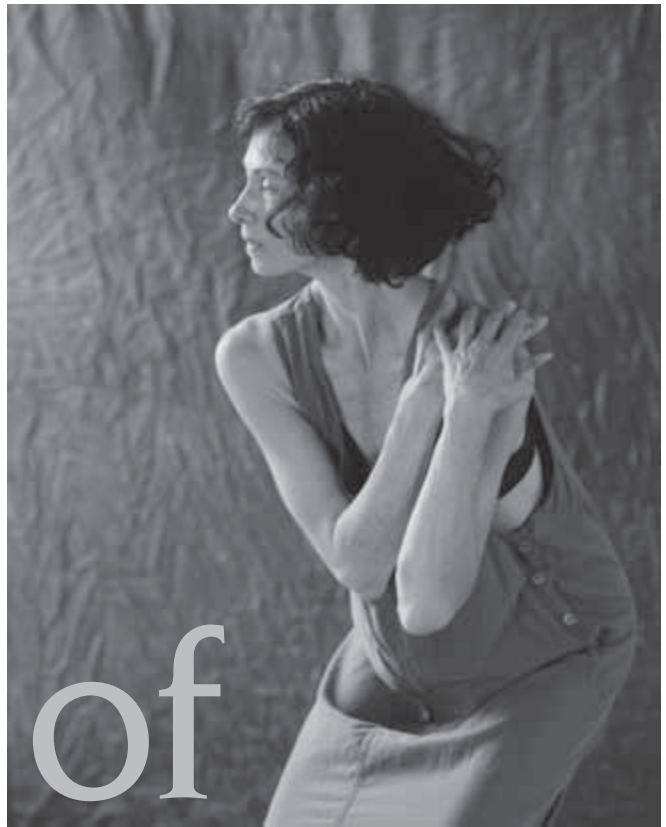


# Claudia Moore's Dance of Imagination



Claudia Moore in Tedd Robinson's *Lone Some*

**BY CAROL ANDERSON**

Claudia Moore is pure in her intent. “The thing I have always loved is playing characters.” She says, “Through my body I can transform. Dance opens my imagination – it helps me to contemplate the mysteries of life – the awesome and the inexplicable. I discover characters that seem to exist inside, purely through doing the movement.”

Moore grew up in North Tonawanda, New York. Her dad was a high school basketball coach, while her mom cared for Claudia, and her siblings Elizabeth, Jane and Ted. When Claudia was about to begin seventh grade, looking for an after-school activity, Moore’s mother took her daughter to a trial ballet class.

The experience was a revelation to Moore, an imaginative child who had always loved dressing up and creating dream worlds. “I remember it very clearly,” she recalls, “it was summer, and I didn’t have the right equipment. I went to my first class in my polka dot sunsuit and a pair

of white socks ... Right away, I was hooked. I think I cried after my first class. As a kid, I loved the sensation of it – I liked feeling my muscles and moving to the music.”

After a year of classes, Moore’s teacher, Stella Applebaum, suggested auditioning for Canada’s National Ballet School (NBS), based in Toronto, an hour north of the border. She attended the NBS summer school in 1966, and entered Grade 8 that fall at the age of twelve. Fortunately, Moore received some scholarship assistance; her family was not wealthy. She recalls being paralytically homesick during her first weeks in residence, but by the spring of 1967 she was adjusting to her new circumstances.

Betty Oliphant was one of her ballet teachers, as was Carol Chadwick. Moore’s favourite teacher was Daniel Seillier, who encouraged and pushed her. At graduation, she remembers, he entrusted her with a challenging solo, and wrote her an opening night note – “J’ai confiance en toi.”

It was an exciting time to be at the NBS. A group of extraordinary, rebellious young dance artists including Ann Ditchburn, Timothy Spain, Christopher Bannerman



Daniel Seillier  
Photo: A&A Photographers

and Karen Kain were a few years ahead of Moore, and all, she notes, “were very contemporary minded.” James Kudelka was a little younger; Frank Augustyn and Robert Desrosiers were among her classmates.

She recalls the thrill of seeing new choreography by Ditchburn, Spain and Bannerman that was shown at the Toronto Workshop Productions Theatre. In 1975, Moore and Desrosiers danced Ditchburn’s renowned duet *Nelligan*, commissioned by Ballet Ys. The cast of Spain’s first big work, *Sagar*, set to Morton Subotnick’s *Silver Apples of the Moon*, was Spain, Moore, Desrosiers, Kain and Augustyn. Enticing “outside” dance study included creative classes with Nadia Pavlychenko, Graham classes with Amelia Itcush, Barry Smith and Ahuva Anbary, and ballet classes at the beginning of which Angela Leigh, newly returned from India, included yoga practice.

On graduation, Moore joined the National Ballet corps. She recalls loving *Swan Lake*, since she “got to dance a lot” and was fascinated by the ballet’s notion of “the dancer as creature” – in retrospect, she considers her immersion in ballet as an introduction to a form of dance theatre. She performed with the first European tour in 1971/72, and the *Sleeping Beauty* tour of Canada and the U.S. the following season. Nureyev was dancing with the National Ballet and his huge celebrity brought the company international attention. Moore recalls

standing in the wings watching him perform José Limón’s powerful work *The Moor’s Pavane*, and yearning to dance the magnificent choreography. In hindsight, she sees this experience as a precursor to her Toronto Dance Theatre days. She quickly tired of the corps, and after two years was ready for “a new dance adventure.”

Robert Desrosiers danced with the National for a year, then joined French contemporary ballet choreographer Felix Blaska’s Grenoble company. On leaving the National Ballet, Moore joined Desrosiers, her sweetheart since high school, and joined Blaska’s troupe touring in Italy, Switzerland, Spain and France. The company was well-received and often performed in wonderful old theatres; Moore recalls gazing up at the starlight in ancient amphitheatres. She also remembers armed guards by the roadside as the bus rumbled through Franco-era Spain.

Desrosiers soon left for London to work with Lindsay Kemp. Kemp was a hugely influential British theatre artist whose company performed his *Flowers*, based on Jean Genet’s work, in Toronto in the late 1970s. Robert was profoundly taken with Kemp’s stunning scenarios, featuring Kemp’s troupe of barely clad



Claudia Moore and Peter Randazzo in Randazzo’s “Pavane” from *A Simple Melody* (1977)  
Photo: Reg Innell

young men, bodies painted white. This was a time of intense questioning for Moore; she left Blaska and considered quitting dance. On joining Desrosiers in London, though, Kemp's work, unlike anything she had seen before, re-ignited her desire to dance. "Kemp opened that door again – I could see through his work how there were many ways to tell a story, or animate a character, and you could do it with your own voice."

The two soon moved back to Canada, settling in Montreal for a short time. Moore recalls with a laugh that they looked in the yellow pages for dance companies, and found Hugo Romero, who had a small troupe, Contemporary Dance Theatre of Montreal. They danced with Romero for about six months, and then connected with Ballet Ys, a new Toronto-based company [later Theatre Ballet of Canada]. Though their life was quite nomadic throughout this period, Moore recalls, "I never worried about money ... life was not so expensive back then ..." One of them was always working, and when he started his company, Desrosiers's work was well-funded; Moore was also successful with early creation grants.

Moore and Desrosiers were married in 1977 at his family's cottage in the Laurentian Mountains. He toured with Lindsay Kemp's company in Europe and South America, while she worked with Toronto Dance Theatre (TDT).

Moore had joined TDT in 1976, and was a featured performer for four years. She danced many roles in works by Patricia Beatty, David Earle, Peter Randazzo and Christopher House. Those years were full of wonderful dance/theatre challenges, she recalls. She was tested by demanding solo work, and initially had to reckon with severe stage jitters. Stressed, she often injured herself before opening performances, and realized she must find a way to lessen the pressure, or "self-destruct". She shifted her focus to finding more joy in the movement, and began to take pleasure in sharing her performance with audiences.

Modest Claudia Moore has been long and widely admired as a consummate performer, celebrated for her exquisite stage presence, for the beauty, intensity, dramatic scope and whimsical wit of her dancing. Dance critic Paula Citron succinctly called her "everybody's favourite dancer."

With TDT, she cherished dancing *Boat, River, Moon*, David Earle's starkly beautiful fable, and Patricia Beatty's austere and profound *Against Sleep*. She connected to the character-infused kinetic charge of Peter Randazzo's choreography. "I loved," she recalls, "inhabiting my character in *Nighthawks*, being in that world ..." She danced House's *Toss Quintet*, his first group work for TDT, and he created a solo for her, *Mantis*.

Desrosiers's choreographic explorations overlapped with Moore's TDT years; he also briefly danced with TDT. His choreography was immediately acclaimed.



Robert Desrosiers and Claudia Moore in Desrosiers's *Bad Weather* (1981)

Photo: Frank Richards

"All the critics," remembers Moore, "were completely taken by his dazzling imagination, his use of props and masks and costumes."

In its earlier years, Desrosiers Dance Theatre was sensationally successful, selling out three-week seasons at the Premiere Dance Theatre, touring to Hong Kong, and across Canada. Moore was Desrosiers's muse and companion for seven years, the anima of his choreographic imagination, at the same time drawing acclaim as an extraordinary dancer. "It was surreal, hallucinatory ..." she reminisces. "These were charged and challenging times. Robert was making fabulous, dreamlike pieces. I'm grateful to have been there with him and remember vividly the astonishing characters we brought to life."

Toward the mid-1980s, she quietly began to move away from Desrosiers's troupe, and develop her own choreography. She created *Steal Threads*, with musician/composer Miguel Frasconi, and at Expo '86 one of her pieces was on the Desrosiers company's program. She muses:

I didn't have any real choreographic training – I started out in TDT workshops; I was inspired by people I worked with ... Most of it was intuitive, through my dance practice ... Often the work I did was in reaction to that work, making other choices – where Robert would use many props I was interested in having one, and seeing how far I could push it ... I always choreographed with a physical impulse in my own body. I had to find it in my own body before I could give it to the dancers – that's what it was like for me.





Claudia Moore and Laurie-Shawn Borzovoy in Moore's *Wedding Album* (1987)  
Photo: Cylla von Tiedemann

When her marriage to Desrosiers came apart, Moore sojourned in Paris, continuing to make work. In the spring of 1985 a terrible car accident in France nearly ended her career. French doctors said she would not walk again. But Dr. Hugh Scully at Toronto General Hospital brought her back to Toronto for further consultation, and after a more advanced x-ray, confirmed that surgery was unnecessary. Moore then began the slow process of healing, finding her way into her life and dance again.

In 1987, Moore married media artist Laurie-Shawn Borzovoy while they were on holiday in Jamaica. "It felt so much like a honeymoon," she laughs, "that we decided to get married."

A new phase of creativity and collaboration with theatre artists and other dancers blossomed. Moore has always valued collaboration, attributing this to her formation in a company situation, where mutual supportiveness is key. *Kleinzeit* (1987), *Debris* (1991), *Crow Sisters* (1992) and *Dragon* (1995) were infused with literary, theatrical, character-based exploration, and crafted closely with individual interpreters. She repeatedly worked with a core of extraordinary dance artists. Fiona Drinnan and Bonnie Kim worked with Moore for more than a decade, and she counts Tom Brouillette, Sarah Chase, Jennifer Lynn Dick, Lyn Snelling, Mark Schaub, Miko Sobriera and Gerry Trentham among dancers significant to her

later processes. She notes, "The best part of creating work was being in the studio with these gifted performers."

In her 1993 solo show, *Horse on the Moon*, she commissioned a series of dances from favourite choreographers. Moore's character in the show was a waitress dancing at night in an empty café. Tedd Robinson created a solo set to Gerry and the Pacemakers, Ginette Laurin made "a poignant solo about memory", Serge Bennathan created choreography referencing Joan of Arc, and Lola MacLaughlin's work featured a large period dress that descended from the ceiling. She performed the show at the du Maurier Theatre Centre, as well as in the LiveArts series in Halifax.

In 1996, she started her company MOonhORSE Dance Theatre. The moon, she explains, is poetic, and the horse is physical. This fantastical creature is Moore's daemon, perhaps – a symbol melding her passions for imagination and motion.

Beginning in 1998, she created a sustained series of works incorporating text and distinctive characters for MOonhORSE. This notable achievement is perhaps most indicative of her unflagging perseverance, since during this time she raised her two children, while creating and performing in these pieces. Motherhood and family have been primary priorities for Moore, and she adapted her work to accommodate caring for her family. "When I had Zoe and Zak, there was a lot of quiet time with them. You're up late at night and can't sleep, so you make things up ... imagination is always in play. They were part of the whole creation period – and truly great creations themselves!"



Tom Brouillette, Peter Chin, Pamela Grundy, Daniel Brooks and Laurie-Shawn Borzovoy in Claudia Moore's *Kleinzeit* (1987)



Claudia Moore in Ginette Laurin's *Horse on the Moon* (1993)  
Photo: Lynda Middleton

Working in conjunction with the Dance Umbrella of Ontario's Christine Moynihan as her manager, Moore drove the initiatives for this series of choreographies, creating and performing in them herself, and presenting them in various Toronto venues. These pieces marked a maturing phase of Moore's work. The first, *wishes* (1998), created with consulting director Daniel Brooks, won the Dora Award in New Choreography. *Three Women* (2000), in which Moore danced with Bonnie Kim and Fiona Drinnan, was based on Sylvia Plath's poetry. Rich in imagery, *Small Midnight* (2001) was co-choreographed with Tedd Robinson, followed by *on earth* (2002), *CASA* (2003) and the creaturely inventions of *by night* (2004). Inspired by text from Shakespeare's plays, *This Castle* (2005) featured direction and text construction by director Patti Powell, while *EVER THUS*, with a cast of Shakespearean heroes and heroines (2006) premiered at the Young Centre for the Performing Arts, running in rep with Soulpepper's *King Lear*.

Often commissioned as a choreographer, Moore has collaborated with contemporary opera productions, including two works by composer R. Murray Schafer, as well as *Facing South* for Tapestry New Opera. Theatre commissions include *Building Jerusalem*, in 2000; Moore also originated the role of healthcare pioneer Adelaide Hoodless in this Volcano production. Among numerous

other credits, she choreographed two Shaw Festival musicals, *On the Town* and *Gentlemen Prefer Blondes*, in 1992 and 1993, and Atom Egoyan's 1993 film *Exotica*.

Moore's choreographic evolution is ongoing. She cites Tedd Robinson's work, and that of Pina Bausch, as important influences on her dancing, and on her choreographic aesthetic. She admires the inner complexity and craft of their dances, as well as the whimsy and depth of their characters. She values Peter Boneham's mentorship and intuitive support, since first encountering him in a 1989 Le Groupe Dance Lab residency, as essential sources of artistic assurance. She expresses gratitude for the artistic guidance she has received – now, she says, she can pay such learning forward, confident in her own ability to mentor younger artists.

Moore reflects that she has always made her way by dancing, teaching, directing and choreographing. She notes her husband's generous support, and that of others including Soulpepper's Albert Schultz – she was an artist-in-residence at Soulpepper from 2008 to 2010. She has received support from all the government agencies, though her company has never received operating grants from Canada Council for the Arts; it has survived on project grants only. Recognition and acknowledgement also come in other ways. She received the 1991 Jacqueline Lemieux Award for excellence in dance, while her choreography has been nominated for Dora Awards for *wishes* (Winner of Best New Choreography, 1998), *D'arc and Light*, *Debris* and *Three Women*. She enjoys the loyal support of a group of devoted MOonhORsE patrons.



Claudia Moore teaching at the National Ballet School, 1988  
Photo: Cylla von Tiedemann





Claudia Moore, Bonnie Kim and Fiona Drinnan in Moore's *Three Women* (2000)  
Photo: John Lauener

"Starting things," notes Moore, "has always been a necessity." She has instigated/curated several festivals and series, including *Physical Feast*, a three-week series with seventeen artists at Buddies in Bad Times in March 1995, and *MOOnhORsE's Poetry in Space* workshops, started in 1999. Moore created a new series, *Older and Reckless*, in 2000. She craved more performance opportunities, and in her characteristically generous way, also wanted to create a venue for



Claudia Moore in her work *Rock-a-bye* (1986)  
Photo: Cylla von Tiedemann

other dance artists over the age of forty-five. *Older and Reckless* has thrived, evolving into a popular series with a national profile. In 2010, it expanded to three shows a year, the final one pairing established choreographers with emergent dance artists, and vice versa. As ever, Moore has acted where she perceives a need – here addressing legacy questions, promoting creative expansion and providing performance opportunities in her *Old and Young* and *Reckless Together* series.

Moore recovered from twin hip joints replacements, in 2007 and 2008, with disciplined determination, returning her focus to performance. "I wanted to bring it all back to one thing, to dancing." She commissioned a major work from James Kudelka, who created the riveting *Half an Hour of Our Time* for her and partner Dan Wild in 2009. In the summer of 2008, she took part in Tedd Robinson's work *Rocks* at his farm in Quebec and has performed his solos as part of her evening, *Dances in a Small Room*.

Guest performances and new commissions are on Moore's horizon. She intends to dance until she is sixty, and then reconsider. Meanwhile, she is one of Toronto's most sought-after dancers. She muses:

At an age when most people retire, I've never had so much work as a dancer – it's what I need, complete saturation in order to reach the next level. And what is the next level? I don't know ... but thinking of my father, who was always active, and how I have always needed to move, I can't imagine the need to move will change. Maybe it will be enough to do tai chi on the beach in Jamaica! ... As a performer, I'm still learning ... it keeps me coming back for more!

Delight and fantasy, darkness and light flicker through Moore's incandescent stage presence – once seen, who can forget Moore's thrilling, chilling performance of her *Lady Macbeth* solo in *This Castle*. She dances forward, gathering womanly wisdom on her long and winding path, following her tenacious passion for the limitless potential of bodies and hearts at play. The longer she dances, the closer to the centre of the spiral she draws – from her first performances on the big stages of storybook ballets, to the present, when she craves close proximity to audiences, sharing the intimate communication she cherishes in her dancing life.

Carol Anderson's diverse career embraces dancing, choreography, directing, teaching and writing. She performed with Judy Jarvis's first company, and was a founding member of Toronto's *Dancemakers*. Since 1988, she has frequently worked with *Dance Collection Danse Press/Presse*. Carol has authored, been an editor and a contributing editor of twelve books. An Associate Professor of Dance at York University, she teaches studio and theory courses.

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