

FOOTNOTES

WINTER 02

VictoriaDanceSeries.com

BY FASTRAC



Photos by David Cooper; (top) Andrea Keard, Susan Elliott, Kathleen McDonagh

PLEASE NOTE:
LOLA Dance's
Voljo is at the
McPHERSON
PLAYHOUSE

Going for the Bigger Picture

By Kaija Pepper

During a talkback session after a performance at Scotiabank Dance Centre in Vancouver, a man in the audience asked the choreographer if she was familiar with a particular mathematical formula. It turned out she had used this formula in constructing the piece we had just seen, and this fellow had recognized it. I was impressed, not having had a single mathematical thought myself during the show.

That's dance for you. For each of us sitting in the dark, something unique is happening: good dance speaks to our innermost being. We each have a lifetime of experiences which make up who we are, and thus the subjective experience of dance is quite natural and, indeed, quite wonderful. It's what leads to those heated arguments following many performances, the ones in the car driving home, or while waiting for the bus, when one person declares this and the other swears by that.

The certainty of some experiences of dance can be overwhelming. A few years ago, I was a group leader for audience discussions following short improvisations. In my groups, there was always one or two participants who would attach detailed narratives to the dance we had just watched. They saw A and it meant B and it led to C which caused D.

This usually meant they "read" the relationship between dancers in a literal way, so that John lifting Mary was understood as a man and a woman in some kind of relationship. Dancers and ex-dancers often read dance technically: as John and Mary performing a series of jetés, at which they will either be impressed by the performers' strength and technical perfection, or not. Despite the fact that we are watching one or more human beings on stage who are people just like us, only able to do such unusual physical things, a more abstract understanding can also be part of our viewing. In this other reading, we leave behind our tendency to create story and/or concentrate on technique to see what else might be discovered. Through de-personalising the dance, we gain a little distance and the bigger picture, where

New at Footnotes

In an attempt to make our newsletters more informative and with the objective of increasing your appreciation of dance in all its forms, the Victoria Dance Series, this issue begins the practice of commissioning feature articles from professional dance journalists. Executive Producer Stephen White recently approached Kaija Pepper, and asked her to contribute a piece on appreciating contemporary dance (in general terms) and LOLA Dance's *Volio* (in specific terms).

Kaija Pepper is a freelance writer, editor and lecturer who contributes to the *Globe and Mail*, the *Vancouver Courier*, *Dance Magazine* and *Dance International*. Her essay on Lola MacLaughlin, "Working the Idea, Revealing the Moment," is published in *The Responsive Body: A Language of Contemporary Dance* (Banff Centre Press, 2002). Kaija's first book, *Theatrical Dance in Vancouver: 1880s – 1920s*, was an Honourable Mention in the 2000 City of Vancouver Book Awards. Her second book, *The Dance Teacher: A Biography of Kay Armstrong*, was published by Dance Collection Dance in 2001.

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Bigger Picture dancing bodies are creative forces in time and space, opens up.

Some dance lends itself more to opening up meaningful abstraction than others, of course. An inspired performance of *Swan Lake* with Evelyn Hart can be a fertile meditation on, say, the nature of dance and music (just how does she become the music, anyway?), while a lacklustre one offers little beyond the basic story. One contemporary choreographer whose works are always a rich playground is Lola MacLaughlin. I saw her latest work, *Volio*, in rehearsal last June just before the company left for its premiere in Ottawa at the Canada Dance Festival. *Volio's* meticulousness in terms of details of staging and movement, set next to its enormous forces of energy, provides all kinds of inspiration for an avid dancewatcher.

The energy created by the three performers—Susan Elliott, Andrea Keevil and Kathleen McDonagh—is unusual in dance terms. Besides movement in space—up and down, forward and back—values evident only over time enter in, as repetition is taken to an extreme. Some movement develops through its own momentum, gradually picking up speed; alternatively, movement will slow down, or stop, as if the force driving it has suddenly disappeared.

This being Lola MacLaughlin, there is more to *Volio* than choreographic exercises. *Volio*, a word taken from a universal language invented by linguist Otto Jespersen, means "wanting something" and indeed "wanting" is at the heart of this work. It's there in the way the dancers reach up for something – over and over and over again. In my experience of *Volio*, reaching was the overwhelming image.

Here's where that abstract reading becomes infused with the complexity of human life; here's where the dance becomes saturated with meaning that transcends technique. The abstract force of repetition becomes more than a mere device as the choreography reveals a dark compulsion, filled with an irresistible desire for something—an addiction to love, or power, or beauty. Each one of us can fill in the blank here. Whatever "wanting" means to the choreographer comes up against what "wanting" means to the individuals having their own experience of the work in the safe, dark space of the theatre.

There's plenty of fodder for discussion on the way home. "Dark compulsion"? Why dark? And what about that long strip of projected sky, and the tall ladder leading up to it? Where might we imagine the dance is taking place....

Help us spread the word

Tucked into this newsletter is a coupon offering **2 for 1 tickets** to friends of our subscribers. As a subscriber, you have taken the leap and joined us for an extraordinary year of contemporary and classical dance, because you understand and appreciate dance in all its forms. But with the *Times Colonist* on strike, we need your help in getting the word out. We are asking that you invite two friends to join you at LOLA Dance, and are providing you with a 2 for 1 coupon to give your friends. When your friends buy one ticket at either \$36 or \$26 they'll receive a second one for free.

We certainly appreciate your support and thank you in advance for helping us reach a broader audience. If you need more coupons, please call 595-1829.

Who is LOLA Dance?

Choreographer/Artistic Director

Prior to a career in dance, **Lola MacLaughlin** was a student of biology and psychology, and did a stint as a singer with a German rock band. MacLaughlin graduated from dance studies at Simon Fraser University and continued her training in New York, Toronto and Vancouver. Seminally influenced by studies at the Freie Universitat in Berlin, the punk movement of the early 1980s and the German Ausdruckstanz, MacLaughlin's first works were performed by EDAM, the radical Vancouver performance collective which she co-founded in 1983. Since 1989, she has been the artistic director of her own company. The diverse body of work that she has developed since then has been recognized through The Banff Centre's Clifford E. Lee Award and The Canada Council's Jacqueline Lemieux Prize, along with numerous commissions. As well as touring nationally, her work has been seen at the Canada Dance Festival and Festival International de Nouvelle Danse.

Dancers

Susan Elliott is a Vancouver-based dance artist who has been a member of the professional dance community since 1989. She has worked as an interpreter of choreography, an improviser, a choreographer and a teacher, performing nationally and internationally. In 2000 Susan became the first dance artist in residence at the Vancouver East Cultural Centre. Recently she has performed with LOLA Dance, The Holy Body Tattoo and in a solo by Setsuko Yamada in the Canadian and Japanese tours of CJ8, a Canadian/Japanese exchange. Susan creates her own work through her company Anatomica, and recently created a new duet for herself and Vancouver dance artist Ziyian Kwan, that premiered at the Canada Dance Festival 2002.

After training in ballet from a young age, **Andrea Keevil** studied contemporary dance at Simon Fraser University. After graduating with a BFA, she went on to work with Judith Garay and Naomi Lefebvre. Since then Andrea has completed the Ballet British Columbia Mentor Program and has enjoyed working with Vancouver choreographers Cornelius Fischer-Credo, Joe Laughlin and Daniel Lauzon.

Kathleen McDonagh has performed in the works of several Vancouver choreographers. She was an EDAM company member for 5 years, and since 1990 has worked in many productions with Dancecorps and DanStabat in addition to performances with LOLA Dance, Frozen Eye, battery opera, The Holy Body Tattoo, Deborah Dunn, Olivia Thorvaldson and

most recently in her own work. She also teaches contact improvisation and the Gyrotonic method.

Designers/Composers

Andreas Kahre is an interdisciplinary artist, designer and musician. He works with images, sounds, objects and text in many different configurations, and is a regular collaborator with many Vancouver theatre and dance companies, including Rumble, Pi, Touchstone, Radix and Lola Dance. He has been nominated for thirteen Jessie Richardson Awards. Recent and current projects include *x,y, the soldier's tale* with Talking Pictures, *Burning Vision* with Rumble Theatre, *The IKEA Plays* created with Radix Theatre, and *The Linear Animal*, a prototype performance for digital paper theatre. Andreas designed the set and images for *Four Solos/Four Cities* and for *fuse*.



Originally from Edinburgh, Scotland, **James Proudfoot** has been living in Vancouver for ten years. For the past eight years he has been resident Technical Director of the Firehall Arts Centre. During this time, he has contributed lighting designs for full-length works for The Holy Body Tattoo, Frozen Eye, Kokoro Dance, battery opera, Alvin Erasga Tolentino, DanStaBat and Mortal Coil among others. James has been Lighting Director for the Dancing on The Edge festival since 1999 and in the course of 24 presentations of

the showcase dance series 12 Minutes Max, he has contributed lighting design / direction for in excess of one hundred locally produced short works. James designed the lighting for LOLA Dance's *fuse*.

Owen Belton graduated from Simon Fraser University in October, 1993 with a degree in Fine and Performing Arts (Concentration Music). His studies included music composition, performance, electronic music, computer music composition, gamelan music as well as dance and film. He uses acoustic and electronic instruments as well as computer processing such as granular synthesis to alter sounds, often blending different elements to unique effect. In addition to writing music for dance and film, Owen has produced and recorded several pop albums and has a digital home studio for recording compositions, sound editing and mastering.

After a failed attempt to enter the National Ballet School at age ten, costume designer **Heather Young** veered into the world of fashion. Schooled in Montreal and living in Vancouver, she has been designing her women's label Dust as well as collaborating with various choreographers.

A Conversation with Lola MacLaughlin



Lola MacLaughlin (photo by David Cooper)

Recently, the Victoria Dance Series asked Lola MacLaughlin to answer a series of questions about *Volio* and how she sees this new work fitting with her total body of work to date. Here's what she had to say:

Stephen White: When did you first start dancing as a youth?

Lola MacLaughlin: I started dancing in grade two. Where I grew up in the South Okanagan, we had a dancing teacher, Buddy Taft, who taught once a week. Those classes were the highlight of my growing up and I lived for the end-of-year performances.

SW: What is it that attracted you to dance?

LM: The opportunity to express myself with my body, I guess, and the challenge of getting my body to do what I wanted it to. I was also very active in theatre as a child but for some reason, dancing was my true love. Perhaps it was because movement is so exhilarating. And I have always loved getting to put on a performance. Growing up, I was the kid who organized a parade or put on a play with all of the neighbourhood kids.

SW: In much of your biographical information, there are statements about how your work is influenced and informed by German Expressionism. Tell me a bit about German Expressionism - what it is and how it has affected the work you do.

LM: Expressionism could probably best be characterized as focusing on the emotional experience and the inner life. My dance training at Simon Fraser University was mostly based on the American Modern Dance scene, which has an emphasis on form, as exemplified by such artists as Merce Cunningham. When I had completed that training, I found myself drawn to the early German Dance which emphasizes the combination of form with content, as exemplified by early Ausdruckstanz artists such as Dora Hoyer and Mary Wigman. They strove to have the content embodied in the form and to express the emotions and the inner life. So, I would have to say that much of my work is involved with finding the motivation for the movement and trying to express ideas of the inner life and the emotional realm - poetic meanings in an abstract realm.

I would also have to say that a current interest of mine

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that is being developed in 'Volio' is on incorporating a minimalist aesthetic in dance. In music, this would be described (Oxford Dictionary) as "characterized by the repetition of short phrases which change very gradually as the music proceeds". Phillip Glass would be the most famous proponent of minimalist music. So, I am working at having the movement say something over a longer formal time period, to have the expression arise out of the repetition of the movements.

While I was at University, I was also introduced to another German idea that I have carried forward into my work, that of the 'gesamstkunstwerk' or total art work, where the movement, the sets, costumes and lighting all work together to express the concepts of the work. This is something that I always try to employ in my dance pieces. The visual design is very important in my work, creating an environment or world in which the dance can live.

SW: In creating *Volio*, what came first - the ideas in the piece, or the music?

LM: I would have to say, that in the creation of *Volio*, the ideas and the music developed in tandem. For this work, we had someone who did music research for us and he would bring many CDs for me to listen to. We would try them all out and certain ones had resonance with what we were doing in the studio.

SW: How did you approach the piece in the development? Did you build it in the studio through improvisation? Did you come in with a series of images that you built on?

LM: *Volio* began with a one-on-one creation period with each of the three dancers. I went into the studio with each of them for one week and we created movement very intensely for the whole week and videotaped everything. That movement material became the bedrock for the solos for each of them and for the whole piece, in fact. We then had a two-week creation residency in the theatre in Montreal where the movement began to be developed and themes emerged. Some of the ideas came first and some grew out of the movement material and how it was taking shape. The visual ideas for the piece developed out of collaboration with designer Andreas Kahre. This is the third work that we have done together.

SW: What are you proudest of in *Volio*?

LM: One of the things that I really like about *Volio* is the way that the three dancers are each so different from one another, how their characters are developed through the choreography to express different things. For instance, Kathleen McDonough has a particular stature and height that is very noble and dignified. And I am very proud of their dancing and expression as dancers.

SW: Can you speak about your work as a choreographer on a continuum—where the works fit and what the accumulation of the work looks like to you?

LM: I have been choreographing for almost 20 years, so that has been a long and winding journey. For many years I was a solo dancer, and toured performing my own work. With the creation of a work entitled *Four Solos/Four Cities*, a few years ago, which is an evocation of the essential character of four different European cities, I felt that the work that I had done as a solo dancer finally came full circle, embodied by the four wonderful dancers in this work. *Four Solos/Four Cities* was also a coming together for me of the expressionist roots of my work and the 'gesamtkunstwerk' that I spoke about above. Last year, I created a work, *fuse*, which was presented in Vancouver and then invited to the Festival International de Nouvelle Danse in Montreal. *fuse* was a fairly radical departure for me into the realm of minimalism. It was created out of 50 small movements taken from ordinary life. *fuse* was a very risky work for me to make and challenging for the audience, although it did incorporate a good deal of humor. In moving into the world of *Volio*, I am trying to amalgamate all of the above into a new direction. I am still interested in experimenting with the vocabulary of the movement, trying to move away from movement that I learned in dancing class or what is considered traditional modern dance vocabulary. I think that it is important for a choreographer to always be looking for what is growth for themselves and to push the boundaries for their audience.

SW: What is it you hope the audience will leave with/carry with them after seeing *Volio*?

LM: For me, I would be very happy if the audience had a chance to be transported to another world through out the duration of *Volio*. The world of *Volio* deals with yearning and aspiration. Everyone has experienced that. We employ several props and set pieces in the work that help to direct our attention toward this experience of wanting. For instance, a slowly changing video image of clouds, like a high window suggests the universe of unlimited potential and possibilities. Leading up to this window, there is a library ladder, representing our desire to know, our quest for understanding that builds upon the past and, through accumulation, brings us to the heights of awareness.

Throughout *Volio* there are implications of our desire to obsessively refine and groom the wild forces, (to bring them under our control and thereby control our environment or context) of nature in order to bring them under our influence. Nature is symbolized in the work by a pair of topiary trees.

Ideally, if the audience were to be nudged into the realm of feeling, or to experience the kinetic and emotional world of the dance, to be stimulated to remember something from the past or to have their intellect or curiosity piqued, or to take a moment of enjoyment from the beauty of the world that we work to create, that would be a great reward for me and for the dancers.

Conversational Dance

Friday, November 1, 2002 at 7:00 pm
Pacific Dance Centre: 2580 Maynard St., Victoria
\$15/ Phone 595-1829 to reserve

What to increase your fluency in dance? **Marquita Lester**, Director of Ballet British Columbia's Mentor Program, and two advanced students from Arts Umbrella in Vancouver, will introduce you to the history, terminology and basics of classical ballet. The demonstration will include the principles and reasons for turn-out; the positions of the body; movements in ballet; specifics of pointe work and more. A question and answer period will be included. This informal session is designed to increase your appreciation and understanding of dance.

Pre-show Chat with Lola MacLaughlin

Join us at 7:20 pm, prior to the performance both evenings, in the Upper Lobby of the McPherson Playhouse to enjoy a pre-show conversation with Lola MacLaughlin. Ms. MacLaughlin will answer your questions as well as provide background on the development of *Volio*.

PLEASE NOTE:
**LOLA Dance's *Volio* is at the
McPHERSON PLAYHOUSE
(not the Royal Theatre)**

DANCE SERIES NEWS

By **Stephen White**

Recently I attended my first annual meeting of CanDance Network, an association of dance presenters from across the country. There are about 25 of us from coast to coast who belong to this organization. We met in Toronto to discuss issues of common interest and to build ways of working together in years to come. CanDance recently created a commissioning program that allows for presenters across the country to pool resources to commission a new work by a Canadian dance artist on an annual basis. The new piece then travels across the country. *Volio*, by LOLA Dance is the first project of this new initiative. Although, the Victoria Dance Series is not one of the original participants, we are presenting the piece in our current season.

While I was in Toronto, I had a chance to meet with Jay Rankin, General Manager of Toronto Dance Theatre. Last year, TDT brought *Severe Clear* to the Royal Theatre. Jay gave me a tour of Toronto Dance Theatre's home on Winchester Street in Toronto's Cabbage Town. TDT operates a pre-professional contemporary dance school as well as the company under the direction of Christopher House. The Victoria Dance Series is currently in conversation with TDT about presenting Mr. House's new work in our 2004/05 season.

The operation is housed in a converted church that has several studios and a small performance space that is widely used by Toronto's contemporary dance community. It was a beehive of activity while I was there. Classes were in session, and the company was in rehearsal as it embarks on a season that will tour Christopher's *Persephone's Lunch* through Quebec. I was privileged to see this wryly ironic piece at the

Canada Dance Festival in Ottawa in June of this year and was taken with its humour and fresh perception. The small company was dancing exceedingly well.

In addition, TDT has commissioned two new works from Peter Chin and Matjash Mrozewski that will premier this fall. Many of you will recall Mrozewski's *A Delicate Battle* that was part of the mixed program presented by the National Ballet of Canada at the Royal Theatre in September 2001—a beautifully textured piece (complete with falling, swirling snow) that focused on the tensions in the male/female relationship.

La La La Human Steps Premiers in Prague

Our March presentation of a new work by Montreal's celebrated La La La Human Steps opens this month in Prague, embarking on a tour through Europe before arriving in Victoria in March 2003. The Victoria Dance Series is very fortunate to have a man on the ground in Prague, Ross Crockford. Many of you may remember that Ross is the former editor of *Monday Magazine* in Victoria. Since leaving Monday, Ross has taken up work as a freelance journalist and has had a variety of articles published in numerous publications across Canada and in the USA.

Ross and his partner (currently on sabbatical from the University of Victoria) are living in Prague this fall and the Dance Series has commissioned a feature to run in our next publication of Footnotes that will detail Ross' impressions of the new piece. Look forward to that piece in early February 2003.