the world to write about new dance experiences. Her goal was audience development, which she had been charged with as an ambassador for the Canadian Dance Assembly, a service organization promoting professional dance. In Moscow, Lo watched from backstage as the Bolshoi Ballet performed Yuri Grigorovich's 1968 showpiece Spartacus in October 2013, and wrote about it for Dance International.*

Just inside the downstage wing on stage right, I was seated on a narrow bench beside a dance critic and three older ladies who worked in the theatre. We were dressed in black, as required of anyone backstage during a performance. At 10 minutes to curtain, technicians made their last checks while dancers scattered the stage in splits and stretches. Mikhail Lobukhin practised pirouettes and paced casually; he looked the part of Spartacus, the enslaved gladiator, with his Herculean physique and shaggy blond hair. Dark eyeliner transformed the doe eyes of Vladislav Lantratov into a menacing glare as the egocentric Crassus. Wearing exercise pants and a hoodie over his costume, Lantratov held a prop sword while practising jumps. Sergei Filin, artistic director of the ballet, came to give his support, dressed in an elegant suit and wearing large, tinted sunglasses to protect his eyes, which are still sensitive following the vicious acid attack on him in January 2013. From the other side of the curtain there was an audible murmur as the audience — a full house — settled into their seats.

The rest of the dancers took their places in the wings. They marked some of the choreography together and bent their bodies in stretches, then nodded to the répétiteur, who gave his last instructions sitting on a stool at the edge of our curtain wing. At 7:08 p.m., the house lights went down.

There was a clash of cymbals from the orchestra, the curtains flew open and dancers burst onto the stage. I reeled back and tucked my legs to my chest in a panic as a large prop was wheeled offstage at full speed and an army of spear-

wielding gladiators charged past with the same fury. Some dancers dressed as slaves stood hunched in the wings with their eyes on the stage. Quietly, they counted: “Ras, dva, tree, cheteyre,” then “Pa-idyoom!” meaning “Let’s go!” The répétiteur whispered “tsst” toward the stage; over the music and commotion, one of the dancers looked up at him, then signaled subtly to the others.



Coming back from a demanding variation, Lantratov let out a soft grunt in the wings before leaping back onstage, where the energy mounted. Backstage, heaving breaths and signs of fatigue became more pronounced in the scarce moments between scenes. Finally, the curtains closed and a dancer upstage let out a “yee-haw!”

During intermission some dancers went for a smoke; they came back in a mix of costumes for the next act, including villa guests and shepherds. Then

came a dancer dressed as a bear and another as a bumblebee; turns out these two were just keeping warm in pajama suits. Eric, one of the musicians, came onstage from the orchestra pit and took a joke photo of Lantratov lying on the ground pretending to be dead. Lobukhin leaned with his hands on a table and chatted with a dancer while pressing the ball of his foot against the floor, then gave it a shake before walking around on the stage; it seemed there was something painful about his foot. On cue, everyone took their places for the next act.

During Svetlana Zakharova's variation as Aegina, the dancers in the wings stopped fidgeting and watched her intently. Later, she stood 10 centimetres in front of me waiting for her cue to go back on. I was awestruck that such power could come from her tiny frame.

In the last act, Lobukhin was hoisted up between spears in the scene of Spartacus' death, then mourned by a tearful Anna Nikulina as his love, Phrygia. Curtains closed and Zakharova lifted her arms up and clapped. “Bravos” and applause thundered from the audience. Everyone was all smiles and dancers took

their bows.

Afterward, a television station conducted some interviews. Filin and his wife, also a Bolshoi dancer, among others, exchanged congratulations with the company. Gradually, the house and backstage emptied and stagehands got to work, unfastening backdrops and winding up cables. “Dyevushka, pazhaloosta,” one of them called out to me, meaning “Miss, please.” I was still standing on the stage and on the floor covering that they were peeling up. ▼

**Bavarian State Ballet**  
Barton, Maliphant, Simon / Mixed Bill  
by Jeannette Andersen

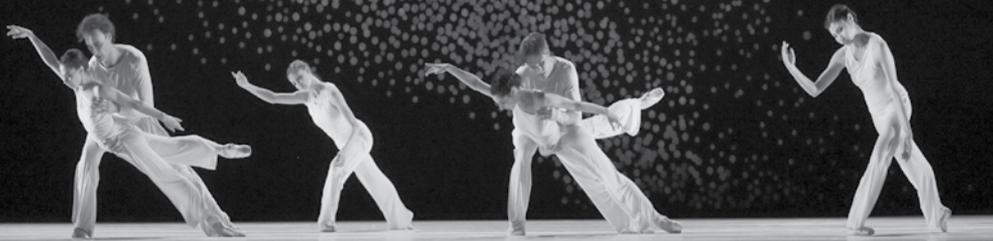
**Ballet du Grand Théâtre de Genève**  
Joëlle Bouvier / *Roméo et Juliette*  
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**Oregon Ballet Theatre**  
Stowell, Kudelka, Wheeldon, Fonte / Mixed Bill  
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by Judith Delmé



## Bavarian State Ballet

### Barton, Maliphant, Simon / Mixed Bill

With a festive opening act, including a pre-premiere fashion show and sound installation at the Munich Opera House, the Bavarian State Ballet opened its annual Ballet Week in April. The first night's three premieres took us on a delightful trip from heaven to earth, marred only by one piece's lack of dancing.

Azure Barton, a Canadian based in New York, brought us into outer space with her *Konzert für Violine und Orchester*, also the title of the Mason Bates music to which it was set. The dancers seemed to move like small celestial bodies in their own orbit against a backdrop (by designer Burke Brown and Barton) resembling a distant galaxy.

Carefree, but with courtesy as their governing principle, the 16 dancers went about their own business, often in infinite variations of high jumps. On recognizing that other dancers had entered, they exited with a courtly gesture. In a detached, impersonal and cool way, solos, couples and groups interchanged, often creating still-life pictures of sheer beauty broken only by the occasional ripple of an arm.

The main couple, Katherina Markowskaja and Lukás Slavický — she usually sprightly and vivacious, he always loving and attentive — danced an intimate duet

ending with a real kiss, but without a spark of passion. Their white bodies against a blue sky were breathtakingly beautiful, but cool and distant as if they moved in an otherworldly dimension free of human feelings. Afterward, they parted, blended into the group and took other partners as if their encounter had had no emotional impact.

The celestial atmosphere was enhanced by Linda Chow's white costumes made of a light material, which lent the dancers an air of floating, the men in loose hanging shirts and pants, the women in long pants with a divided skirt. Bates' symphonic and techno composition was similarly celestial, and sounded like film music.

With *Spiral Pass*, British choreographer Russell Maliphant brought us back to earth in a mix of low, intertwining gliding movements. The piece opens with a man (Marlon Dino) curved like a ball in a spotlight. A woman (Lucia Lacarra) appears from the darkness and they engage in a duet like two moving sculptures, spiralling, winding and coiling around each other.

Lacarra was in utmost control of every movement. Despite her suppleness, her averted gaze evoked the emotional detachment of a marble statue. They were followed by nine other dancers forming couples and groups, elaborating on the theme of spiralling.

The piece had some particularly captivating moments. In a dance with four men, Lacarra — seemingly weightless and defying

gravity — walked on and over their bodies; from a folded position in the arms of one man, she suddenly stood on the arm of another; she let herself fall and was caught in the split second before hitting the ground.

Later three women whirled back and forth in rectangles of light just to dissolve like in a film into a scene with four men spinning on their knees. Jonah Cook, a very gifted and musical young dancer, and Karen Azatyan were especially good at creating the illusion of spinning objects.

Stevie Stewart's costumes, whitish tops with dark sweatpants, gave the dancers the kind of everyday anonymity that enabled Maliphant to transform them into strange organisms telling their own mysterious tale of danger, control and trust in each other. The music by DJ/composer Mukul, a collection of sounds created simultaneously with the choreography, added to the earth-bound atmosphere.

The evening's opening piece, *Der gelbe Klang* (*The Yellow Sound*), was the non-dancing piece and seemed an odd choice for a high-calibre ballet company. It was created by the German stage director Michael Simon, a longtime collaborator of William Forsythe and Jirí Kylián, who also contributed set and costumes.

As inspiration, Simon used the painter Wassily Kandinsky's 1911 experimental play of the same name, in which Kandinsky propagated the idea that all theatrical elements should be put on an equal footing. It was, however, never staged in his time. The result was a work in which the credo seemed to be "Everything can move," but in which the dancers were sadly reduced to movers of objects.

In *Der gelbe Klang*, we meet a child exploring a painter's studio; we experience oversized fragments of paintings similar to Kandinsky's seemingly fighting for space; text fragments on boards carried by dancers display themselves; a mouth moving on legs and yellow body parts (again carried by dancers) finally assemble to form a gibbering Michelin-Man figure, all accompanied by excerpts from lesser known Frank Zappa compositions. The piece was received with audible disapproval by the dance-loving Munich audience, and you cannot help but wonder what persuaded ballet director Ivan Liska to use his limited resources on a production that made so little use of his very talented dancers.

— JEANNETTE ANDERSEN

## Joëlle Bouvier / *Roméo et Juliette*

Ballet du Grand Théâtre de Genève's *Roméo et Juliette* opens with a striking image: a bare-chested man in a long black skirt, holding a tall black pole and standing on a silver ramp that extends from one side of the stage to the other, curving down as if into the earth at one end. He moves off the ramp and onto the floor, spinning in circles at centre stage, his full skirt swirling and his long pole beginning to hum as it brushes the ground. He is Death (we assume) and he is coming for someone.

The rest of the piece, however, only occasionally lives up to this stunning opening.

Created by Swiss-born contemporary dance choreographer Joëlle Bouvier for Ballet Genève in 2009, this *Roméo et Juliette* — seen in Victoria, British Columbia, at the Royal Theatre on March 14 — is a minimalist 75-minute re-telling of the world's most famous love story. Seeking to explain the backstory quickly and simply, Bouvier follows the arresting if somewhat obvious image of Death (Aurélien Douqué) with an even more heavy-handed one: two groups of black-clad dancers, with two male dancers in each group manipulating a single figure in white — one male and one female — lifting them up and down, over and over, in silence. The figures are, of course, Roméo (Nahuel Vega) and Juliette (Sara Shigenari): mere puppets of fate and family.

From here, the Shakespearean narrative takes over. Bouvier uses selections from the familiar Sergei Prokofiev score, composed for the Kirov Ballet in 1935, sometimes matching the action to the part written expressly for it, and sometimes not. To begin, she takes the magnificent opening chords of the Dance of the Knights to express aurally the devastating impact of the moment the two lovers meet. Except that the impact is all in the ears and not in the eyes. There is barely a ripple, and certainly no electric charge, when Roméo and Juliette first see each other.

The choreography throughout the piece rarely, if ever, lives up to the splendour of the score or the heart-wrench of the story. Where Bouvier excels is in the fight sequences. She does violence exceptionally well and the battles between

Tybalt (powerfully danced by Loris Bonani) and Mercutio (Vladimir Ippolitov), and between Tybalt and Roméo, are almost terrifying in their physicality and intensity. I wanted to turn away but couldn't, equally horrified and fascinated.

Everything else is under-choreographed. The pieces for the full corps, generally danced in unison, are heavily repetitive and simplistic: barefoot, the women run a lot and throw themselves into the men's arms a lot, while the men run, too, and catch the women over and over again, and they all occasionally throw in the odd contemporary hand or head gesture. It's a shame, because these lovely and talented dancers could do so much more. The biggest pity, however, is how under-used poor Roméo and Juliette are.

showing us with his body how her death has devastated him.

Yet there are some absolutely wonderful things here, too. There are those fight scenes for one, and some dynamite visuals. The set (by Rémi Nicolas and Jacqueline Bosson) with its curving ramp seems monumental, but then dramatically splits apart toward the end. Death returns again with his face shrouded in black to carry away Mercutio; Juliette climbs a human balcony before Roméo catches her; a wedding veil/shroud she wears magically rises to indicate the marriage bed; dancers create a bier using poles just like the one Death carried to convey Juliette to her tomb.

The striking visuals almost, but not quite, make up for the lack of either romance or tragedy in this production.



## Ballet du Grand Théâtre de Genève

Vega proves he can be a compelling dancer in his fight with Tybalt, yet we have to take the story's word for it that he is madly in love. Shigenari has a great deal of solo time, yet manages to tell us nothing about herself. We get no sense of who these two are as individuals, and there is no joyous spark between them, which could perhaps be partly a lack of dramatic ability, but mostly it lies, I think, in the blandness of the choreography. Our hearts do not quicken with theirs, nor do we despair with Roméo when Juliette dies. Instead, we watch as he moves her lifeless body from here to there and back again, rather than

And there are a number of unnecessary irritants: Why does Tybalt wear a skirt when no other male does, except Death? Why does Roméo change into wide-legged pants to fight Tybalt? Why doesn't Death come back for Tybalt and Roméo, too? How exactly did Roméo die — did he simply will himself to death? Was Juliette actually dead at the end, or merely sitting down for a moment?

And yet, and yet ... those fights and those few stunning images will stick with me.

— ROBIN J. MILLER

## Stowell, Kudelka, Wheeldon, Fonte / Mixed Bill

“You never know if it’s you or the dancers,” choreographer Todd Bolender commented in 2006, shortly before he died. He was speaking of the international success of his ballet, *The Still Point*, which premiered in the 1950s in New York and was for decades in the repertoires of many companies in the United States and abroad.

Ideally, it is choreographers and dancers, working together, who create excellence. That was certainly the case with Oregon Ballet Theatre’s February mixed bill at Portland’s Keller Auditorium, in which the first and second casts brought out quite different things in the program’s four finely crafted pieces: Christopher Stowell’s premiere, *A Second Front*, James Kudelka’s *Almost Mozart*, Christopher Wheeldon’s *Liturgy* and Nicolo Fonte’s *Bolero*.

This was particularly true of *Almost Mozart*, made on Oregon Ballet Theatre in 2006. The scantily costumed, unabashedly experimental work, in which the five cast members perform a series of duets and trios, ends with a flashy bravura solo.

Opening night, Xuan Cheng, a principal dancer of slight build whose fragile appearance belies considerable muscular strength, was the woman struggling to free herself from the strong grip of Jordan Kindell and Michael Linsmeier in the three trios, a seemingly impossible task. But only seemingly — at one point she appeared to be slamming both to the floor simultaneously, eliciting audience cheers. Following a passionately sad pas de deux, performed opening night by Alison Roper and Brett Bauer, Cheng returned to the stage, executed some rapid and triumphant pirouettes, and exited.

The second cast made Kudelka’s ballet look quite different, primarily because of Candace Bouchard’s interpretation of Cheng’s role. Dancing with Adam Hartley and Avery Reiners, Bouchard turned Cheng’s outward struggle into an inner one, a search for ways to break their grip without it being an athletic contest. As she twisted her body this way and that, you wondered not so much if she was going to free herself as how she would stretch herself next.

For Martina Chavez, or any other company dancer, Roper’s wrenching eloquence in the pas de deux was difficult if not impossible to match. Partnered with acute sensitivity by Brian Simcoe, Chavez didn’t try, instead deploying her endlessly long legs and beautiful face to express the end of a romance, perhaps, rather than the permanent departure implied by Roper. The pas de deux is the only part of this ballet accompanied by music, Mozart’s *Masonic Funeral Music*. The other sections are introduced by fragments from Mozart’s *Piano Concerto No. 23 in A Major*, but danced in silence occasionally broken by the sound of pointe shoes hitting the floor.

*A Second Front* is Stowell’s 11th piece for Oregon Ballet Theatre, which he directed from 2003 to the end of 2012. He knows

While solos, particularly one performed by Li, convey the edgy energy of this ballroom scene, and the opening pas de deux sets the fearful tone, the ensemble dances with their intricate floor patterns most visibly demonstrate that Stowell has mastered his craft. The work is full of steps that reflect Stowell’s dancing career, much of it in the Balanchine repertory, rendered in a way that makes *A Second Front* expressive of our time as well as of the mid-century era in which Shostakovich composed his ballet suites, under the threat of Soviet censorship.

*Liturgy*, Wheeldon’s liquidly gymnastic pas de deux to a score by Philip Glass, was danced elegantly by Wu and Simcoe on opening night, more athletically but no less beautifully by Roper and Bauer later



these dancers well, having developed many of them, and it showed on opening night, when Cheng, Simcoe, Haiyan Wu, Ye Li and Ansa Deguchi were particularly outstanding in Stowell’s fast, dramatic neo-classical choreography.

The ballet takes place in a decaying Soviet ballroom, the dancers costumed by Mark Zappone in grey suits for the men, the women in pleated silky grey gowns. The music — by Dimitri Shostakovich, alternately menacing and lyrical — is, as is usual with Stowell, the inspiration for the piece. It opens, however, to the sound of whispering, establishing an undercurrent of danger and paranoia that runs throughout.

in the run. Premiered by New York City Ballet in 2003, it too reflects a 21st-century aesthetic that stretches the body in new ways.

*Bolero* closed the evening. Fonte’s extremely interesting take on Ravel’s basically uninteresting score was made on Oregon Ballet Theatre in 2008, partly as a vehicle for Roper, who retires in April after two decades with the company. If Ravel’s score is about the dehumanizing effects of the industrial revolution, Fonte, unlike many of his contemporaries, presents the dancers as fully human, the ending a Terpsichorean ode to joy.

— MARTHA ULLMAN WEST

## Donald Byrd / *The Minstrel Show Revisited*

Donald Byrd builds on his 1991, Bessie award-winning *The Minstrel Show* with *The Minstrel Show Revisited*, featuring Spectrum Dance Theater, the Seattle company he has directed since 2002. This highly theatrical dance piece, performed at the Cornish Playhouse February 20-22, presents caricatures of the traditional minstrel show genre: uneducated, shuffling Sambos and nurturing Mammies. But the paradox of minstrelsy is clear to Byrd: this overtly racist form, a mainstay of American show business by the 1840s, offered opportunities to black performers. The shows also touted nostalgia for a gentle, rural life, albeit one populated with slaves.

The interpretation Byrd gives is designed to shock: he confronts the audience with violent words and actions, all the better to understand what minstrelsy actually was and how the racist attitudes it elevated still prevail today. Byrd, who performs in the piece, asks in an early act, "What is the best joke in history?" His answer: "Civil Rights."

The show reprises parts of the original form. Dancers, in thick blackface and skintight unitards, organize themselves in a semi-circle around the Minstrel emcee or Interlocutor (the brilliant Alex Crozier). Audience members are similarly arranged when they're called up onstage to act as the jokers Tambo and Bones to Byrd's straight man, Mr. Jones. Here, the trick is on the audience, as the highly racist, inflammatory jokes are meant to desensitize.

The staging includes *My Old Kentucky Home* strummed in the background, ragtime tunes first popular in the late 1890s, and diversion in the form of back flips and cartwheels. The final act is more a one-act play similar to minstrel shows of yore. It's a 21st-century plantation scene — one inhabited by Trayvon Martin, the African-American teen shot by George Zimmerman, a neighbourhood watch volunteer, in Sanford, Florida, in 2012.

Above all, *The Minstrel Show Revisited* is a dance of both movement and words. The movement is diverse, sometimes literal — a lynching, a scantily clad white girl (Cara-May Marcus) flirting, a slave (Davione Gordon)



writhing, a chain gang working, and often abstract — expressionless faces with heads bobbing like an over-friendly dog, legs lifting high only to plop down like a mechanical doll's. Couples dance listlessly to a 3/4 waltz, livening up toward the end of the piece with a 2/4 rag.

The abstract phrases especially are striking, suggesting the hopelessness of living in a world dominated by racist stereotypes. Spectrum dancer Shadou Mintrone embodies something of this world askew, with her constrained marionette-like dance in a bright red skirt, and her breezy grand jetés and classical splits.

Byrd's edgy movement, Mio Morales' percussive music, Rico Chiarelli's stark lighting, and Doris Black's evocative costumes (inspired by Gabriel Berry's costumes for the original staging) join in one sensory assault, but they are accents to the main event onstage: Byrd's prose. That prose, with its racist terms, names, jabs and barbs, is like a ribbon that runs throughout the piece articulating Byrd's tenacious stance against racism.

The evening-length work (running almost three hours) is a jarring juxtaposition of literal humour and explicit aggression. Vulnerability and violence are themes in much of Byrd's work,

never more poignant than in Mintrone's Elaine character, a true antebellum darling, who expounds on the hazards of being a dancer as much as she waxes eloquent on the life of a southern belle.

Still, little has prepared us for the epic ending: a pas de trois of Derek Crescenti as Zimmerman, Gordon as Martin, and Mintrone as the radio dispatch officer who received the 911 calls from Zimmerman the night of the shooting. Byrd's ensemble of dancers, in hoodies and white gloves, surround the three men. The main characters recite the actual police transcripts in chillingly monotonous voices. The dancers attempt to stare down the audience, sometimes with exaggerated smiles, sometimes with anger-set features.

Beautifully executed and produced, Byrd's 2014 version of *The Minstrel Show* is as worthy of recognition today as the original. More than 20 years later, popular and critical acclaim for Byrd's disturbing tale has not waned.

— GIGI BERARDI

## William Forsythe / *Ballettabend* (Semperoper Ballet) and *Sider* (Forsythe Company)

Dresden's Semperoper Ballet danced a cornucopia of William Forsythe works under the title *Ballettabend* (A Ballet Evening) in February. The ballets, made between 1987 to 2004, gained a certain context from being danced at the grand, but still fairly intimate, Semperoper. Around the same time, a short tram ride away, the Forsythe Company presented the choreographer's *Sider* (2011) at Hellerau European Center for the Arts, where Émile Jaques-Dalcroze famously taught eurhythmics in the early 20th century, and where the company is in residence.

In *Neue Suite*, the Semperoper Ballet danced a wider range of styles than the brash short works set to Thom Willems' crashing scores that appear on many stages these days, and the evening helpfully put those popular pieces in a broader context. In *Neue Suite*, Forsythe has assembled a series of his more balletic pas de deux, mostly made during his time at the helm of Frankfurt Ballet. Not only is *Neue Suite* a splendid historical assemblage, it offers such rich comment on the structures and intentions of the heterosexual pas de deux form that it should be required "read-

ing" for any serious student of dance (here's a piece crying out to be recorded on DVD). There is a sense of refinement in the duets set to Handel, for instance, but at the end of one, a moment of confrontation between the couple upends expectations, and they exit in opposite directions.

The evening's most contemporary piece — the one that doesn't play with convention, but simply establishes itself — was the closer, *Enemy in the Figure* (1989). Here, music (by Willems), along with choreography, set, costumes and lighting (all by Forsythe) come together to create a cohesive sense of place and dramatic energy. The piece is abstract, but not obscure, effortlessly carrying us into and through its own evolving world. A grey metal backdrop and a curving wood wall placed stage left establish the space in which the playful, fully modern movement takes place, as in the wild solo by a male dancer in fringed black shorts, his limbs and the fringes exploding out from his strong centre as he shivers and shakes in contemporary choreographic abandon. The women and the men are in socks, key to the modern feel of *Enemy in the Figure*.

*Artifact Suite*, which opened, was a 2004 reworking of 1984's *Artifact*. This work is divided into male and female teams, with the women in pink pointe shoes, and its intention seems mostly to provide a commentary on the

mechanics of dance — on choreographic motivation and construction. Certainly, the group formations and semaphore arms were impressive in a kind of military way — an ensemble of 39 dancers fills the large stage with orderly lines. They are led by a woman in white — the Other Person (Vanja Vitman) — who stands barefoot, quietly involved in her semaphore port de bras that seem to be a distillation of art and message.

It was hard to make sense of *Sider*, which I saw the Forsythe Company dance a few days later. Although three dramaturges are listed in the credits, the piece was dramatically incoherent, as obscure as some of the most aggravating works by young dancemakers so lost in intellectual ambitions they neglect the choreography itself. Or maybe they don't have choreographic talent, which we know is not the case with Forsythe. Clearly, he understands bodies in motion, and yet here his cast of 16 mostly shuffle and stumble about while dragging or kicking large pieces of cardboard. Costumes by Dorothee Merg were variously patterned and coloured pants and tops, with several dancers peering out from behind the nylon balaclavas on their heads.

Hints of the Elizabethan theatrical inspiration behind the piece (its rhythmic inflections, as noted in the program) were visible in the white ruff around the neck of some of the dancers, and heard in the musical gibberish of their vocalizations. More concrete but still obscure bits of English text were written on the cardboard or projected on the back wall: "in disarray," "she is to them as they are to us," "it was to him as he was to it," and so forth.

Thankfully, there was also some impressive physicality, those now familiar Forsythean eruptions of shoulders, hips and knees that follow an obscure but intriguing logic. But the gimpy walks, repetitive soft-shoe shuffle (in runners, which everyone wears) and stumbles seemed like affectations.

In the 70-minute *Sider*, the artist that once had his finger on the pulse of the late-20th century seems now, in the early 21st-century, in research mode. Perhaps *Sider* will prove to have been a necessary step along the way to new theatrical thrills.

— KAIJA PEPPER



## Forsythe Company

## Slava Samodurov / *Romeo and Juliet*

February 13, the day before Valentine's, was an auspicious date for the premiere of Slava Samodurov's *Romeo and Juliet* for the Royal Ballet of Flanders, in the opera house of the medieval Flemish city of Gent. Russian-born Samodurov, commissioned by Flanders' artistic director Assis Carreiro, is an ex-principal dancer with the Kirov, London's Royal and Dutch National Ballet companies and, since 2012, director of Yekaterinburg Ballet.

It's the first major commission by Carreiro, who took up her Belgian post in 2011. Carreiro, recently awarded an MBE in Britain for her work in contemporary dance, is seen as a highly successful manager, but has yet to prove herself in directing a classical ballet company; to this end, *Romeo and Juliet* may be one of the decisive factors.

The title of the ballet could well have been *Juliet and her Romeo*, echoing the lines in the epilogue of Shakespeare's play, because Samodurov centered the drama around the tragic heroine. Young Spanish-born soloist Laura Hidalgo, with her dark Mediterranean looks, intense dramatic sense and musicality, was Juliet incarnate in an incandescent portrayal. Alongside her as Romeo, long-term principal Wim Vanlessen, although dancing immaculately, appeared rather too mature.

In an early press interview, Samodurov described his starting point as Shakespeare's words "All the world's a stage, And all the men and women merely players," and so opens with his dancers, clad in up-market rehearsal gear, strolling on at the start of rehearsals for the play. The inventive décor by British designer Anthony MacIlwaine is a modernistic Globe theatre, which transforms effortlessly into a ballroom, Juliet's room with balcony and the dark interior of a cathedral, all with the aid of flowing drapery, a skeletal staircase and a vast black curtain drawn to conceal the supporting structure. It allowed for seamless entrances and exits while the constant movement on the different levels gave the action a sense of immediacy.

Tim Van Steenberg, one of Antwerp's hottest young designers, was responsible for the costumes. They played

a major role in the overall dramatic structure, showing obvious close collaboration between designer and choreographer. Samodurov noted in the program his interest in bird motifs (in the play, Juliet likens Romeo to a raven); not only do these appear on the sleeveless T-shirts of the men, but he manipulates his groups of dancers in frolicsome swarms, and wing-like arms are apparent throughout.

In the ballroom scene, Juliet, an innocent dove in a soft white dress, is the prey not only of Romeo, but of others as well. In this scene, too, the costumes were striking; gowns with immense

Torrado) and the icily beautiful Lady Capulet (Ana Carolina Quaresma) vividly to life.

Less successful was the choreography for the street scenes with several awkward and repetitive sequences and a fair amount of padding. Some of the fault lay perhaps in the use of Prokofiev's score in its entirety. This modern version would have been better paced with some judicious musical cuts and a paring down from three to two acts.

Where Samodurov did well was with his portrayal of the two central figures: his Romeo and Juliet were two thoroughly modern youngsters, touching in



trains for the women and Renaissance-style jackets for the men covered in a collage of large, painted portraits and motifs in tints of burnished gold, copper and rust.

There are no two factions at the outset; enmity arises only later. It's an interesting take, but dramatically unconvincing, which makes the ensuing fight interminable. There were other weak links, such as the portrayal of two pivotal figures, Friar Lawrence and the nurse; the former was cursorily dealt with and the latter far too young and attractive to be believable.

On the other hand, Samodurov's choreographic portraits of volatile Mercutio (a lithe Yevgeniy Kolesnik), the prankster Benvolio (Philippe Lens) and Romeo with his adolescent yearnings, brought these characters, together with a dark and menacing Tybalt (towering Sergio

their naivety and poignant as their love deepens, including the first tentative meeting of hands and the flirtatious play at the ball, with Juliet tossing aside Romeo's mask without realizing the consequences of her action.

The balcony scene was charming; again the clasping of hands, this time sparking a passion that rippled through their entire bodies. After their night together, Juliet is unable to let go of Romeo, holding onto his jacket until the last minute. All these small details made their tragic end inevitable and believable.

Although flawed, it was an attractive ballet and showed Samodurov to be a choreographer of flair and originality. Whether it remains a constant in the repertoire, only time will tell.

— JUDITH DELMÉ

# La Monarca: The Monarch and the Butterfly Effect

Rosario Ancer



The monarch butterfly's sleepy transformation from its caterpillar stage is something akin to how I felt when I began researching my flamenco piece, *La Monarca: The Monarch and the Butterfly Effect*. I'm at an age when retirement might seem logical, but it was as if I were emerging from an artistic metamorphosis and awakening to a renewed life of creative maturity with its freedom to embrace risk. *La Monarca* reflects on my continual motion, travelling between Mexico, where I was born; Spain, the mecca of flamenco; and Canada, where I immigrated 30 years ago. I have been a migrant between three homes, reminding me of the recurring autumn pilgrimage of the monarch butterfly between Canada and Mexico. How do they do it? Why do they do it? It is not difficult to guess it is somehow connected to survival.

— ROSARIO ANCKER

Flamenco dancer and choreographer Rosario Ancer is co-founder, along with her husband, flamenco guitarist Victor Kolstee, of Centro Flamenco in Vancouver and of the Vancouver International Flamenco Festival, now in its 24th year.

Ancer's autobiographical show, *Mis Hermanas: Thicker Than Water, My Sisters and I*, toured in Mexico and Western Canada in 2012.

Visit [www.flamencorosario.org](http://www.flamencorosario.org).

Rosario Ancer's dresses for *La Monarca* were commissioned from Cristina Galán of Flamencura in Seville.



Photos: Victor Kolstee and Rosario Ancer by VNB Photo; Rosario Ancer by VNB Photo; Butterfly by Victor Kolstee

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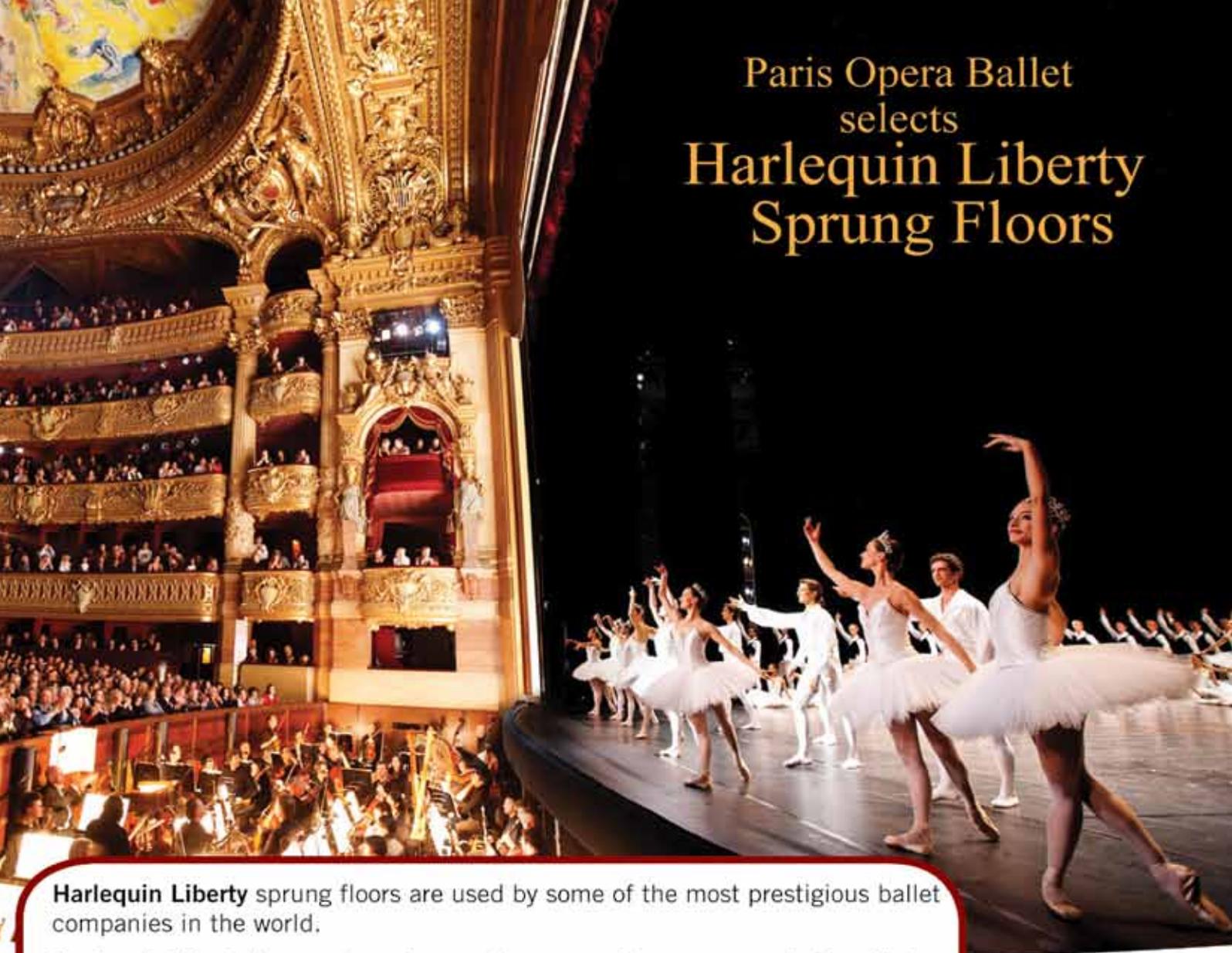
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