

# Dusk Dances adds challenging, evening-only work

Tedd Robinson's *Disconcertante* to be seen only after more family oriented performances finish.



Ron Stewart and Claudia Moore will reprise their roles in Tedd Robinson's *Disconcertante* at Dusk Dances.

By **MICHAEL CRABB** Dance

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Success is a wonderful thing but, wrongly handled, it can lead to complacency. Sylvie Bouchard, founder and director of Toronto's perennially popular, open-air Dusk Dances, is alert to the potential danger.

"Personally, I'd have trouble just repeating the same formula over and over again," says Bouchard, who launched Dusk Dances in 1993. "So we're constantly figuring out ways to keep it vibrant." Dusk Dances' success is beyond dispute. It has toured nationally and spawned franchised events in smaller communities. At its longtime Toronto home, Withrow Park, a Dusk Dances show on a clear, balmy night can attract close to a thousand people, including kids in strollers and canine companions.

They come, in Bouchard's not inapt description, "to be enchanted" by a program of relatively short, accessible works performed at various locations throughout the park. The genial host and guide for this roving dance-feast, this year actor Brad Brackenridge, almost invariably turns out to be a children's favourite.

Over the years Bouchard has tweaked Dusk Dances to keep it fresh, expanded it by adding matinees, and sought out artists who reflect a diversity of dance styles and traditions.

This year, for the first time, she's offering an enriched experience for those who might appreciate a longer, more evolved work and she's turned to a choreographer she greatly admires, Tedd Robinson, to deliver it. His 25-minute *Disconcertante* will be performed evenings only, after the regular, more family oriented performance has finished.

"I believe there's part of our audience that has an appetite for a little more but still in the park setting," says Bouchard.

Although this will mark Robinson's Dusk Dances debut, *Disconcertante* is not entirely new. The work was originally commissioned in 2010, the 200th anniversary of the birth of Chopin, selections of whose music Robinson was inspired to use. The title is a deliberate play on musical terminology and reflects the unsettled dynamics of a social gathering involving three women and two men, one of whom may be dying.

*Disconcertante* did not make it to the stage until June 2013 when it was the highlight of a compelling program at Toronto's Young Centre featuring dancers all over the age of 40, some much older. Most of the cast for *Disconcertante*'s Dusk Dances premiere are the originals, but Linnea Swan will dance the role created by Bouchard.

"Sadly, between administering the festival and making Photuris Versicolor, a new work I'm performing with Marie-Josée Chartier, it just seemed too much to take on," says Bouchard.

Robinson says those who saw *Disconcertante* in its theatrical setting two years ago may see it quite differently this time.

"I think of it as an adaptation of a theatre piece to a site-specific work," explains Robinson. "There had to be some changes. The women will still be in evening gowns but will wear different shoes and there won't be as much falling or work from the ground. We're locating it in a more remote part of the park amidst a grove of trees. After we did a run-through on Wednesday night I think the effect is going to be quite magical."

As for the content of *Disconcertante*, Robinson refers to it as an "abstract narrative." There's a deliberate air of uncertainty surrounding the five characters and their relationship to each other, not just from an audience perspective but from the characters' as well. There are hints of romantic attachment, perhaps of jealousy and, as Robinson puts it, "of the past seeping in."

Robinson is eager for audience members to interpret the drama of *Disconcertante* individually. "People will read whatever they want into these tangled relationships."

And it's a work that only mature artists with rich life experience can dance with conviction.

“Young dancers are often exciting to watch, but there’s something special about mature dancers,” says Robinson. “They may not have the same technical virtuosity, but their artistry is settled. They know what they need to do to get where they want to be. And they learn fast.”

On a practical note, Dusk Dances is a non-ticketed, pay-what-you-can event, but you’ll be invited to donate at the end to help cover the event’s considerable costs.

Dusk Dances ([duskdances.ca](http://duskdances.ca)) is at Withrow Park (Logan and McConnell Aves., one block south of Danforth), Aug. 3 to 9.

Showtime is 7:30 p.m. with 2:30 p.m. matinees on Aug. 6 and 9. There’s a live music concert 45 minutes before every performance, this year the Cuban sounds of Guaracha Y Son. Miko Sobreira will teach a free outdoor salsa class.

Dusk Dances only cancels a show, and then usually at the last minute, if the weather poses a hazard. Still, Bouchard suggests rescheduling if it’s pouring with rain where you are when you plan to head for the park. Finally, if you tend to be a mosquito magnet, take a suitable repellent.