

DANCE COLLECTION DANSE

Number 71

DANCE THAT LASTS

Fall 2011

**The Story Goes Way Back:
Setting the Scene for
Ballet British Columbia**

**Paul-André Fortier:
30 years, 30 days, 30 minutes**

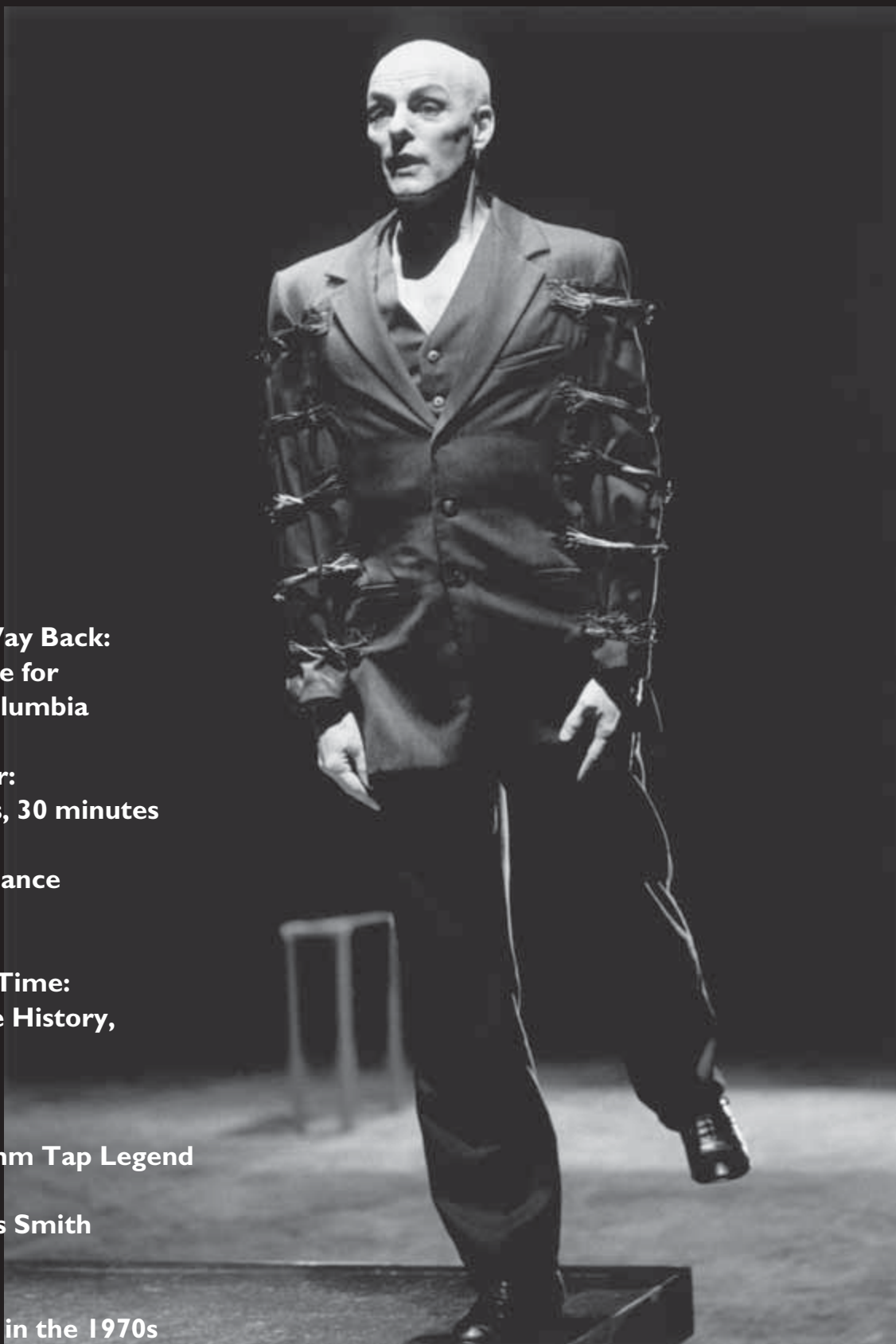
**Claudia Moore's Dance
of Imagination**

**Dancing Through Time:
Toronto's Dance History,
1900-1980**

**Ethel Bruneau:
Montreal's Rhythm Tap Legend**

Remembering Lois Smith

**Renegade Bodies:
Canadian Dance in the 1970s**



Dear Friends of DCD,

My days as a dancer in the 1980s cemented my belief that the arts are as fundamental to the whole person as the air that we breathe. I left dance but continued on a path leading to an MBA and second career in arts administration. I am currently the Managing Director of the Institute for Contemporary Culture at the Royal Ontario Museum. So it comes as no surprise, then, that my interests are well matched to those of Dance Collection Danse.

I am proud to be at the helm of DCD, an organization that houses such a unique national collection. Nowhere else in Canada will you find a comparable assembly of dance-related documents, artifacts and resources. This collection is at the very heart of everything that DCD undertakes. It has long provided the basis for our publishing and educational activities. Our recent push to share this collection through public exhibition has been met with tremendous enthusiasm.

As we swim upstream into the future against global uncertainties, we need your help and commitment to DCD more than ever. Please send in a donation, buy a book, attend our events or visit our website. Be sure to tell your friends about us and let your political representatives know how important arts and culture are to your community.

We at DCD are very moved by the fact that Lois Smith, a pioneering dancer in this country, continued to give in the form of a bequest. She is a symbol of what we can do together to keep the DCD collection secure and the organization thriving far far into the future.

I hope that our magazine continues to inform and delight you. Please enjoy!

Until next time...
Francisco Alvarez
Chair, Dance Collection Danse

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Francisco Alvarez in his work *Zone*, 1981

Dance Collection Danse Magazine

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Photo: Cylla von Tiedemann

Opening Remarks

MIRIAM ADAMS

DCD has experienced a very full and dynamic year since you last received our *Magazine*. With a multi-year Ontario Trillium Foundation grant, we have been able to hire additional personnel and begin the design of a critical path for cataloguing the collection, fundraising and marketing in order to place our thriving organization on more solid ground.

Our first major exhibition at the Market Gallery, *Dancing Through Time: Toronto's Dance History 1900-1980*, curated by Amy Bowring, was an absolute hit and gave us an opportunity to share some of our archival treasures with the general public. Loyal DCD friend and enthusiast, Veronica Tennant, generously hosted the opening reception. So many of the guests raved about the extraordinary exhibit and the reception's warmth, humour, abundant comestibles and fantastic live performances by Toronto-based dance artists. It was when Bob Rae, who attended with his wife Arlene Perly Rae, pointed out that he saw his Aunt Grace in an exhibit photo of the line-up of dancers at Toronto's Uptown Theatre in the 1920s, that we knew our work truly connected to the larger world. During the show's four-month run, we presented two other public events and offered twelve special guided tours. The overwhelmingly positive response gave DCD more momentum for crafting dreams and goals for the future.

Appropriate here is a comment from Mike Layton who recently quoted his father Jack, "always have a dream that is longer than a lifetime".

And so, we at DCD carefully sculpt our vision for creating a space that can accommodate continuing exhibits; a lecture hall where we can educate and

inform students and the public about Canada's rich dance history; a large temperature-controlled room where we can house, digitize and share our extensive archival collection; a performance studio for the presentation of Canadian choreographic masterworks danced by today's dancers; and a video screening room where the public can view the art form's history in Canada from the days when it was first recorded.

In this light, I was revisiting an article entitled "Dreams and Appetites" by Peter C. Newman in the 100th Anniversary issue of *Maclean's* magazine, October 2005. I think his words express how DCD stakeholders view what we do and how they themselves can relate to our mission: "History consists of moments and periods. The moments give it excitement; the periods give it meaning." And in expressing the job of documenting people and processes, Newman uses poignant language: "... [the work] remains indispensable to the Canadian experience" and "a mirror in which Canadians glimpsed each other and recognized themselves." And so, we too hope to unfurl memories and imaginations.

As these Opening Remarks are rife with the words of others who can say it much better than I, here is another quote for which I thank colleague and multidisciplinary artist Peter Dudar who lately forwarded journalist Chris Hedges's words: "I remember Borges writing that we die twice, once when the body gives out and then the second and final death when there is no one left to tell our story."

DCD moves boldly forward with our dreams ... so we can continue to tell the stories.

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Cover: Paul-André Fortier in his *Bras de plomb* (1993)

Photo: Michael Slobodian

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Photo: Travis Allison

Stabilizing the Collection

BY AMY BOWRING

This summer we have been busy enhancing the stability of the collection at DCD. This is due to two substantial foundation grants: the Metcalf Foundation allowed us to hire Carlyne Clare as an intern to assist with many archival tasks; the Ontario Trillium Foundation (OTF) enabled us to increase our budget for archival supplies.

Carlyne is a dancer who also holds an MA in museum studies from the University of Toronto. With her help, we have increased the amount of cataloguing we have been able to do; cataloguing allows us to know what we have and where it is stored. With the Trillium funds we have been re-housing parts of the

collection: transferring paper materials from office-quality storage boxes to archival-quality, acid-free storage; moving photos, slides and negatives into better sleeves and holders; and building custom-made storage boxes for items such as tutus. We recently purchased a large map cabinet – while we don't have any maps in the collection, the cabinet is perfect for storing our extensive poster collection.

And on the advice of the Canadian Conservation Institute (CCI), we purchased the materials needed to store Maud Allan's fragile 1906 *Vision of Salome* costume in an oxygen-free environment. The costume is in need of restoration and

sealing it in an oxygen-free environment will stabilize the existing deterioration until restoration is possible.

Next on the agenda is re-housing our substantial costume collections, which have largely come from artists Nesta Toumine, Lola MacLaughlin and Danny Grossman, with additional costumes from Jeanne Robinson, Irene Apinée and Lois Smith. There is much more to do but the OTF funding is helping us to buy new supplies and allows us to employ Carlyne for two more years so that she can continue the great work she started as our Metcalf intern.

In mid-November, we will be meeting with Irene Karsten



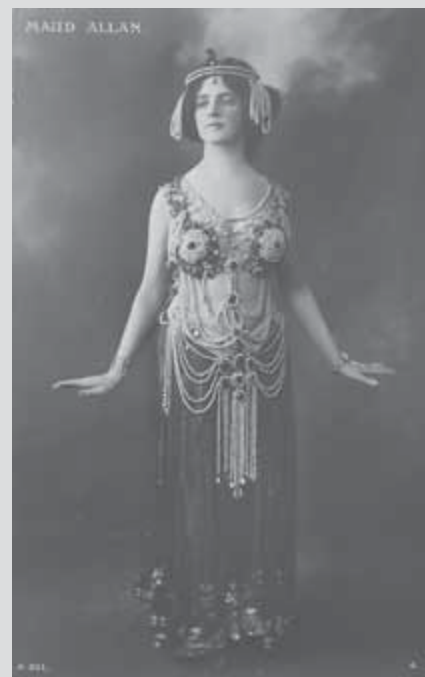
Members of the Ottawa Classical Ballet in Nesta Toumine's *Moonlight Sonata* with backdrop design by Slava Toumine
Photo: Pasch

of the Canadian Conservation Institute, who will tour DCD's office and off-site storage units to make recommendations for storage and facility planning. This project is a component of our three-year OTF funding to work towards finding a new home for DCD's offices and collections. The Canadian Conservation Institute is a government-funded organization that provides conservation, restoration and consulting services to the museum and heritage community; it is a leader in conservation research in Canada.

To add to all of this busy archival activity, we are also collaborating with Sholem Dolgoy, co-director of the production program at the Ryerson Theatre School, in January to digitally archive backdrops designed by Sviatoslav (Slava) Toumine for Nesta Toumine's Ottawa Classical Ballet in the 1940s and 1950s. DCD's collection houses thirty-five of Toumine's backdrops, roughly 20 feet by 30 feet in size,

many of which have not been seen or unfolded for several decades. DCD will work with Sholem and the Ryerson production students to hang and light approximately five of the backdrops, which will then be professionally photographed and archived. DCD holds many photographs of the backdrops but these are black and white; creating a colour digital collection of the backdrops will be of great use to researchers (many of whom come from the Ryerson Theatre School). This will be a tremendous opportunity for the students to see historic backdrops up close and to learn from Sholem about some of the techniques and materials used at the time. These same students study Canadian dance history with me in the winter. The plan is to make this an annual project for DCD and Ryerson.

So things are humming along at DCD as we work diligently to preserve Canada's dance legacy. Partnerships such as those with the Ontario Trillium Foundation, the



Maud Allan in her *Vision of Salome* costume, 1906

Metcalf Foundation and Ryerson Theatre School are vital in helping us to achieve our goals to care for and share this country's dance heritage and to move into the next phase of DCD's development.



Members of the Ottawa Classical Ballet in Nesta Toumine's production of *Coppélia* with backdrop design by Slava Toumine

THE STORY GOES WAY BACK

Setting the Scene for Ballet British Columbia

BY KAIJA PEPPER

Ballet in Vancouver, British Columbia, was for a long time a double story of presence and absence. The presence came through large-scale school recitals and international touring companies, both well supported by press and public. In 1921, for instance, the *Sun* newspaper reviewed Mollie Lee's *The Lost Child* at the downtown Avenue Theatre, singling out one student, "wee Jane Tait", who received "tumultuous applause". As for the impressive stream of renowned visitors, in January 1941 when the Ballets Russes de Monte Carlo performed, it was the company's fourth visit. Dancing in *Les Sylphides* was Vancouver's Audree Thomas, whose stage name was Anna Istomina; Victoria's Ian Gibson appeared in *Scheherazade*. The presence of BC dancers in a Russian company points directly to what the absence was about: the lack of a local company, which meant dancers had to forge careers far from home.

Vancouverites were proud of the long line of locally trained dancers who achieved success elsewhere – including Lynn Seymour and Jennifer Penney, both international stars with England's Royal Ballet, and Jean McKenzie and Lois Smith, the first prima ballerinas with the Royal Winnipeg



Ballet BC dancer Racheal Prince
Photo: Michael Slobodian

Ballet (McKenzie) and the National Ballet of Canada (Smith) – but the dearth of opportunities on the west coast was discouraging. Dating from at least the forties, the lack of a ballet troupe in Canada's third largest city was much lamented.

In the fifties, promising groups sprung up, only to quickly fade. It wasn't until the seventies that one group – Ballet Horizons – managed to transcend its own brief flowering. When the artistic personnel dispersed, the board hung on until they could pass the company's legal structure over to Maria Lewis, who was encouraged to transform her student group into Pacific Ballet Theatre. The company she built lasted a decade – then a milestone in Vancouver dance history. In 1986, it was transformed into Ballet British Columbia.

Ballet BC is still here. True, history came close to repeating itself in 2009, when the small group of just over a dozen dancers almost folded through a familiar tale of financial collapse and artistic crisis – but it didn't, and 2011 marks Ballet BC's twenty-fifth anniversary year. Artistic director Emily Molnar and executive director Jay Rankin celebrated by presenting a quartet of commissions last April, in keeping with the company's longstanding focus on "ballet of today".

Of course, "ballet of today" is a relative term, and over the decades a contemporary frame of mind has fuelled most of the ballet-making here in the west. A silver anniversary seems a fitting time to touch base with those long-past "todays" by evoking a few predecessors who helped build ballet in Vancouver. It's a huge story, involving dancers, choreographers, artistic directors, critics, presenters, board members and audiences – all necessary roles to sustaining a rich theatrical dancescape. The intention is to set the scene just enough to show – and celebrate – Ballet BC's roots.

Great dancers, such as Pavlova, Nijinsky and Adeline Genée, toured to Vancouver in the teens, but it was only when a substantial population of ballet teachers, primarily from Britain and Russia, immigrated to Canada's west coast and set up shop in the 1920s that ballet developed a local presence. "Dance of today" in the decade of the Charleston was well represented by Violet Barbes's school – "The Only School de Ballet in B.C." – where toe, classic, step, Grecian, Oriental, eccentric, interpretive and ballroom were taught. This young city – Vancouver was only incorporated in 1886 – welcomed the shows the schools produced, full evenings of dance featuring hordes of children in imaginative costumes and often showcasing the teachers in solos.

The city's dancers were already making careers elsewhere: in 1923, the *Sun* ran a photo of Isadore Cohn in pointe shoes when she returned "after a successful season in New York at the Strand theatre". In 1927, a *Sun* article was headlined: "Local Dancers Make Big Hit", an enthusiastic reference to two Vancouverites working with New York's Albertina Rasch Girls.

By the thirties, as historian Robert Todd wrote in *Dance in Canada* magazine (Summer 1978), Vancouver had "acquired a reputation as a cradle of dancers and changed from being the passive importer of dance to become an active exporter of dancers." The export was greatly helped by the import: when impresario Lily J. Laverock presented the Jooss Ballet in 1937, Joy Darwin had the opportunity to successfully audition for that company. The first two of several west coast dancers to join the famed Russian ballet got their chance when Laverock brought Colonel de Basil's Ballets Russes to town for the third time in 1938: Rosemary Deveson (who became Natasha Sobinova) and Patricia Meyers (Alexandra



Audree Thomas (Anna Istomina), one of several BC dancers to perform with the Ballets Russes companies, c. 1938
Photo: Maurice Seymour

Denisova) are local legends, thanks to well-chronicled careers by another historian, Leland Windreich. Faux-Russian dancers were a glamorous part of Vancouver's dance of today in the thirties.

A critical spin was put on this exodus by those who saw it as the result of the lack of opportunity at home. In 1946, a *Province* article complained: "We could have an entirely Canadian company with a little effort, and more than a little finance, and ninety per cent would hail from Vancouver and district."

Excellent dancers suggest the presence of excellent teachers, two of whom – Beth Lockhart and June Roper – helped found the Vancouver Civic Ballet Society in 1946. For the Society's debut, several dancers were presented under the name Vancouver Civic Ballet for a Kiwanis Club Variety Concert. A program note states the Society's broad interest in using "the media of stage and

radio, lectures, study classes, and other means” in order to be “an effective instrument in the cultural development of the people, to be of service to the Community and to assist those artists who are striving to uphold the noble tradition of the Ballet.”

One of the most notable of the great teacher/choreographers – a group of mostly women who were the main force behind dance in Vancouver during the 1950s – was Kay Armstrong. BC-born Armstrong’s first group, Le Ballet Concert, was formed with senior students from her large school. During the fifties, Armstrong’s award-winning choreography earned acclaim, including the dreamy quartet *Étude*, the only Canadian work in the National Ballet of Canada’s repertoire when the company debuted in 1951.

Armstrong was often in competition with another teacher/choreographer – British immigrant Mara McBirney. In April 1950 when Guy Glover came from Toronto to adjudicate entries for the Third Canadian Ballet Festival in Montreal, the two women had to share a studio for the audition: happily, both Armstrong’s Le Ballet Concert and McBirney’s Vancouver Ballet Production Club were accepted.

McBirney, with Beth Lockhart, had already launched and folded Panto-Pacific Ballet, which seems to have lasted just long enough for the Second Canadian Ballet Festival in 1949 in Toronto. Closer to home, the 1951 BC Provincial Festival of the Dance spurred the formation of the Vancouver Ballet Guild. Perhaps hoping to foster civic pride by including “Vancouver” in its name, this fleeting endeavour was formed by Betty Blygh, daughter of Mollie Lee (one of the most popular of the immigrant dance teachers in the twenties).

In 1952, Armstrong hoped to

sever the financial ties between her school and company by rechristening Le Ballet Concert as Vancouver Ballet Company, but no funding support was found from civic grants (which were ad hoc until the seventies, when the City’s Social Planning department initiated cultural grant programs) or patrons. Instead, she formed Kay Armstrong Dance Theatre, the name reflecting her own financial and creative commitment. After two tours (one as far as Alberta), showing a range of ballet from classical to contemporary, financial pressures forced the company’s closure.

The idea of positioning a company provincially is evident at the Fifth Canadian Ballet Festival in 1953 with the British Columbia Ballet Company. New York’s *Dance News* described the group as “an amalgamation of students and teachers from the BC School of Dancing and the Mara McBirney School, both of Vancouver (an interesting experiment which schools in other towns might find it worth while considering)”. The article is illustrated with a photo of Lynn Springbett, “a young Vancouver dancer to be watched”, and soon to become Lynn Seymour, Kenneth MacMillan’s muse.

The merger didn’t last: the next year, McBirney’s forthrightly titled Student Ballet appeared in the Ballet Society’s Showcase series, after which no traces are found; the other somewhat more robust initiative came from the BC School of Dancing’s Heino Heiden. The recently arrived German dancer boldly placed his name next to his new home city with the formation of Heino Heiden Vancouver Ballet, which he brought to the final Canadian Ballet Festival in 1954 in Toronto.

When Heino Heiden Vancouver Ballet appeared in the 1954 Showcase series, Anna-Marie Ellerbeck was among the dancers. Now Anna-



Anna-Marie Ellerbeck, 1954

Marie Holmes, she and her ex-husband, David Holmes, were the first North Americans to dance with the legendary Kirov Ballet in 1963, and she is currently active staging the major classical ballets worldwide.

The new BC Ballet Company appeared at the 1955 Showcase. Made up of dancers chosen in an open audition by Frederic Franklin, who had toured to Vancouver with the Ballets Russes de Monte Carlo earlier that year, it was another company that apparently lasted for just one occasion.

Throughout this decade of ephemeral companies, pride in the dancers remained constant. When *Province* critic Ida Halpern reviewed a performance on the Ballet Society’s tenth anniversary in September 1956, she wrote: “Vancouver’s great potential in ballet dancers was once more realized ...”

The *Sun*’s Martha Robinson echoed this pride several times – and

repeated the lament over lack of local opportunity. In January 1957 Robinson reported the frustration of the city's dance teachers over the fact that "Vancouver's talented dancers are 'for export only.' This city denies them 'the breaks' when it comes to gaining needed stage experience. Vancouver is known throughout Canada as THE training ground for this nation's foremost dancers. Yet year after year Vancouver lets its dance talent slip uncaringly through its fingers, and never calculates the loss."

By the sixties, the era of the great teacher/choreographers was over. Armstrong's and McBirney's choreography and shows began to seem amateur because of ties to their schools. Fuelling the dance of the 1960s was the desire to choreograph and present work that would be perceived as professional, keeping issues of art – not the needs of young students – foremost.

Yet it was another dedicated teacher – British immigrant Joy Camden – who founded Pacific Dance Theatre in 1964. Camden, in an excerpt from her memoir published in the Vancouver Dance Centre's newsletter in 2002, recalled her intention "to use all techniques of dance in a variety of fresh combinations. Thus we mixed classical ballet with modern and jazz." This mix was very much of its time, and the up-and-coming Norbert Vesak soon joined Camden as assistant director and co-choreographer.

Sun critic William Littler emphasized the company's professional status in his reviews, as in this one from June 1964: "Now that the Pacific Dance Theatre has been successfully launched and the West Coast has its own professional dance company, let us hope the public will give it the support that is necessary for it to thrive." They didn't – at least not financially. Camden wrote in her memoir: "If I had been able to keep



Joy Camden and Norbert Vesak in Vesak's *The Sanguin Cord*, Pacific Dance Theatre, 1965

the company together until the end of 1966, Pacific Dance Theatre would have been three years old and thus eligible for a Canada Council grant. But despite my best efforts, this did not happen."

Around this time, Lockhart stepped back in the fray with a new partner, Franklin White, a former dancer with England's Royal Ballet. On November 16, 1965, the *Sun* announced: "A ballet company

was born here Monday. It is Ballet, British Columbia – a professional company designed specifically to tour the province. Plans call for a compact, highly-mobile company of 16 performers to be accompanied on the road by a small orchestra or instrumental group of eight.” The *Province* described one goal as being “a means of letting young dancers train and stay in B.C.” It appears Ballet, British Columbia never materialized, although the entry on White in the 1967 *Dance Encyclopedia* ends on the optimistic line: “Now director of the Vancouver (B.C.) Ballet (since summer, 1966).”

Young BC-born Reid Anderson performed Franz in a 1965 Ballet Society Showcase production of *Coppélia* and the next year was Colas in *La Fille Mal Gardée*. By 1969, Anderson was in Germany dancing with Stuttgart Ballet. He would return to Vancouver in 1989 to briefly head Ballet British Columbia before taking on the direction of The National Ballet of Canada and then Stuttgart Ballet, where he is today.



Reid Anderson as Colas in *La Fille Mal Gardée*, 1966

“Can a new classical ballet group find happiness in stingy Vancouver?” That was the headline for an article in the University of British Columbia’s student newspaper, the *Ubyyssey*, on February 26, 1971. Just two weeks earlier, Norbert Vesak’s Western Dance Theatre had folded, with financial woes top on the list of reasons why; hence the “stingy Vancouver” part of the headline.

On their first program in 1970, Western Dance Theatre had called themselves “Vancouver’s exciting new modern ballet company”, and Lynn Seymour had flown home from London’s Royal Ballet to make a guest appearance. “We are going for a clean-cut modern-dance image,” Vesak said in the *Sun*, “very direct, no frills, no guck, no head-trips going on during a performance.” This was non-elitist, tutu-free ballet at a time when Vancouver was known as the “Hippie Capital of Canada”.

The “new classical ballet group” the *Ubyyssey* headline referred to was Ballet Horizons. While they did present classics such as *Les Sylphides* and the *Corsair* pas de deux, artistic director Morley Wiseman (now known by the single name Padam) used “classical” loosely: “If you perform a ballet using well-trained classical dancers ... then it’s a classical ballet, even if the treatment is modern.”

Saskatchewan-born Wiseman, an ex-dancer with The National Ballet of Canada, Les Grands Ballets Canadiens and the Royal Winnipeg Ballet, created six works on pointe for Ballet Horizons. One was a full-length *Nutcracker*; other more modern works were set to Debussy, Strauss, Tchaikovsky, Ravel and Cesar Franck.

According to a Canadian Ballet Horizons Society Brief from 1973, the founding goal had been “to support the formation of a professional ballet company and school



Graham Goodbody, Dianne Bell, Nicola Blakey and Paul Blakey in Morley Wiseman’s *Spectrum* for Ballet Horizons, Vancouver Art Gallery, 1970

whose faculty consisted only of professional dancers recognized by the main international dance companies. Thus the faculty of the school would form the nucleus of a new classical ballet company.” This was similar to the school-centred model used by Armstrong and her colleagues in the fifties except it was the faculty, not the students, who would make up the roster of dancers.

Ballet Horizons received its first public grant in 1971, from the BC Cultural Fund, for \$100. Others followed, including, in 1972, two \$10,000 grants from the BC government, both of which were considered significant enough to report on by local newspapers. Such grants were not enough to build a solid financial situation: three of the four founding dancers left as early as fall 1971 to pursue opportunities elsewhere. A year later, the fourth, Dianne Bell, accepted a position to dance in Berlin (where she worked for almost three decades), and Wiseman (then married to Bell) left with her.



"It was a sorry situation for Vancouver and B.C.," the board wrote in their brief, "for we were seeing again, as we had all too frequently seen in the past, the exodus of dedicated artistic talent for lack of sufficient opportunity on the local scene to fully realize their potential." The board decided to focus on building the Ballet Horizons school, and asked Una Kai, a former New York City Ballet dancer who happened to be in Vancouver while her husband pursued work here as a scenic painter, to advise them. Kai had been teaching at the school, and agreed to help out in the interim.

Kai and the board began courting Maria Lewis, an ex-dancer with Les Grands Ballets Canadiens and The National Ballet of Canada, who had founded a school in 1969 in her hometown of Vancouver. The idea was to effect a merger with what the brief described very positively as Lewis's "firmly established ballet school". Lewis had also formed the Maria Lewis Ballet Ensemble, an unpaid group of students "who already have been doing small presentations of very high calibre." Despite Lewis's obvious

competence, the board wanted to bring in Brydon Paige "on a visiting/guidance basis". Paige was an ex-Kay Armstrong student then heading Les Compagnons de la Danse, the junior company of Les Grands Ballets Canadiens. Paige was busy (he became artistic director of Alberta Ballet in 1976) so this didn't happen, but in 1974 he did create a work, *Mahabe*, for Lewis's ensemble. Bolstered by the work's success, the board transformed Canadian Ballet Horizons Society into Pacific Ballet Theatre Society, under the direction of Maria Lewis, in February 1976.

When Max Wyman saw Pacific Ballet Theatre at the Playhouse at the end of April 1976, he described it in the *Sun* as "a pretty little ballet company, a company filled with promise and potential for dance in this city..." He compliments Lewis's choreography, referring to her "light and innocent magic multiplier showpiece, *Tone on Tone*" and her "still-enchanting *Springtime of the Year*".

Lewis brought in guest choreographers Judith Marcuse and Fernand Nault. Then she commissioned a work from a former dancer with Les Grands Ballets Canadiens, Saskatchewan-born Renald Rabu, whose contemporary ballets proved so popular he was made resident choreographer in 1978.

The move was the beginning of the end for Lewis; by 1980, the atmosphere at Pacific Ballet Theatre was tense. According to Lewis in an interview with this writer shortly before she died in 2004, this was partly due to financial difficulties, particularly the fact they were still not receiving Canada Council money despite relatively generous provincial and municipal support, and partly due to an unofficial popularity contest between her and Rabu. Busy teaching full-time at the school, Lewis reluctantly stepped down as director, remaining in charge of the school.

Rabu won the Clifford E. Lee Award for Choreography in 1980, after presenting a commedia dell'arte-costumed piece, *Pierrot*, to music by Antonio Vivaldi. The following year, the all-important Canada Council money was finally forthcoming. Then it was Rabu's turn to run aground when a Canada Council jury failed to fund the company due to doubts about his choreographic development and leadership; while he was in Europe during the summer of 1985, the board fired him.



Members of Pacific Ballet Theatre in Renald Rabu's *Pierrot*, c. 1980
Photo: Rodney Palden

But the ship didn't sink: again, a persistent board – which now included impresario David Y.H. Lui and former Royal Winnipeg Ballet dancer Jean Stoneham Orr – kept it afloat, and Pacific Ballet Theatre Society evolved into Pacific Ballet British Columbia Society in 1986. Swedish-born Annette av Paul, who had just retired as a ballerina with Les Grands Ballets Canadiens, commuted from her Stratford home to head the new company. Av Paul's



David MacGillivray and Charie Evans in Brian Macdonald's *Time Out of Mind*, Ballet BC, c. 1988
Photo: David Cooper

first program in April 1986 proudly launched Ballet British Columbia with two works by Canadians: *Time Out of Mind* (1963) by Brian Macdonald (then resident choreographer at Les Grands, and also av Paul's husband) and *Music for the Eyes*, a premiere by Reid Anderson, visiting from Stuttgart. Frederick Ashton's *Monotones I and II* and Marius Petipa's the Rose Adagio from *Sleeping Beauty* completed the bill. Ballet BC debuted at the Queen Elizabeth Theatre, the large downtown civic venue that has been the company's home since.

The Ballet BC chapter in Vancouver's history is the first that is not about a short-lived company or dancers with no chance to forge careers at home. Yet it's been tumultuous, with a changing artistic leadership: after av Paul came Anderson,

funded with private money by newcomers Enrico Sorrentino and Roberta Baseggio from Italy, pre-



Ballet BC artistic director Emily Molnar
Photo: Michael Slobodian

Patricia Neary, Barry Ingham, John Alleyne and, finally, Emily Molnar, another Saskatchewan-born artist. Molnar is also an ex-dancer with Frankfurt Ballet and Ballet BC (where she was known as Alleyne's muse), and came to the post in 2009 with several years experience as an independent choreographer.

Molnar is an important player in a local ballet scene that today includes Goh Ballet Youth Company, under the direction of Chan Hon Goh, an ex-National Ballet of Canada ballerina. In 2010, a contemporary ballet company, Vancouver City Dance Theatre,

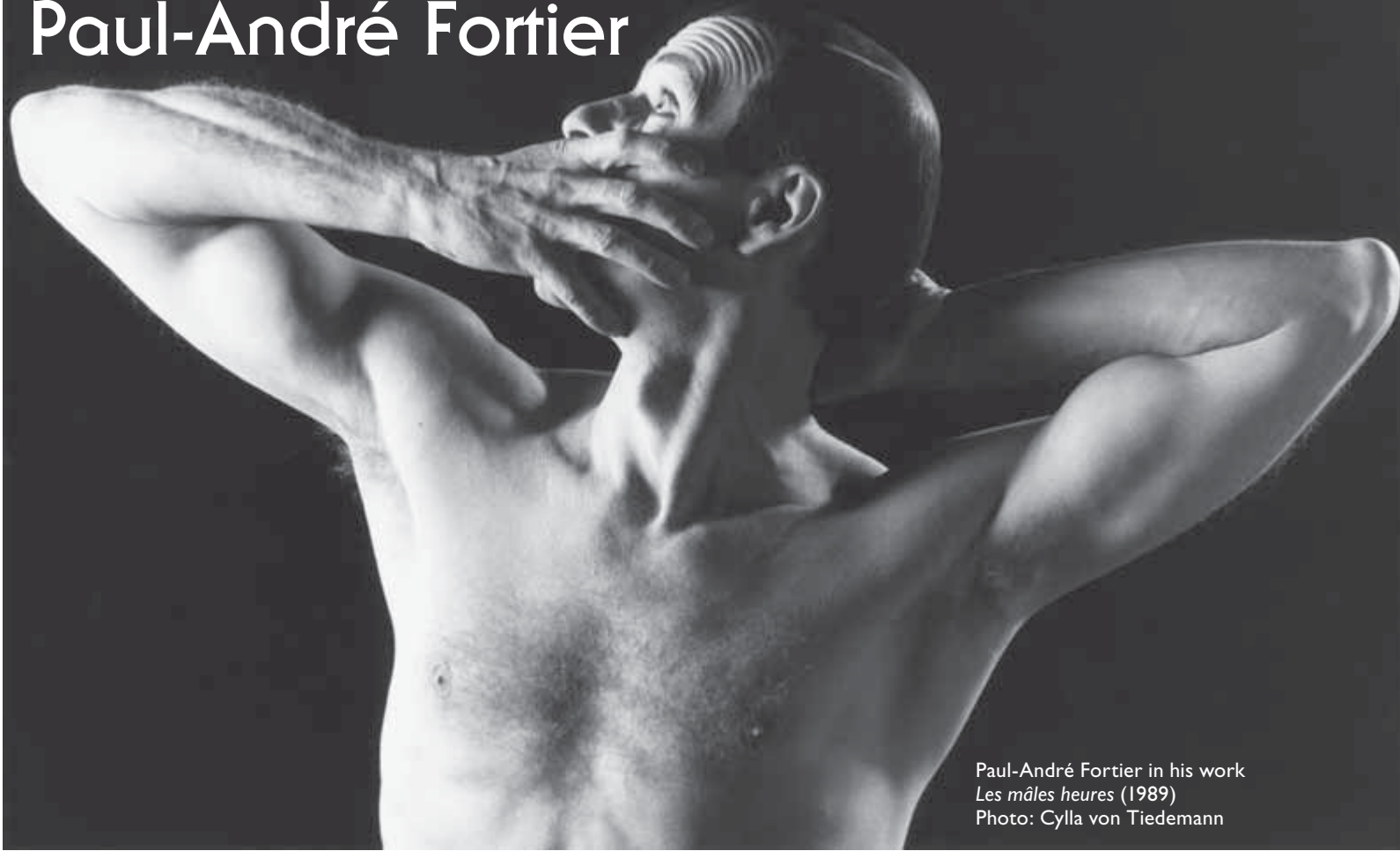
miered at the Playhouse. Though few international groups dare tour to Vancouver these days – audiences no longer flock to ballet as in earlier decades – major Canadian companies such as The National Ballet of Canada, the Royal Winnipeg Ballet and Alberta Ballet do take the risk. So do two from BC: Ballet Kelowna has come down from the interior a few times and Ballet Victoria has crossed the water for school outreach and made a mainstage debut here in October 2011. Molnar is not alone in ensuring that ballet in Vancouver continues to have a presence.

Best wishes to Ballet British Columbia in its twenty-fifth year from everyone who is part of the story of ballet on the west coast, whether present in body or, now, only in spirit.

Kaija Pepper is a writer and editor whose work appears in a number of North American publications, including *The Globe and Mail*, *Queen's Quarterly* and *Dance Magazine*. Her third Vancouver dance history book, *The Man Next Door Dances: The Art of Peter Bingham*, was published by Dance Collection Danse Press/Presse and was a finalist for the 2008 City of Vancouver Book Award.

For more reading about Vancouver's dance ...

See Kaija Pepper's *Theatrical Dance in Vancouver: 1880's-1920's* and *The Dance Teacher: A Biography of Kay Armstrong*, both published by Dance Collection Danse. Other DCD titles to read are Leland Windreich's *June Roper: Ballet Starmaker* and *Dancing for de Basil: Letters to her parents from Rosemary Deveson, 1938-1940*.



Paul-André Fortier in his work
Les mâles heures (1989)
Photo: Cylla von Tiedemann

30 years, 30 days, 30 minutes

BY PAMELA NEWELL

If you have seen Fortier perform, you will remember his arms. They are achingly poignant in their impossible length, breadth and precision. They wield like swords, reach into infinity or dangle in ageless innocence. 2011 is the 30th anniversary of Paul-André Fortier's company Fortier Danse-Création (FDC). It seems appropriate that, among other activities to mark the occasion, the seminal solo arm study in four acts – *Bras de plomb* [Arms of lead] (1993) – was chosen to be set on a dancer, other than Fortier, for the first time. It is as much a time to honour the extraordinary past as to look toward the future, legacy and heritage.

Also on the agenda for the anniversary celebration was a reappearance of Fortier's *Solo 30x30* in Montreal in September and October 2011. *Solo 30x30*, a significant milestone in Fortier's career, is a 30-minute choreography that Fortier performs in a designated outdoor space for 30 days in a row. The piece premiered on Millennium Bridge in Newcastle, England, in 2006 and has toured sites in numerous cities including London, Rome and New York. Like much of Fortier's work, the site-specific undertaking was born from provocation, this time self-

imposed. At fifty-eight, Fortier set himself the challenge of performing outside for 30 straight days, rain or shine.

Solo 30x30 is site-specific, but not in the strict sense. Much site-specific work is conceived and created around the interaction of dancers with a particular place, its landscape, architecture and even its history. *Solo 30x30* is a fixed choreographic sequence. It is not created for a specific site; instead each site envelops it and creates new parameters for the movement sequence and the performer's experience. It is ritualistic, a repeated event during which Fortier opens himself to transformation.

With *Solo 30x30*, Fortier joins diverse contemporary artists who have a desire to confront public space, and by consequence the public, on their own terms. Like high-wire artist Philippe Petit's tightrope walk between New York City's Twin Trade Towers or Banksy's furtive street art "tags" of whimsical social commentary, Fortier is, as he puts it, "a man who dances on a roof every day" (one series of performances took place on the roof of a shelter in Nancy, France). Whether there is an audience of rubbernecking, non-stopping passers by, people who live and work in the area



Paul-André Fortier in his work *Solo 30X30* (2006)
Photo: Ginelle Chagnon

and stop to observe, or no one but Ginelle Chagnon (choreographer's assistant and rehearsal director), a delightful discourse is set in motion: at what level – like the proverbial tree falling and making sound (or not) in the forest – does a dance work exist?

Fortier is counted among the generation, post Le Groupe Nouvelle Aire, that launched Quebec dance into its unstoppable international hold on cutting-edge art making. His colleagues and contemporaries include Édouard Lock, Ginette Laurin, Marie Chouinard and Daniel Léveillé. But unlike most choreographers from this generation, with the exception of Chouinard's recent return to the stage, he still performs. And very much so. In fact since 1989 his company has chosen to focus primarily on his solo endeavours, while making regular choreographic forays into group creations for professionals and students as well as solo commissions. It is as much a financial decision as anything else, he says: "The company is not rich enough to do group work. I would do more, but it takes a much bigger organization. If you can't do what you want to do and make a satisfying production, I'd rather not do it."

"I did my first plié at twenty-four"

Fortier came to dance late in life. Growing up in the small village of Waterville in the Eastern Townships of Quebec, he had no exposure to dance, or to much art and culture of any kind. His parents were minimally educated but socially active in their community. They worked hard in their vocations to give four of their five children a private school education. Fortier's years studying Greek, Latin, English and French in a Catholic boarding school were formative. One can sense in his stature a certain saturation in the institutional practices of pre-Quiet Revolution Quebec: daily mass, personal discipline and reverence for tradition. Artistically inclined, he went on to university to study the only subject offered that he felt gave him access to artistic expression – literature. Upon graduation, he lands the plum position of professor in a Quebec college. He is set for life. His parents are proud. Their hard work has paid off.

In 1972, while working toward a master's degree, Fortier attended a dance concert that one of his colleagues was producing at the CEGEP (Collège d'Enseignement Général et Professionnel) Granby where he taught French literature. He immediately wanted to know more about dance, about the body – this body that was so suspect in Quebec society. The colleague suggested he take a summer workshop with the now iconic Le Groupe Nouvelle Aire and, as they say, the rest is history. Right away, even at twenty-four, he excelled. Martine Époque, co-founder of the troupe, knew that she was in the presence of a "natural".

For the following year, Fortier travelled between his teaching job in Granby and dance classes and rehearsals in Montreal. He became a Nouvelle Aire company member and, soon after, left his teaching position and abandoned his master's studies to establish himself in Montreal. Seeing the burgeoning choreographic success of Nouvelle Aire members Édouard Lock (now artistic director of LaLaLa Human Steps) and Daniel Léveillé (now artistic director of Daniel Léveillé Danse), he found the courage to let go of financial security and parental expectations. He accepted living on the margins.

Provocation and transgression

Starting out, Fortier was frustrated by the fact that dance was considered only as entertainment with little possibility for philosophical or political engagement. With these young, experimental choreographers at Nouvelle Aire, however, transgression was becoming essential. In 1975, he danced in Lock's first choreography, *Temps Volé* [Stolen Time]: "It was the first time a piece of choreography made me feel concern as a man, as a man who has a life, who



Michèle Febvre and Paul-André Fortier in Martine Époque's *Lianes* (1977), Le Groupe Nouvelle Aire
Photo: Daniel Héon

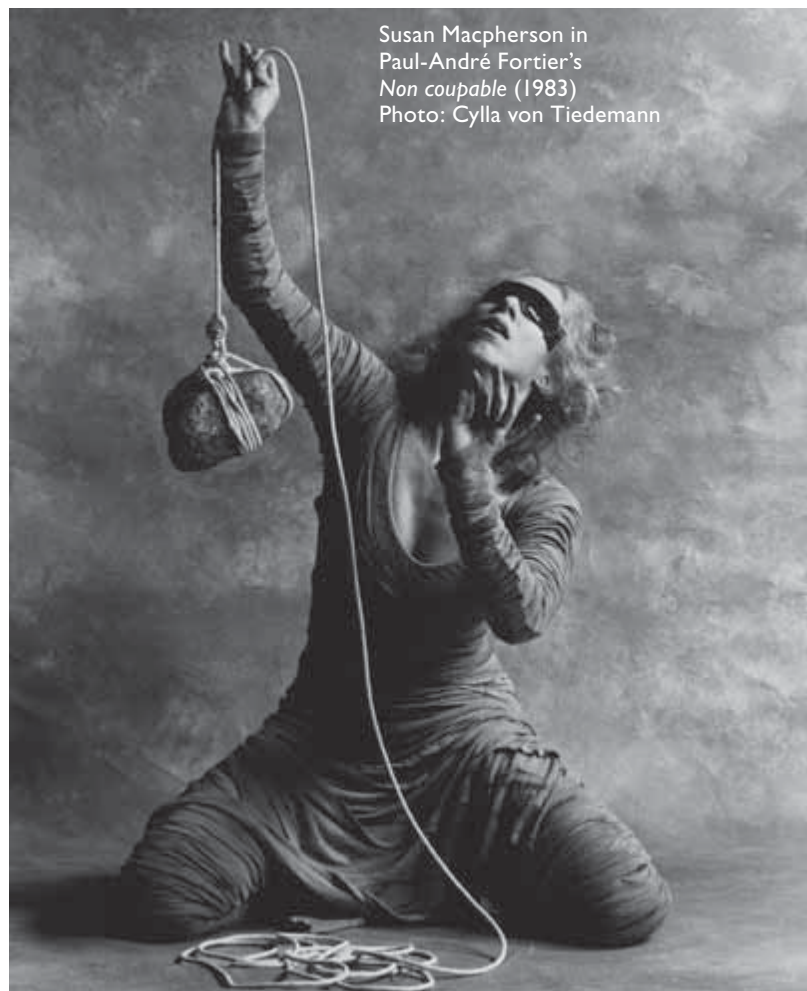
has a relationship with others. And I felt the piece was about my relationships ... the beauty and the misery of those relationships. I felt totally [engaged] and, I thought, this is what I like about dance. When I think about [the piece now] it still moves me." Unlike the abstraction characteristic of Nouvelle Aire, Lock's work was pertinent to Fortier's life. There was no overt narrative, but the choreographic propositions made him reach deep inside himself. He knew he wanted to go against dance's prevailing identity as fantasy and stereotyped gender roles. He told *Le Devoir* journalist Julie Bouchard in 2000: "If a novel can shock us, upset our world view and force us to question our assumptions, then dance can also."

Michèle Febvre, a dancer in several of Fortier's early works and later a dance theorist and a Université du Québec à Montréal (UQAM) professor, remembers that while his creative process took the form of most modern dance practice, the philosophy behind his aesthetic choices was very different from that of Nouvelle Aire. He was interested in critical themes of identity, sexuality, relationship, and in displaying that experimentation overtly, not hidden behind the sanitized expression of an idealized body. In general, this new generation of creators was interested in a dance *moins propre*, more human; they wanted to explore the body in all its vital expression, not just its beauty.

Fortier's early works – *Images noires* [Dark Images] (1978), *Rêve I* [Dream I] (1979) and *Parlez-moi donc du cul de mon enfance* [Talk to me about the deadend of my childhood] (1979) – were often raw and crude. They explored strong emotions, abuse and inner conflict in a realistic

rendering. In *Parlez-moi*, a dancer slowly turns peeling layer upon layer of clothing in a time-lapse striptease – a bold proposition in itself for Quebec stages at that time, but also a metaphor for the possibilities of self-inquiry and personal growth he sought in dance creation.

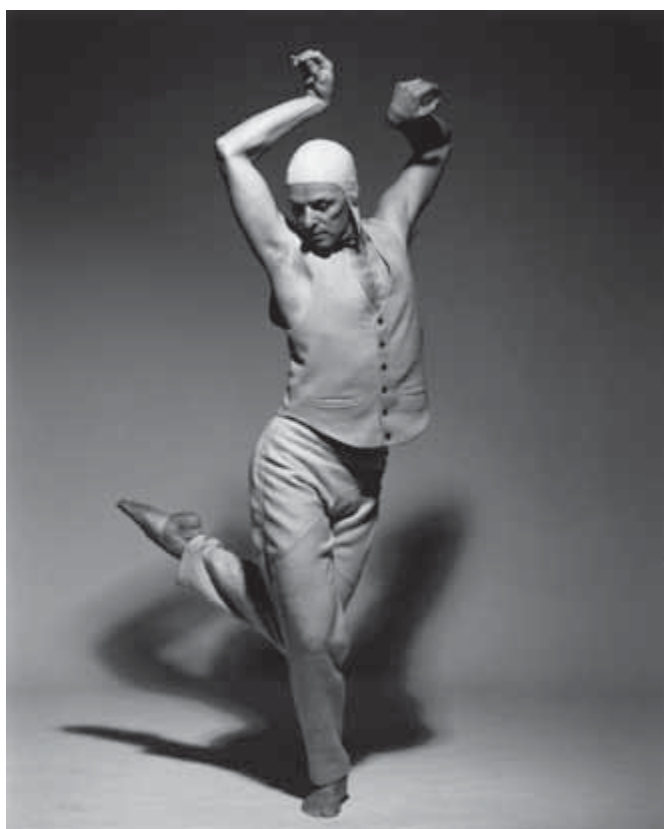
These early works carried Fortier into his, and indeed Quebec's, prolific *danse-théâtre* decade of the 1980s. Fortier founded his company in 1981 and cut his teeth creating diverse works in solo, duet and ensemble format through his own initiation and in important commissions for such solo artists as Margie Gillis and Susan Macpherson, and for companies such as Les Grands Ballets Canadiens. It was a furious period of creation and management, perhaps also characterized by the peculiar absence of Fortier on stage. The decade culminated in the founding of Montréal Danse with Daniel Jackson in 1986, where he stayed for three years. This new structure provided a vehicle for making group work and, with the shared direction, time to perform again. He commissioned a series of solos by Daniel Léveillé, Denis Lavoie, Daniel Soulières, Jean-Pierre Perreault and Catherine Tardif, and created one for himself. They became the program "Fortier en solo". Robin Poitras, artistic director of New Dance Horizons in Regina, who presented the evening, remembers his remarkable "capacity to interpret ... to see one individual able to speak that many languages was quite profound. And he was able to wipe the slate clean between each piece."



Susan Macpherson in Paul-André Fortier's *Non coupable* (1983)
Photo: Cylla von Tiedemann

The solo adventure

In 1989, at over forty years old, Fortier pursued this solo impulse and created *Les mâles heures* [Corrupt Times], which triggered a significant shift in his artistic trajectory. It was the first of three evening-length solos – with *La tentation de la transparence* [Luminosity's Temptation] (1991) and *Bras de plomb* (1993) – that deeply marked his creative voice and the artistic identity for which he is perhaps best known today. Evoking Quebec's Catholic past and the strict education of young boys, *Les mâles heures* features a character who wrestles to reconcile conflicting inner impulses. In it, Febvre believes he is saying: "There, this is who I am, who I was." And over the course of the three solos, she feels he was "progressively separating himself from, even erasing, his past."



Paul-André Fortier in his work *La tentation de la transparence* (1991)

Photo: Michael Slobodian

For *La tentation de la transparence*, Fortier found his source in literature – Marguerite Yourcenar's *L'oeuvre au noir*. His knowledge of literature and his love of books are a great source of inspiration, whether directly or indirectly. His early study in Catholic boarding school of four different grammars helped, he says, to "structure" his mind and now, in turn, helps him structure artistic work: "It influenced my whole way of creating. I like the metaphor of the puzzle. Pieces sometimes don't belong

to the same image. Sometimes we try to make them fit, but we need in fact to get rid of them." Ever the pedagogue, he returned to teaching in 1989, taking a position as professor in the dance department at UQAM.

Tentation was also Fortier's first collaboration with visual artist Betty Goodwin. She contributed to the design of a scenic island, the platform on and around which his stranded aviator is at once trapped and able to transcend through heroic attempts to take flight. In this second solo, Fortier further bares himself, now beyond autobiography. With his spectacular Fortier wingspan, he is a timeless soul grappling in a universal dimension.

Bras de plomb was also a collaboration with Goodwin. She designed the set, a smaller platform recalling furniture and a more interior environment, and she contributed to the costume concept. The presence of visual art and collaboration are integral to Fortier's oeuvre, evidenced already in his first choreography – *Derrière la porte un mur* [Behind the door, a wall] (1978) – which featured the work of visual artist Françoise Sullivan. Other important and long-term collaborators include composer Gaétan Leboeuf, costume designer Denis Lavoie, rehearsal director Ginelle Chagnon and lighting designer Jean Phillippe Trépanier. Fortier chose to remount and pass on *Bras de plomb* in part to bring awareness to these large-scale collaborations. He is drawn to collaborate with other artists because of who they are as people: "I respect them and want to learn from them. I want to be with the person in the room in the creative process, have them close to me." Poitras observes: "He approaches it from a real place of diplomacy. He invites somebody when he's at a place where he completely trusts them, believes in them and totally respects them. And expects that same reciprocity. And therefore these magical things can happen, because they are really honest collaborations in the Cage-Cunningham sense."

With these three trademark solos – which Fortier remounted separately and back-to-back in January 2000 – and subsequent work, he is identified less with dance theatre and more with formalism, with purity and clarity of execution. The tone indeed changed, however, the movement language was not necessarily new. Febvre explains that his affinity for verticality, line and spatial design has always been there. Even in a thematic atmosphere of danger and darkness with hoses or rocks as props, the choreographic signature was characterized by its architectural relationship to space, personal and environmental. Febvre feels these two Fortier poles are wonderfully illustrated in the duet *Cabane* [Shack] (2008). In *Cabane*, another extraordinary meeting of several artistic minds, Rober Racine, composer and performer, is a kind of gnome presence – the surreal, theatrical, campy personification – while Fortier is the serious



Paul-André Fortier and Rober Racine in Fortier's work *Cabane* (2008)
Photo: Hugo Glendinning

white clown – the straight man, pure, linear, in control. Poitras also sees these two sides meeting in “almost the corpus callosum, the right and left brain, channelled so that the public receives the piece through the mix of these worlds.” She first met Fortier while a student at York University in the early 1980s and remembers “a living artist ... in the vortex” who made the students do a lot of walking. She observed in him that “there was never a moment wasted. There was no filler. Everything was there for a reason.” And yet, she exclaims as she reflects on the creative process for her recently commissioned solo *She* (2009), “he is a wild guy. He has a completely wild imagination. There are no limits.”

“A man who dances”

Fortier the choreographer can never be separated from Fortier the performer. His presence is monumental, fully embodied, every cell illuminated. He has found comfort in identifying himself as “a man who dances” with all the directness and simplicity that that implies. And when Fortier works with other dancers, he chooses accomplished performers – Peggy Baker, Gioconda Barbuto, Robert Meilleur, Sandra Lapierre – soloists in their own right. They too are real people dancing, “men and women who dance.” In spite of complex, virtuosic movement, the transitions can have a pedestrian quality. The effect seems to acknowledge the dancer as not only sensation and an organic medium for movement, but as an evolved, intellectual, upright being.

Aware of his own age as a performer, Fortier is fascinated by notions of youth and maturity, both on their

own – *Jeux de fous* [Foolish Games] (1998) or *Risque* [Risk] (2003) – and juxtaposed – *Tensions* [Tensions] (2001) or *Lumière* [Light] (2004). He keeps performing because he believes “there is a poetry in the aging body that is not in the younger body ... we carry our whole history.” And he knows he will keep creating; he can feel a new piece incubating. “It doesn’t feel good. Until ideas start to materialize, it is very uncomfortable. I can carry this for months. You have to be patient and wait for the first materialization of this discomfort to appear. Once something starts to shape, you can relax. It’s so strange. It’s like a disease, like something you can’t avoid.”



Audrey Thibodeau and Warwick Long in Paul-André Fortier's *Lumière* (2004)
Photo: Robert Etcheverry



Paul-André Fortier, Gilles Simard, Louise Bédard, Danielle Tardif, Ginette Laurin, Daniel Soulières and Michèle Febvre in Fortier's *Pow! ... t'es mort ...* (1982)
Photo: Robert Etcheverry

Public spaces/Space's public

In recent creations, Fortier has committed more forcefully to his longstanding desire to directly communicate with his public. Particularly since *Solo 30x30*, he is succeeding on many levels. Fortier says this marathon of sorts "is the deepest, most extraordinary human experience of my life. It has changed my vision of things." At his initiation, artists around the world have created responses to the work, from Peter Bingham's 30-minute performance, to texts, films and even a Fortier avatar for an interactive video by an Italian artist. In France, the multi-media artist Daniel Denise asked Fortier to do portions of the solo in 30 different work places, including a fire station, an underground parking lot and the kitchen of a restaurant on Easter Sunday. These performances are part of a film in process.

Solo 30x30, *Cabane* and a new work, *Box* (2010), are also conceived with an environmental consciousness and meant to be performed in any locale. The lighting concept for *Cabane* by John Munro, another long-term Fortier accomplice, uses no theatre lights and requires

only six electrical outlets. It has been presented in a meat market, a seventeenth-century French courtyard and a law firm's lobby, each time encountering a new public and taking on new meaning. Perhaps Fortier has always been focussed, fundamentally, on multiplying and layering perspectives. His iconic, sign-like physical language brings into relief the positive and negative fields of the choreographic landscape. He takes it into public space to get closer to the space's public. And as Poitras so poetically observes, the results create yet another, virtual performance context: "What's so lovely is the ephemerality. Because after he leaves, the dance is left there. It's there forever. Every time I go by the library in Vancouver where he performed, I can still see him dancing."

Pamela Newell, choreographer, teacher and writer, received her Master's degree from the Université du Québec à Montréal (UQAM) and teaches at Concordia University. Her awarding-winning research on the choreographer-dancer relationship in the creative process has appeared in two anthologies. She is rehearsal director for Compagnie Marie Chouinard.

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 recollects, "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.

DCD Receives Archival Gift from the NYPL

A collection of Ruth Sorel house and souvenir programs, dated 1949, were recently donated to Dance Collection Danse by the Dance Division of the New York Public Library.

Sorel, a dancer with Mary Wigman's company, immigrated to Canada in 1944 residing in Montreal until the mid-1950s. During this time, she created various dance works featuring the city's ballet and modern dance artists.

Below is Iro Valaskakis Tembeck's entry on Ruth Sorel in DCD's *Encyclopedia of Theatre Dance in Canada/Encyclopédie de la Danse Théâtrale au Canada*.

DCD thanks the New York Public Library and Charles Perrier, Assistant Curator, Jerome Robbins Dance Division, for this generous and welcome gift.



Ruth Sorel, c. 1949
Photo: John Steele

Sorel, Ruth. Choreographer, artistic director, dancer, teacher. Born: 1907, Halle, Germany. Died: 1974, Warsaw, Poland. Birth name: Ruth Abramowitz (or Abramovitch).

Born of Polish parents, Ruth Abramowitz studied Dalcroze Eurhythmics, and danced for Mary Wigman in Dresden from 1923-1928. From 1927-1933 she was also a soloist with the Berlin Municipal Opera (Berlin Stadtischeoper), appearing in works by Lizzie Maudrik, and was particularly known for her character role in the *Legend of Joseph* (1930). In 1933, she won first prize for her exceptionally expressive dancing at the International Solo Dance Festival held in Warsaw. Soon after, she was forced to flee Nazi persecution because of her Jewish parentage, and she settled in Poland with her dance partner George Groke. Together they toured Italy, France, England and Palestine for the next two years, venturing also as far as Canada, the United States and Brazil. Her concert work *Salome* or *Dance of the Seven Veils* was particularly well received.

In Warsaw, Abramowitz opened a school for dance and theatre professionals with an official permit from the Ministry

of Education. The students she trained were to receive awards at subsequent international competitions, notably in Brussels in 1939.

While in Poland, Abramowitz married a Polish writer and dramatist, Michel Choromanski, and immigrated with him to Canada in 1944. During her stay in Montreal, Abramowitz performed and worked under the name of Sorel, dropping her other surname. She opened a dance studio in Westmount, and she also taught in Trois-Rivières and Shawinigan.



Souvenir program for Les Ballets Ruth Sorel, 1949

Her troupe was alternately billed as Les Ballets Ruth Sorel or the Ruth Sorel Modern Dance Group, and the pieces involved both the European modern dance approach and the classical ballet vocabulary.

Among her best known works was *Mea Culpa, Mea Culpa*, a medieval mystery play with characters including a sinner, a priest and a Greek-style chorus of women. The work was featured in the Second Canadian Ballet Festival held in Toronto in 1949, and a very short sequence from it appears in the National Film Board documentary *Ballet Festival*. Other works include *Tittle Tattle*, *Two Lawyers in the Moonlight*, *Shakespearean Shadows* and *La Gaspésienne*. This last piece, created in 1949, was one of the first dance works to deal with French-Canadian subject matter.

As well as performing in Canada, Sorel's group appeared in New York at the Choreographers' Workshop. Among the dancers in the company were Andrée Millaire, Birouté Nagys, Alexander Macdougall and Michel Boudot.

In the mid-1950s, Sorel and her husband left Canada, returning to Warsaw, where she died in 1974.

DANCING THROUGH TIME

Toronto's Dance History 1900-1980

BY MICHAEL CRABB

It would be hard to imagine a more appropriate setting for an exhibition about Toronto's dance heritage than the city's historic Market Gallery. From March 5 to July 2, the lofty Victorian-era space that started life 166 years ago as the Council

Chamber of the then Toronto City Hall became the site of an ambitious, tip-of-the iceberg display of select items from the ever-growing archives of Dance Collection Danse.

Dancing Through Time: Toronto's Dance History 1900-1980, thought-

fully curated by DCD Director of Research Amy Bowring, included an impressive array of documents, photographs, posters, designs, costumes and much more – even what Bowring describes frankly as dance kitsch – to evoke the remarkable and often overlooked vibrancy of dance in Toronto throughout the twentieth century.

As the exhibition compellingly highlighted, although professional dance companies did not emerge in Toronto until the 1950s – the late 1960s for modern dance troupes – the soil had been well tilled by a host of antecedent pioneers. Some were immigrants who brought with them a dance culture they were eager to share. Others were inspired by the visits of such legendary artists as ballerina Anna Pavlova and German modern dance Expressionist, Mary Wigman. Pavlova's repeated visits to Toronto's Massey Hall spurred local demand for ballet classes, a demand often met by Russian teachers who found refuge in Canada from the turmoil of the Bolshevik Revolution.

To a receptive few, Wigman revealed that the art form could be much more than toe-shoed glamour and romance, thus inspiring such Torontonians as Cynthia Barrett, Saida Gerrard and Nancy Lima Dent – the latter against her stern Italian father's wishes – to explore modern dance. As the exhibition illustrated, without those explorations Toronto Dance Theatre might never have happened.

Instructively, in an age when we take multiculturalism for granted, the exhibition surprisingly revealed the early influence



Irina Baronova and members of Col. de Basil's Ballets Russes backstage at the Royal Alexandra Theatre preparing for a performance of *Le Mariage d'Aurore*, 1935
Photo: Allan Sangster

of such visiting performers as Indian dancer Uday Shankar, the older brother of musician Ravi Shankar, and flamenco dancers Argentinita and Carmen Amaya.

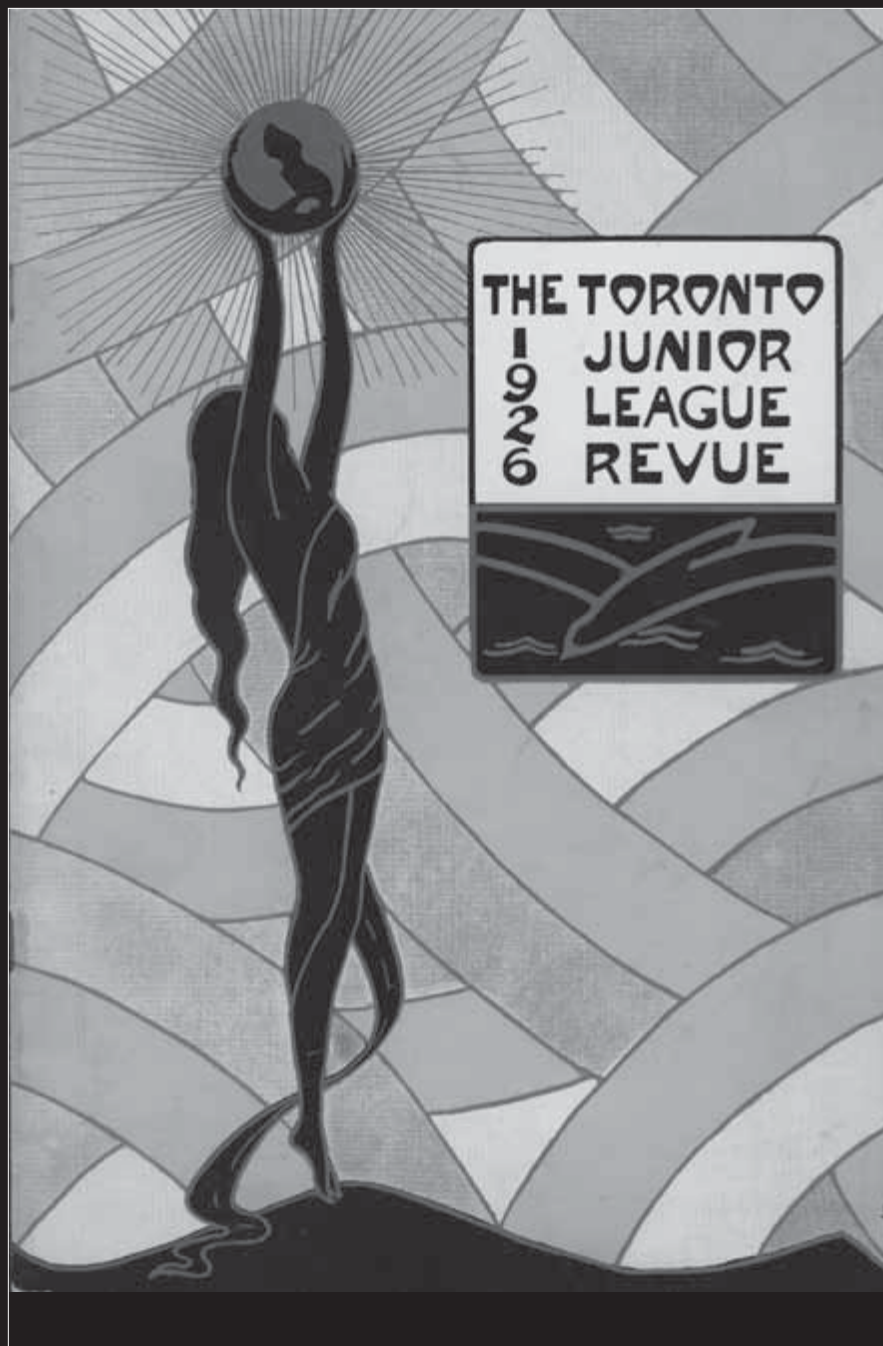
The exhibition also served as a reminder that the notion of a rigid divide between art and entertainment – the one high-minded, the other commercial – is largely a product of recent history. Before public funding of the arts was introduced, dancers had to be pragmatic realists. They struggled to make a career any way they could and saw no shame in performing in vaudeville shows – any more than did Russian-born Boris Volkoff, “the father of Canadian ballet,” in choreographing them.

As a result of this wholesomely robust attitude, dance successfully infused the popular public consciousness and prepared the ground for the more seriously intended artistic endeavours that emerged mid-century.

The exhibition’s careful attention to the often overlooked or under-appreciated early chapters of Toronto’s dance history provides useful context for the six Canadian Ballet Festivals – with the exception of 1951, held annually from 1948 to 1954. These gatherings of Canadian dance talent, three of which were convened in Toronto, stimulated public interest and demonstrated that the time was ripe to supplement the continuing visits of touring companies from abroad with the professional efforts of home-grown artists.

The appeal and success of an exhibition depends on much more than its contents. Its arrangement is arguably as crucial. *Dancing Through Time* scored on both counts.

The largely chronological ordering of displays aptly buttressed curator Bowring’s intention to show the steady evolution of dance in Toronto. This she achieved with a judiciously balanced selection of documents and artifacts.



Cover art for a Junior League Revue house program

A carefully typed 1951 letter from a young lawyer in Edmonton who had just accepted Celia Franca’s call to join the newly founded National Ballet of Canada – Grant Strate, now the elder statesman of Canadian dance – evoked the adventurous uncertainty of that then fledgling enterprise. A 1952 *Spectre de la Rose* costume worn by David Adams was a reminder of the limited material resources designer Kay Ambrose had to work

with. Scrutinizing the contents of Irene Apinée’s make-up kit was like stepping back sixty years.

More than anything, *Dancing Through Time* reminds us of the vital role Dance Collection Danse has played, now for a quarter century, in giving us back our own history. Without DCD’s continuing efforts to preserve what has survived from the past, our understanding of dance today would be sadly diminished.

Ethel Bruneau

Montreal's Rhythm Tap Legend

BY LYS STEVENS

Intro

Ethel Bruneau's cup of life has been filled to the brim with tap dancing. A professional tap dancer at nine years old, she was brought to Montreal from New York in her teens with Cab Calloway's jazz orchestra. In the 1950s and 1960s she dominated the Montreal nightclub scene, performing her tap and Afro-Cuban acts, singing and occasionally acting as MC. She began teaching tap in 1964 and, despite her limited mobility, continues to this day, responsible for generations of tap dancers with that special "Ethel Bruneau" flair that has won competitions and created stars.

I first encountered Ethel Bruneau through her voice – the fully animated voice of a black American woman in her seventies rattling off names I had only read about in books or seen in the movies (and others I was left scrambling to figure out on my own). Interviews invariably generate a vortex of facts and memories from a rich life filled with glitter and passion. One question posed will get sidetracked into a wealth of tangents evoking a time gone by, Montreal's jazz age, or the Harlem renaissance. Whether recounting moments in her life history or embarking on diatribes about how dance is portrayed on television today, she speaks with a humour that is completely persuading, and deadly serious.



Ethel Bruneau, mid-1960s
Photo: Bert Jay

Tap history

One curiosity of mine, as I explore tap dance as a researcher, is the virtual divide between its black and white traditions. Tap was, by all accounts, an encounter at the beginning of the nineteenth century between the Irish jig, English clogging and African slave rhythms. In their minstrel shows, Irish performers in blackface imitated southern blacks, and, when racist

laws loosened, blacks performed the dance as well. The 1920s and 1930s produced the stylistic distinction between rhythm tap and Broadway tap as black dancers focussed on rhythmic innovations from jazz music, while Broadway and Hollywood dancers used the elegant lines of ballet and modern dance. By the time Bruneau was born in the mid-1930s, the Harlem renaissance was in full swing ... and swinging with the sounds of jazz. She was clearly in the rhythm tap camp.

Early years

On January 1, 1936, Ethel Mae Waterman was born to a Barbadian father and a Jamaican mother. Mr. Waterman worked in management for the New York City postal service, while Mrs. Waterman took care of their sixteen children, eight of whom they adopted after mayor LaGuardia asked her to take them in as foster children. She also cooked for visiting acts at the famous Apollo Theater in Harlem down the street. “She’d say, ‘Walk fast, take it to them while it’s hot!’” Bruneau recalls.

At age four, Bruneau began formal classes at the Mary Bruce Dance Academy, also in Harlem, where she learned ballet, acrobatics and tap. The school was like a second home to Bruneau, who remembers that Bruce often fed her students and taught those who couldn’t afford classes. Mary Bruce produced yearly shows where she presented her “Starbuds” at Carnegie Hall with an eighteen-piece band. Summers she conducted dance camps at Brucewood, her property in the Catskills. Her husband, Chicago fighter and builder Andrew Johnson, had built the cabins and dance studios, and Mrs. Waterman cooked.

From age nine to her early teens, Bruneau tapped in a duo with her cousin Poppy called the Melody Twins, doing shows in Atlantic City on the Boardwalk, and USO shows on army bases. Mary Bruce was their agent, securing gigs as well for her Brucettes, an elite troupe of which Bruneau was also a member. Bruneau remembers performing on variety television shows such as Ed Sullivan’s *The Toast of the Town*, Milton Berle’s *Texaco Star Theatre*, Sid Ceasar’s *Your Show of Shows*, *The Jackie Gleason Show*, *The Faye Emerson Show*, *The Ken Murray Show*, and a quiz show hosted by Bert Parks called *Stop the Music*.

Around the age of twelve, Bruneau and Poppy began travelling downtown to take extra classes on Broadway – from Martha Graham and José Limón to the Katherine Dunham School of Cultural Arts. She says, “I took everybody’s class, ‘cause in New York you just go to class after class after class, everybody did. Because in those days the classes were \$3.” Tap teacher Frances Cole took a special interest calling Bruneau “legs” because of her long legs. A young Bernadette Peters was in those classes, accompanied by her mother who, in typical show-mom fashion would urge her daughter to join Bruneau at the front of the class. Bruneau remembers being nagged by Mrs. Peters to audition for the Rockettes (a farcical proposition in the ‘50s, as the Rockettes’ official policy excluded black dancers until 1987). Bruneau graduated from the newly established New York City High School of the Performing Arts in the early 1950s.

But the sights, sounds and characters of the jazz era surrounded Bruneau back up in Harlem. Bruneau’s older



Ethel Bruneau and Cornelius “Poppy” Scott, The Melody Twins, c. 1950

sister was a shake dancer who danced at the Burlesque showplace Minsky’s before moving north to Montreal. Her aunt was a showgirl at the Apollo whose husband was the renowned hooper Charles “Honi” Cole. All the great tap dancers of the time were her mentors: “I hung around with most of the masters. I hung around with Honi, Charlie, Sandman Sims ... ‘cause I lived five blocks from the Apollo Theater, so I was hanging out backstage and out on the street in the back. I tapped with whoever was on the bill that week; I was out back getting lessons, they’re tapping – I’m learning.” History’s greatest tap dancer, Mr. Bill Bojangles Robinson himself made guest teaching appearances at the Bruce school.

Montreal Bound

At the age of seventeen and at the urging of a friend, Bruneau responded to an ad, “booking shows for Canada and Broadway.” Show business impresario M. Jules Stein invited the girls to an audition in the Brill Building on Broadway. “There were all these people. And they were looking for black people and they were looking for white people and ‘can you sing?’ I wasn’t a great singer but I sang. And I did my thing, and [my friend] did her thing, but I didn’t really want to go – I was going [to be] with her. But I had to do all the talking for her because Barbara didn’t want to do it, and they asked me, ‘So you, you’re



Ethel Bruneau, late 1950s

really good.' 'Thank you.' 'And you can sing too.' They said, 'we're booking the show for Montreal, Canada, but you have to do chorus work.' And, 'let me see how you tap.' So I did one of my tap acts, and they liked that."

They booked her as the soubrette for Cab Calloway's orchestra, the chorus girl who "tags the number" with an extra song and dance after the rest have left the stage. She then had to negotiate with her parents for permission to accept the gig in Montreal. Her aunt, who had been the Melody Twins manager, encouraged her, and on the condition that she lived with her older sister, she was eventually allowed to go.

In 1953, Bruneau arrived to a city vibrating with the sounds of jazz. Propelled by the American prohibition in the twenties, Montreal had developed a reputation for its nightlife, hosting top artists from the United States and France, and continuing with illicit after-hours entertainment. "The scale of Montreal's nightclub industry during its peak in the late 1940s and early 1950s was staggering. Musicians swear there were literally hundreds of

clubs in the city offering some kind of show," states John Gilmore in his book *Swinging in Paradise: The Story of Jazz in Montreal*. Bruneau was astounded, "It was called 'Neon City'. All lit up, from west to east with clubs ... This place was like, this was Las Vegas!"

The gig was booked into the Bellevue Casino on Bleury and Ontario streets. The run lasted three weeks. When agent Roy Cooper approached Bruneau to offer her 365 days of work in Montreal, she quickly accepted. The Montmartre, the Top Hat, the Maroon Club, Casa Loma, the French Casino (now the Cleopatra); the Chanta Claire and the 42 on Notre Dame; Turbillion in the east; Cavendish in the west, Bruneau lists off the names of nightclubs she performed at as if she's reading from a phone book. She recalls that Chez Paris had around forty-five strippers then, "When I worked with the strippers, I was considered the star, the 'vedette'. I was always either an MC and would bring on the strippers, or sing and dance between them." She worked often at the famous Rockhead's Paradise, "downtown" at St. Antoine and Mountain Street, the only nightclub in Montreal owned by a black.

Becoming known as "Miss Swing" and the "Queen of Afro-Cuban", Bruneau would perform her act two times a day, seven days a week. Her tap act, which would last about twenty minutes, would open with a song, break into a big tap number, get spiced up with some comedy, and end with a soft shoe. "Open with something really hot, and you close with a bang," she says. Her Afro-Cuban act began with an elegant song and a gown, which she tore off to reveal a bikini, accompanied by African-style dancing to heavy drums. She estimates that it cost her around \$1,000 to have her music written out for the band, with a section for the drummer, a section for the trombone, another for the piano.

Ethel was young and full of life. She claims she never slept. Her life revolved around show business and the entertainers she met through the nightclubs, many of whom were Americans. "All the entertainers lived here, everybody was an entertainer," she recalls. She met her husband on the Main, at the Main Café. He was the legendary Mansfield Tavern waiter Henri "Ti Rouge" Bruneau, considered by many as the best waiter in Montreal. They married in 1957.

The decline of Montreal's nightclub scene was gradual throughout the late 1950s and 1960s. By 1952, television had arrived in Montreal, and in 1954 Mayor Jean Drapeau was elected and began his anti-crime and anti-vice crusade. Rock music began replacing jazz as the voice of youth. Bruneau continued to work in show business, touring Quebec and Ontario: in Toronto she performed at the Victory Theatre, in Gatineau at the Ambassador, at the Louis XIV in Quebec City. She travelled to Fort Frances, Val D'Or, Forrestville, and other smaller towns. From 1959 through 1960, Bruneau toured North America with the black singer/comedienne Pearl Bailey and her brother, the famed tapper Bill Bailey. In Montreal,



Ethel Bruneau's students performing at the Vaudreuil Inn, late 1960s

Newspaper advertisement showcasing Ethel Bruneau as "Miss Swing"

Bruneau also performed on Radio-Canada's *Au p'tit café* and *Music Hall*, some of the most watched TV shows in Quebec at the time. She didn't slacken her pace when her daughter was born in 1961. In 1964, dancing with the Arleigh Peterson Dancers, she shared the stage with Josephine Baker at Place des Arts.

In the 1970s, she collaborated with jazz dancer Don Jordan. Jordan's father was a musician who often had an assortment of artists over at the house: Oscar Peterson, Duke Ellington, Cab Calloway. "Ethel was just part of the mix," he states. In 1972 they did a show in Longueuil to sold-out audiences. She created another show in 1974 at the Casino Royal with pianist Billy Taylor. In 1985 she performed on *RSVP*, a live-audience television show hosted by René Simard, performing a tap number, an Afro-Cuban number and singing ... a formidable performer at age forty-nine. More recently she has appeared on TV documentaries to talk about tap dance and her life, such as an episode in the recent *Voulez-vous danser* series on ARTV.

Tap teacher

In 1964, Ethel Bruneau began weekly treks from her home in the east end out to the tiny subdivision of Dorion Gardens off the west end of the island, in order to teach private lessons to a friend's ten-year-old stepdaughter. She remembers, "All the kids she played with would come in and they all sat on the floor watching – 'cause there was nothing else [to do]." Quickly enough the private lessons became group lessons, in the Reany family basement. Kim Reany has stayed with her since, becoming her life

accomplice in tap. Another of her first students, Kathy Brault, remembers the space: "Unfinished cement floor, and mirrors set up like a dance studio." Brault remembers her fondly. "She was so glamorous, you could tell she was the real thing." Their first recital took place in a local school, and the second at the Vaudreuil Inn, with live musicians, in the Mary Bruce tradition. Classes moved to the local community centre for the next six years. In 1970, Bruneau's son JP was born and not long after she finished her Early Childhood Education Degree from McGill and began working at a nursery school in Montreal West.

Her second dance school was in the Ballets Jazz de Montréal building on St. Catherine Street. She also taught classes for the Ballets Jazz and the Ballets Russes, and later at multiple dance schools across the West Island. For a time, she opened a branch of her own school in the Côte Saint-Luc neighbourhood. In 1980, she began teaching at the Universal Negro Improvement Association (UNIA), a Marcus Garvey organization in Little Burgundy, which operates a complex with low-rent housing and offices. Granted by the City of Montreal, their original location on St. James had been demolished in the 1960s along with hundreds of other black homes and businesses to make way for the Ville-Marie Expressway. UNIA president Henry Langdon offered Bruneau a free space on Saturdays to give classes to the local youth. Bruneau never turned away any kid whose parents could not afford to pay. In 1995, Ethel Bruneau created the The Montreal Tap Dance Society, through which she handed out student scholarships, and she created the Montreal Tap Festival bringing such tap dance masters as Jimmy Slide, Van the Man Porter, Diane Walker and Heather Cornell to Montreal. Now living in Brossard, she mortgaged her residence several times in order to finance the tap festivals and workshops.

Currently, the Ethel Bruneau Dance Studio is based in Dorval, where she has a back wall dedicated to Gregory Hines who went with her to the Mary Bruce school and became a life-long friend. Hines notoriously dubbed her the "Tap Queen of Montreal" in 1996 when he



Ethel Bruneau dancing at Rockead's Paradise

performed at the Montreal International Jazz Festival. Her end-of-year show is held at Collège Jean-de-Brébeuf in Outremont, but a live band is no longer viable.

Her comic timing comes in handy with her teaching, and she is obviously adored by her students, young and old. "Ethel is from the heart, she creates a passion. It's like a family – it's about the dance, not the business," states student Jen Coates. Star students Travis Knights and Tanya Rivard dance for the Austin, Texas, company Tapestry. Another of her star students, Justin Jackson, is the seven-time Canadian Tap Champion of Canada. Her three granddaughters Tisha, Majiza and Makeda teach at her school.

Ethel Bruneau is an unceasing promoter of tap dancing, receiving numerous awards and acknowledgments for her work, including the Rosetti Lifetime



Travis Knights and Gregory Hines, 1996

Achievement Award from the Festival International Danse Encore in Trois-Rivières (1999); honours at the second Dance Sounds of Blackness Awards (1999) and Black Theatre Workshop's Martin Luther King Award (2009). Don Jordan states, "Ethel is crazy, energetic, she has a joy of life. Dance is her life. And she is so persistent – she invests every ounce of her being into her students." In 2009 she was flown out to Vancouver to participate in Rising Tide: Canadians in Tap Conference to speak about her life, helping to create a national consciousness of our own tap heritage in Canada.

In 1984, she married her manager Paul Emile Garneau, while remaining close with her first husband. She has now survived both. Despite hip pain and a double bypass surgery last July, at seventy-five years old Ethel Bruneau is not looking to slow down. As she always says, "I'm going to tap 'til the day I die" ... "I'm going to die with my tap shoes on." Let's hope that day lives far in the future.

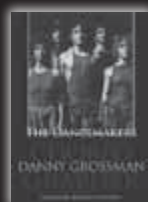
Montreal-based dance writer and arts administrator Lys Stevens holds a Masters in Dance Studies from UQAM. She does some of the programming at Studio 303, where she also authored their guide-book to dance production for emerging choreographers, now an online resource. She is a guest writer at *The Dance Current*.

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Remembering

Lois Smith, winner of "Burnaby's Best Baby Contest", 1930



In 1978, almost a decade after she'd hung up her prima ballerina pointe shoes, Lois Smith returned to The National Ballet of Canada to portray the vengeful fairy, Carabosse, in *The Sleeping Beauty*. In a way it's ironic because, unlike Princess Aurora in Rudolf Nureyev's production of that iconic Russian classic, Smith, as a babe-in-arms, did not suffer the curse of an evil fairy. On the contrary, the midwife who attended Smith's home birth in Burnaby, BC, on October 8, 1929, appears to have been much more of the Lilac Fairy ilk. According to family lore, the good woman, drawing from ancient wisdom, pronounced that the agreeably plump eight pound newborn would one day be famous because "she was born with a veil covering her" – a pleasantly poetic euphemism for a remnant of the amniotic sac. Given their decidedly humble circumstances, Smith's parents might reasonably have greeted this news with a measure of skepticism.

Her immigrant British father, following his own dad's trade, was a shoemaker. At the time, the best he could manage for his wife, and sons Bill and Jack, was a simple two-room abode with a single water tap, an outhouse and a chicken coop. Today quite modest houses towards the top of Pandora Street, with their view northward to the coastal mountains and Lower Mainland to the south, can command seven-figure valuations. In 1929, the Smith residence was effectively in the bush, little more than a shack at the end of a trail. There was no phone. When Mrs. Smith went into labour, Mr. Smith had to walk a long block to find a phone to call the doctor and midwife – and then left for work, hoping all would be well. Reportedly, he was delighted to return that evening to find himself the father of a bonny baby girl. Yet, with the possible exception of the midwife, nowhere in anyone's wildest imaginings could it have been foreseen that Lois Smith would emerge to become Canada's first ballet sweetheart, a stage presence so poised, graceful and dramatically compelling that she won converts to the art form across the land, in theatres great and gymnasia small.

There had been other estimable Canadian female dancers before her but none with the national, name-recognition impact of Lois Smith, an impact reinforced by her frequent appearances on the nascent CBC Television. Together with David Adams, Smith's celebrated onstage partner and love-of-her-life husband, she was an authentic trailblazer. Yet, at the time of her death in January 2011, despite all the predictable tributes from those who had been touched by her artistry, the full scope of Lois Smith's achievement was not easily communicated to a younger generation.

Even her official retirement from the National Ballet, triggered in 1969 by yet another injury to a chronically troublesome knee, received somewhat muted notice. Smith was accorded a farewell performance that November, dancing the evil Black Queen – a controversial substitute for the traditional von Rothbart character – in Erik Bruhn's sadly lost production of *Swan Lake*. By then Veronica Tennant was the rising star. Karen Kain had just joined the corps. The pioneering generation among whom Smith was a luminary was rapidly thinning and being overshadowed. Curiously, it was only in 1980 that Smith was formally honoured with the Order of Canada – and then only because certain influential figures became apprised of the egregious oversight. Tennant had been appointed five years earlier; Kain in 1976.

Lois Smith

BY MICHAEL CRABB

Nowadays, girls with a hunger for dance and the kind of ideal proportions Smith was blessed with, have a range of options in terms of training. Scouts from leading professional ballet academies, scholarships for the needy in hand, trawl the country for emerging talents.

Smith evinced a love of movement early on and was, with her father's encouragement, an avid child gymnast and sportswoman – especially in high jump. Yet, in the 1930s, she had no role models and no ready access to training, only an instinctive urge to dance. There was no Chopin, Delibes or Tchaikovsky on the gramophone at home because, as Smith recalled years later, her brother Jack couldn't abide classical music.



Lois Smith in Frederick Ashton's *Les Rendezvous*, 1956/57 season, The National Ballet of Canada
Photo: Ken Bell

When Smith was six, a family friend offered to pay to put her in ballet class but her staunchly proud working-class mother refused. Family resources, however, were deemed acceptable. Four years later her brother Bill, who was a decade older, offered to pay, from his earnings at

Leckey's Shoe Factory, for a class a week at the BC School of Dancing. It had been founded by the legendary teacher June Roper and by 1939 was run by Dorothy Wilson. In accord with the unenlightened custom of the era, Smith was put straight into "toe shoes," as they were then commonly referred to; though no damage was done to her untrained feet because six months later Bill lost his job and Smith's dance instruction was abruptly halted.

After Grade 10, she moved to "Commercial School" with the idea of becoming a secretary, but had saved enough from summer jobs to return to ballet training. She started daily classes at the Rosemary Deveson School of Dance in a studio atop Vancouver's Georgia Hotel. Within seven months she auditioned for the city's summer outdoor Theatre Under the Stars (TUTS) and was accepted into the corps. She appeared, for the first time professionally, at the Malkin Bowl in Stanley Park in the 1945 productions of such musical theatre confectations as *The Vagabond King*, *Red Mill* and *The Fortune Teller*. It was a baptism by fire that Smith later credited with preparing her admirably for the gruelling challenges of life in the fledgling National Ballet of Canada.

Those who believe in the notion of romantic destiny might conclude that Lois Smith was fated to meet David Adams. It was the summer of 1949. Smith was nineteen and already well established as a musical theatre dancer. She'd just come off a lengthy North American tour of *Oklahoma!* and had no inclination to sign on for another summer season with her professional alma mater. In contrast, Winnipeg-born Adams was glad to land a principal contract with TUTS. The tall, handsome dancer, also of British immigrant parents, after rapid success in Gweneth Lloyd and Betty Farrally's Winnipeg Ballet, had spent two years training and dancing professionally in London. Adams's aspiration was to be a classical dancer, but with limited opportunities in Canada he'd settled for a summer with TUTS while mulling his options.

Adams, then twenty, was strolling down a Vancouver street with a group of female TUTS colleagues when he noticed an attractive young woman waving from the other side. It was Smith. She crossed to greet her friends. As Cupid hovered unseen with bow in hand, they introduced to her Adams. Within a year, Smith and Adams were married.

By that time the couple had joined both hands and careers and were in Los Angeles, dancing in the Civic



David Adams and Lois Smith in a National Ballet of Canada rehearsal at St. Lawrence Hall, c. 1952

Light Opera's production of *The Chocolate Soldier*. Soon they were in San Francisco, on tour with *Rose Marie*. Adams, however, was still set on a classical ballet career and believed his young wife had the makings of a true ballerina. He wanted to take her to Britain where he was confident his connections and access to the best teachers held more promise than anything Canada could offer. He may well have been proved correct but two events interceded and derailed the plan: Celia Franca, a lively force in British ballet, arrived in Canada with a view to establishing a truly national classical troupe along the lines of the Sadler's Wells Ballet, and Lois Smith became pregnant.

Franca already knew Adams. They had danced together in London. It was natural for her to recruit him to her cause since he was about the only male dancer

immediately on hand with the technical virtuosity and partnering strength she desperately need. His condition of acceptance was that Franca also hire Smith, sight unseen. Franca agreed. The die was cast. Lois Smith and David Adams became charter members of The National Ballet of Canada at its launch in the fall of 1951 and were soon established as a star couple, "Mr. and Mrs. Ballet."

This did not mean that Smith was instantly transformed into the Swan Queen that by the mid-1950s was dazzling audiences across Canada and on lengthy tours across North America. In a sense, and under Adams's careful tutelage, Smith learned on the job, growing in technical strength and refinement. Even so, her natural poise and authority – the cool counter to Adams's pyrotechnical heat – soon won her a devoted public.

As was required of a leading dancer in what was then a relatively small troupe, Smith was cast in a wide range of roles, from purely classical to dramatic and comedic. Until Franca's official retirement as a ballerina in 1959, she and Smith would alternate in *Giselle* as the tragic title heroine and the unforgiving Queen of the Wilis. They also shared roles in the ballets Franca acquired from her former mentor and colleague, Antony Tudor. But it was Smith who put an unforgettable personal stamp on Caroline in *Lilac Garden*. As Franca wrote in a 1978 quasi-memoir: "Lois Smith as Caroline came nearer in quality to the original – the sensitive and delicate Maude Lloyd – than any other dancer I have seen." The exacting critic Nathan Cohen described Smith's Caroline as "a performance of the most remarkable discipline and muted anguish."

In *Lilac Garden*, Caroline's anguish is fuelled by the fact that she must marry a man she does not love and bid farewell to the man she does. The sunny newspaper reports of Smith and Adams's own marriage



Lois Smith in a National Ballet of Canada rehearsal at St. Lawrence Hall
Photo courtesy of The National Ballet of Canada Archives



Lois Smith in a publicity photo for The National Ballet of Canada

suggested that her personal life carried no hint of Caroline's anguish. A typical publicity photograph shows Adams fiddling with a cine camera – he was an avid amateur filmmaker – while a dutiful Smith tempts him with a plate of home-cooked food.

By the late 1950s, however, all was not as it appeared. Adams, and to an extent Smith too, had grown professionally restless and considered options beyond the National Ballet. More unsettling was Adams's roving eye. When in the summer of 1961 he signed on with the then London Festival Ballet, today's English National Ballet, the move was prompted by a combination of personal and professional motives. Adams and Smith tried to preserve the marriage, but when he severed his final ties with the National Ballet two years later it was effectively over.

Although over time both found comfort in the arms of others, an extraordinary bond remained, occasionally strained but only irrevocably sundered by Adams's death in October 2007. By then he had been living in Alberta for thirty years, had remarried in 1980 and fathered a second daughter. Smith, meanwhile, had moved to British Columbia's Sunshine Coast; but they stayed in close touch, with Adams's second and much younger wife, Meredith, open-heartedly acknowledging Lois and David's deep, enduring friendship.

When Smith left the National Ballet in 1969 she'd not unreasonably hoped to have a continuing role as a teacher, coach and performer in character roles. She particularly aspired to dance Lady Capulet in *Romeo and Juliet*. Instead she was offered a trifling position in the wig department, which she declined in favour of

opening her own ballet school in Toronto. In 1973, she agreed to move her now thriving studio, a loft space at the top of a long dark staircase on Toronto's historic Front Street, to the city's George Brown College (GBC) where two years later it was formally incorporated as the dance division within the performing arts faculty. On his return from England in 1977 and for several years thereafter, she invited Adams to teach at GBC's summer school. In 1986, the couple briefly reunited as dancers in a little ballroom number for a Dance Collection Danse fundraising gala in support of its ENCORE! ENCORE! reconstruction project.

Smith remained head of GBC's dance department until negotiating an early retirement in 1988. She wanted to be closer to her aging mother in Vancouver but, as she also later confided, she had wearied of struggling to maintain serious standards within the college program while under institutional pressure to boost enrolment.

Lois Smith and Earl Kraul in the Canadian Conference of the Arts' presentation of *Orpheus and Eurydice* with the Canadian Opera Company and the Toronto Symphony Orchestra, directed and choreographed by Hanya Holm, O'Keefe Centre, 1962





Lois Smith as the Fairy Godmother in Celia Franca's *Cinderella* (1968)
Photo: Ken Bell, courtesy of The National Ballet of Canada Archives

Smith's almost twenty post-National Ballet years in Toronto were busy ones. Apart from her teaching, she choreographed for opera and television and with mime-artist Rudy Lynn co-founded the Canadian Silent Players in 1973. Six years later, with Earl Kraul, her principal partner at the National Ballet after Adams's departure, she co-founded the Dance Company of Ontario, partly as a performing opportunity for her best professional students. She even returned to dance as an occasional guest of the National Ballet under Alexander Grant's artistic directorship – Carabosse and the Queen in *The Sleeping Beauty* and, with unforgettable brio for



Lois Smith as Carabosse in the National Ballet's production of *The Sleeping Beauty*
Photo courtesy of The National Ballet of Canada Archives

a fifty-two year old, as Giovanina in the company's thirtieth anniversary gala performance of *Napoli*.

So far as her Toronto fans were concerned, much like Adams, Lois Smith effectively dropped from the radar once she resettled elsewhere. Her return to BC, however, was far from an inactive retirement.

In retrospect, close friends note that there were early indications of the Alzheimer's disease that eventually caused her death. She became forgetful and, as happens, Smith was finally lost to those around her. Before she moved into the darkness, though, she had some fifteen years of happy community engagement.

She taught and adjudicated. She attended performances in Vancouver, often staying with her former National Ballet colleague Grant Strate. She joined the board of Ballet BC. She became founding president of the Sunshine Coast Dance Society (SCDS), established to provide inspiration and performance opportunities for dancers in training. In her years as a ballerina, Smith, always prudent in her financial affairs, had often made her own clothes. She enjoyed turning that skill to making costumes for SCDS dancers. She also served for a decade on the board of the Sunshine Coast Festival of Written Arts, profitably took up stained glass work and, as a lively recreation, turned to square dancing.

It was there, while answering the caller's cues, that she met Bruce Buvyer, in retirement an avid yachtsman. He soon became a close friend, the partner who lovingly cared for Smith in her final years.

Lois Smith was cherished to the very end. For those fortunate enough to have seen her dance, Smith will remain in their minds as the ultimate ballerina, serene and pure. As long as people care about their cultural heritage, she will retain a special place in the history of Canadian dance. As Karen Kain succinctly puts it: "Lois truly made an enduring mark."

Michael Crabb has been writing about dance for almost forty years. He is currently dance critic for *The Toronto Star* and a regular contributor to *The Dancing Times* (UK), *Dance*, *Pointe* and *Dance Teacher* magazines (USA) and Canada's *Dance International*. In 2002, *Dance Collection Danse* published his book, *An Instinct for Success: Arnold Spohr and the Royal Winnipeg Ballet*.



Stained-glass window designed and built by Lois Smith

Thank You Lois

In Memory of Lois Smith and Her Pioneering Contribution to Canadian Ballet

Our beloved Lois Smith, The National Ballet of Canada's first prima ballerina, died in January 2011. Following her passing, DCD became the recipient of a substantial bequest for which we will be forever grateful. Her generous financial gift will help us to enhance the legacy of the art form she loved.



Lois Smith in *Giselle*, 1952
Photo: Gene Draper,
courtesy of The National
Ballet of Canada Archives

Over many years, Lois also donated her personal archives to Dance Collection Danse. These materials reflect her life before, during and after her esteemed stage career. DCD is proud to house Lois's photographs, awards, clippings, writings, videos, costumes, memorabilia and artworks. As we digitize this treasure trove, we will share with the public – through articles, exhibits and access to the materials – this remarkable collection representing an extraordinary life in dance.

Lois's bequest will help DCD to further our dream of a new facility where she will be prominently and deservedly acknowledged – in perpetuity. Following Lois's example, we invite the dance community and dance lovers to invest in the future and support the legacy of the art form by ensuring that theatrical dance history is preserved for the benefit of future generations.

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RENEGADE BODIES

Canadian Dance in the 1970s

EDITORS: ALLANA C. LINDGREN AND KAIJA PEPPER

Comprising 15 essays by Canadian writers and scholars, *Renegade Bodies* is a book that embraces lively discussion about artistic and cultural shifts along with the social and political transformations of the 1970s. How were dance and its practitioners affected by the vigorous and varying beliefs, the principles and key societal trends of the times?

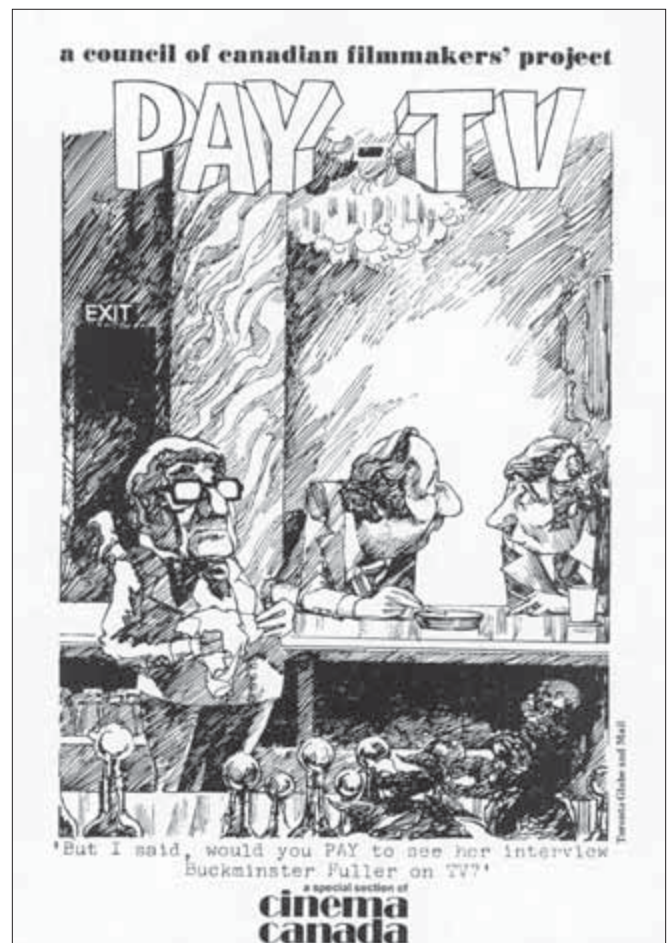
Published by Dance Collection Danse in early 2012

Excerpt

LAUNCHING THE GLOBAL VILLAGE

BY SUSAN CREAM

It's hard to remember what the world was like when pay television first appeared on the horizon in 1976. That was the year Montreal hosted the Summer Olympics, and the Parti Québécois was elected for the first time. The experimental studio theatre 15 Dance Lab was two years old; Maggie was still with Pierre; and the photocopier (noisy, orange-lidded Xerox machines) was the hot new technology transforming the inner workings of business, education and the media. On television *The Muppets* was all the rage; Adrienne Clarkson had just made the leap to *The Fifth Estate* from daytime TV; Jan Tennant had crashed the gender bar in TV network news only the year before when she was the first woman to anchor *The National* on the CBC. To be sure, there were portents of the future we now live with every day. Toronto's upstart CITY-TV with its edgy, urban approach to current affairs (and the infamous Baby Blue movies) was one. The arrival in the newsroom of computers and ENG – electronic news gathering, which eliminated the need for processing as with film – were two more. But the CBC, CTV and (newly licensed) Global TV still ruled Canadian airwaves in 1976, competing for audiences with the usual plethora of American sitcoms and talk shows packed with ads.



In the world of broadcasting and telecommunications, cable television was the big news. A technology that was proving to be immensely profitable, it nevertheless lacked the lustre of broadcast television because it was all medium and no message. Like a telephone line, it simply delivered content provided by others. For that reason, cable executives were unkindly referred to as parking lot attendants, though they themselves argued cable was merely a technical extension of existing broadcast signals otherwise being distributed by microwave. The industry, of course, was trying to avoid Canadian content rules, but in 1968 cable was folded into the broadcasting system and subsequently licensed by the CRTC (the Canadian Radio-television and Telecommunications Commission) like any television network or radio station and subject to the Broadcasting Act. Though by no means universally available, cable had a “penetration rate” of 2.7 million households by 1976, and Canada was on its way to being the most cabled country in the world.

All of this had implications. Cable implied the possibility of a multi-channel universe, for instance, and hinted darkly at the dispensability of broadcasters. The new electronic medium of video implied the possibility of cheap, independent production, and a challenge to the program monopoly of the CBC and the National Film Board of Canada. With satellites blurring borders and erasing time, television, and all the media connected to it, seemed poised for dramatic change. And Canada seemed ready, in more ways than one, to meet the challenge. It was Marshall McLuhan, after all, who gave the phenomenon, the Global Village, its name.

At the other end of the technological continuum, down where coaxial cable meets content, visual artists were busy developing something called video art, having seized the electronic medium and put it to service creating new art forms. It was a moment when the Canadian documentary tradition fused with a radically new visual sensibility and a liberating new technology, producing award-winning video artists such as Toronto’s Lisa Steele and Vancouver’s Paul Wong. Artist-run galleries, including A Space in Toronto, and the Western Front and Video Inn in Vancouver, appeared in inner-city back streets and began organizing events and collaborations, acquiring video equipment and setting up editing suites for members’ use. A Space, as symbolized by the indomitable Marien Lewis, the video/performance artist who ran the place and did the grant applications for years, was a multidisciplinary centre for all sorts of debates, a crossroads for artists experimenting with different media, who shared the same commitments. Poets and musicians were involved, as well as dancers, writers and artists working with video and

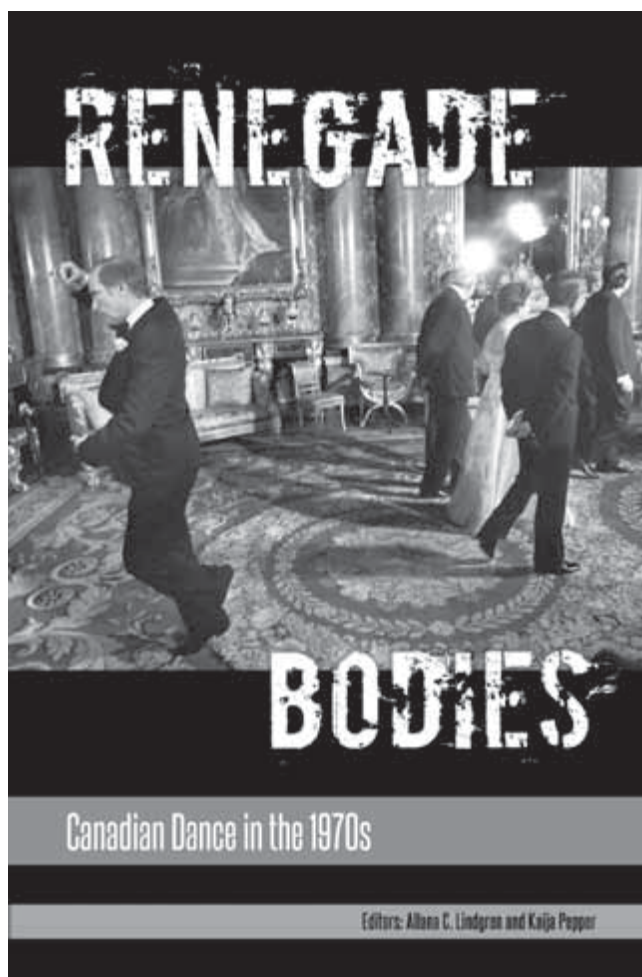


Page from Video Guide

its cohort, performance art. It was a stage for all sorts of related activities, including a gutsy newsletter of artist-written arts criticism called *Proof Only* (later *Only Paper Today*). This scene was repeated all over the country.

As artists set out to explore the possibilities of digital technology, they also diversified. They had already started setting up facilities for themselves, banding together to start their own production companies, and the number of independent magazines and record companies, new music, dance and film collectives, indie theatres, co-op galleries and bookstores grew. It was an era of unprecedented cultural expansion both at the official level within the arts (the established performing arts companies, public art galleries and publishing houses), and at street level, where an unruly artistic underground was busy building an alternative network of Canadian culture that remains in place today.

As the ideals of the sixties sank in and spread to the mainstream, grassroots movements organized for the long haul, nowhere more visibly than in the arts. The National Question, which informed much of the political debate at the time, was a rallying cry for artists all over the country. They saw the erosion of Canadian control



in business and industry playing out in the cultural field. Walter Gordon's famed Royal Commission report on the Canadian economy had signalled a sea-change in Canadian politics on the subject of ownership and sovereignty in the sixties, exemplified by the emergence of a militant nationalist wing within the NDP known as the Waffle. In the arts, the pressure built for policies supporting the development of Canadian-owned cultural industries in the interest of ensuring original Canadian production. During this period, partly because of artists' activism, the well-established principle of public enterprise and regulation in broadcasting (as exemplified by the CBC and the CRTC) was extended to Canadian filmmaking, recording and publishing. The branch-plant economy offered a simple choice when it came to culture in those days as it rationalized Canada as an extension of the United States' market, easily supplied from south of the border. Local production was not part of the plan. Operated on the commercial model, Canadian culture made no economic sense. So it boiled down to the choice between "the State or the United States."

Artists noticed something else. Well-endowed professional theatre companies, symphony orchestras, ballet and opera companies, and public art galleries in all parts of the country very rarely, if ever, performed or exhibited

anything Canadian. The situation was pervasive, and it was not the result of a colonized economy so much as a colonial mentality. Taking this on was a radical move and it necessitated collective action. There were high-definition moments, for sure. Like the ceremony in 1970 at Grossman's Tavern in Toronto anointing poet Milton Acorn (who had just published his first major collection, *I've Tasted My Blood*) "the People's Poet" after he was passed over for the Governor General's award in favour of an American teaching at the University of British Columbia. And demonstrations at the Art Gallery of Ontario in 1972 protesting the hiring of an American chief curator, when Acorn and photographer Michel Lambeth (dressed as Uncle Sam) chained themselves to office furniture. However, the long-lasting radical change was in artists themselves, in their determination to by-pass the branch plants and the old guard, to find a home-grown audience for Canadian art.

Susan Crean is a Toronto-based writer and cultural critic whose book *The Laughing One – A Journey to Emily Carr* was nominated for the Governor General's Literary Award in 2001. Her first book, *Who's Afraid of Canadian Culture?* (1976), chronicles the early days of the nationalist movement in the arts. A pioneer of literary nonfiction, she was the first Maclean-Hunter Chair in Creative Non-fiction at the University of British Columbia in 1989/90. Her current project can be found at www.whatistoronto.ca.

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Photo: Lawrence and Miriam Adams in Miriam's *Watch Me Dance You Bastards*

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