

FOOTNOTES

FALL 03

VictoriaDanceSeries.com

BY FASTRAC

Bily Marchewski in *Spektor*. Photo by Jamie Griffiths

bodies moving forward, backward, sideways, up, down... their movement in space is multidirectional, and there will be many different movements happening at the same time. Even in a solo, an arm might be up, a leg back, the eyes looking left and so on.

Yet the expression in dance can be so clear. At its most inspired, dance is logical, emotional, inevitable.

Still, choreographers are drawn to add words to their work. In some cases, they want to say something particular and only words will make sure the audience gets the meaning clearly, so they add a vocal score or have dancers speak a bit of text. Words can also be used in a more substantial dramatic narrative to create characters and spe-

WHEN DANCE TALKS, TOO

By Kaija Pepper

Sometimes, as a purist in love with the possibilities inherent in dance itself, I wonder what makes a choreographer feel the need to use words as well as movement. And sometimes, as a writer addicted to exploring dance through words, I wonder if I've set myself a crazy task. The processes of writing and dancing are so different!

What you see and experience during a dance performance cannot be put literally into words. As I write—as you read—we move forward one word at a time, only going backwards to check on something or to rewrite/reread a difficult passage. Hardly a description of dancing! There, on stage, we see many

cific situations, so the performers are not just dancers moving about in abstract time and space.

In other cases, words are used more abstractly, like poetry. A word or a few words add an accent to a movement, or a suggestion that layers that movement with another thought. Or the words run on and on, a flow of vowels and consonants as musical as the movement.

A dance set to an actual song can be overkill, if it interprets the lyrics literally. The dance becomes merely a way of expressing the feelings the song evokes, and so is really unnecessary—we already have the song.

Billy Marchewski in *Spektator*. Photo by Jamie Griffiths.



WHEN DANCE TALKS, TOO battery opera is a Vancouver-based dance company fond of using words in an intriguing variety of ways. Artistic directors Lee Su-Feh and David McIntosh state in their publicity that the company was founded “based on the belief that the most exciting art is to be found in the intersections of form and tradition.” One of the many lessons of cultural diversity has been to see the worth of just that kind of creative boundary crossing, which Malaysian-born Lee and Kentucky-born McIntosh are well placed to explore in their artistic partnership (they’re life partners as well). Each contributes their unique cultural background and creative strengths to their collaborations: Lee’s traditional Malaysian dance, modern dance and ballet training are put into the pot along with art school-trained McIntosh’s facility with words. Martial arts training, which underlies their work, is something they have in common.

One of their most popular collaborations, *Spektator*, combines dance and words in an unusual evening that takes place in the round. That’s because it’s set in a boxing ring. McIntosh plays the role of Referee, singing and shouting as he takes us through the evening. Lee is the Deity of the Occasion, whose martial arts-inspired movement adds a more abstract level to the work. The cast includes four dancers, a musician and a Commentator.

So is it still dance? When *Spektator* premiered in Vancouver in 2001, at least one theatre critic weighed in with her thoughts. She described it as being “dance, ritual, drama and flights of fancy beyond belief...” A dance critic called it “an event”; another said it was “dance-theatre.” They’re all fair descriptions. Certainly, dance is at the core of the work, and the quartet of dancers is central.

Interdisciplinary work like *Spektator* tends to attract a wider audience than much pure dance, and that, of course, can only be a good thing. Whatever the mix—and besides combining words with dance, all kinds of technology is commonly included, most often video—it is the dance I look at first. How does it stand up to the other elements? What does it contribute that makes it necessary to the work?

In the long run, though, the form we are most drawn to, whether dance or drama or music, is only a container for meaning, and an artist must shape their work as the subject matter demands. What is fascinating is how crucial dance is to many interdisciplinary projects. It’s the dance that makes meaning fly.

Meet the battery opera Company

Susan Elliott, Dancer, was born and raised on the west coast of Canada. Elliott is a Vancouver-based dancer, choreographer, improviser and teacher. Since 1988, Elliott has been active in the Canadian dance milieu, performing in over 60 original works by both national and international choreographers. She is the artistic director of Anatomica, dance artist in residence at Vancouver East Cultural Centre, first recipient of The Dance Centre’s Isadora Award and a member of two Canadian dance collectives, Platform 33 and Quorum. Elliott has danced for battery opera since the mid 1990s and is happy to be back in this touring production of *Spektator*.

KT Shores, Dancer, began her training with the Montgomery Ballet and went on to study modern dance and literature at the University of Alabama. She has also studied with Vancouver’s EDAM, Julia Sasso, North Carolina School of the Arts, American Ballet Theater, and her choreography and films have been featured at University of Alabama’s Guerrilla Theater, and in Vancouver at the Roundhouse, the Sugar Refinery and Video Inn. Shores is a graduate of MainDance and is happy to be

The Victoria Dance Series is a non-profit organization dedicated to dance presentation and education. Our mission is to enhance the appreciation of dance in the Capital Region by presenting and developing professional dance and engaging the community in outreach programs.

The Victoria Dance Series is governed by a Board of Directors that includes:

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More information at: www.victoriadanceseries.com

Footnotes is prepared by Executive Producer Stephen White. We invite your comments and feedback.

If you would like to help us save on postage and printing by receiving your newsletter via ecologically friendly email (confidentiality ensured) please let us know!

working with battery opera again after her debut with the company earlier this summer in Croatia.

Billy Marchenski, Dancer, is a graduate of the Simon Fraser University theatre program. He was last seen in Screaming Flea's *This Room Is Moving* at Video-In. Other obsessions of the year included *SexMachine* with Radix Theatre and battery opera's newest work, *Cyclops*. Marchenski is always excited to reinvest in the world of *Spektator* and plumb its depths.

DD Kugler, Dramaturge, is a freelance director/dramaturge and, since 1998, an Associate Professor in the Theatre Area of the School for the Contemporary Arts, at Simon Fraser University, where he teaches directing, dramaturgy, play-making and theatre history. During five seasons as Artistic Director of Edmonton's Northern Light Theatre, and eight seasons as Production Dramaturge with Toronto's Necessary Angel Theatre, Kugler primarily developed and directed new work by Canadian playwrights. Since moving to Vancouver, Kugler has collaborated as dramaturge with battery opera on their productions of *Domestik*, *Reptile Diva*, *Spektator* and *Cyclops*.

Ron Stewart, Dancer, has been a dancer for 18 years and his career has taken many forms, starting in Montréal where he trained and worked with Sonia Vartanian's company Les Ballets Classique de Montréal. He moved to Vancouver in 1990. His training continued primarily through workshops with educators Peggy Baker, Peter Bingham, Jennifer Mascall, Risa Steinberg, Linda Putnum and Christopher House. After performing with Toronto Dance Theatre from 1994 – 98 Stewart returned to Vancouver and continued to work locally with Lola McLaughlin, battery opera, Mascall Dance and EDAM, and nationally with the likes of Robin Poitras, Bill Coleman, Julia Sasso, Tom Stroud and David Earle. For the 2003 – 04 season Ron is Guest Artistic Director of Mascall Dance.

James Proudfoot, Lighting Designer. Originally from Edinburgh, Proudfoot has been living in Vancouver for 10 years. For the past seven years he has been resident Technical Director of the Firehall Arts Centre. During this time, James has contributed lighting designs for full length works to the Holy Body Tattoo, Frozen Eye, Anatomica, Wen Wei Wang, Kokoro Dance, Alvin Erasga Tolentino, DanStaBat, Lola Dance, Kinesis Dance and Mortal Coil amongst others. With battery opera, Proudfoot has also had the pleasure of designing lighting for *Speck*, *Reptile Diva*, *Spektator* and *Cyclops*.

Max Murphy, Musician, is a Toronto-born/Vancouver-based saxophonist. In his 13-year career, he has played in many ensembles covering a wide range of musical idioms. Having played in clubs throughout Canada and the US, he has also performed in Vancouver on saxophone and flute. As well, he DJs and produces electronica. He has studied with Tom Keenlyside and Graham Ord. His first endeavour with battery opera was with last year's premiere of *Cyclops*, where he played alongside his original mentor Chris Grove, as well as childhood friends and neighbours David McIntosh and Lee Su-Feh.

Paul Ternes, Actor, is a Vancouver-based performer, writer and director with a passionate interest in creative collaboration and the exploration of new forms of theatrical expression. After studying theatre and dance at Simon Fraser University's School for the Contemporary Arts, he went on to work with the Tamahnous Theatre core group, receiving two Jessie nominations for the company's collectively created show, *Wet Dreams* in 1996. He is the co-artistic director of Radix, a critically acclaimed company that specializes in original, interdisciplinary performances in unconventional locations. As a performer he recently toured Croatia with battery opera's *Spektator*, and was last seen as Cassius Sidewinder in boca del lupo's outdoor summer hit *Lagoon of Lost Tales*. He is looking forward to playing the piano as Fred in the westcoast premiere of *Nocturne* (an incomplete and inaccurate account of the love affair between George Sand and Frederic Chopin), followed by an appearance in Cor Departure's *Lady Macbeth – The Secret Life*, as well as another tour of *Spektator* to Montreal.



Jenn Murray and Billy Marchenski in *Spektator*. Photo by Jamie Griffiths

DANCE SERIES NEWS

Interview

*During the course of the summer, I posed a number of questions to David McIntosh and Lee Su-Feh about *Spektator* and their lives and work together as life partners and as artists. What follows is an edited version of their responses to those questions. To read the complete interview, visit our website at www.victoriadanceseries.com. The interview is posted at the bottom of our home page.*

STEPHEN WHITE: Can we start with a basic background on battery opera?

SU-FEH: We started the company in 1995. We came from different backgrounds—I was, and am a contemporary choreographer and dancer influenced by Chinese martial arts and my early exposure to south-east Asian dance, ritual and theatre; while David came from an idiosyncratic background of visual arts, arty video and the art band scene. We started the company based on a vague feeling that despite our very different backgrounds—cultural, historical and artistic—we shared a common aesthetic somewhere. Now, however, I feel like there is less a common aesthetic than a dynamic dialogue and mutual attraction between opposing tensions. This is where the work comes out of.

Until a few years ago, there were two kinds of work coming out of the company: David's work, which was a cross between absurdist cabaret, folk music, punk music, street theatre, and story telling; and Su-Feh's work, which was more easily defined as contemporary dance with Chinese and south-east Asian influences. Although we were always involved in each other's work, only one of us would be considered the primary author.

Recently, however, we have started working together, sharing authorship, as it were. The work comes out of our conversations—the disputes, the agreements, the obsessions, the struggle for dominance of ideas. On the surface, each work can look quite different from another. Our last three works, *Reptile Diva*, *Spektator* and *Cyclops*—are quite different experiences but underlying it all is a belief in the expression of the human body—a body that thinks, feels, sings, speaks and dances.

sw: Where did the inspiration for *Spektator* come from?

LS-F: The first time we saw a cockfight in the Philippines. Prior to this, our images of cockfights were of clandestine small gatherings of men in small villages. In the Philippines we saw huge stadiums that held thousands of people built solely for the purpose of watching two chickens fight to death. The

scale of it was mind-blowing as it was, but the theatre of it was even more amazing. Intricate hand signals, betting, money being folded up and thrown all over the stadium; noise, noise, noise and then silence just before the fight, then immense hysterical noise. What was also interesting was how we were transformed ourselves. When we started watching we watched from an ethical and moral high ground; We are better than this, this is barbaric, we are just here for anthropological reasons etc., etc. Then someone talked us into placing a bet and suddenly, having participated in esoteric hand signals and with money on the line, we were transformed from civilized ethical people into screaming, raving, blood-thirsty maniacs.

The thing that interests us in all art, in all life, is transformation, alchemy. How we can change from civilized creatures into part of a raging mob, how an empty room can become a sacred space, how laughing can turn into crying, thinking into feeling, seeing into participating. It seems to us that stakes play a big role in the mechanism that transforms one thing to another. In *Spektator* we explore these stakes. For the performers, the stakes are increased in that most of the work is improvised, albeit within very tight, highly complex structures; and the outcome of "fights" are decided in the moment of performance. For the audience, the simple fact that they are seated in the round means they are part of the scene: They can be seen by the people across from them and they are watched just as they watch. They are participants, not just voyeurs. They can also place bets and scream and yell.

sw: How did you develop *Spektator* in the rehearsal hall?

LS-F: Between 1999 and 2001 we developed *Spektator* through a series of workshops and "labs" in various cities with various groups of dancers and actors. In each workshop, we would explore a different theme, e.g. how to make a space sacred, how to exercise power over someone else, how to turn from a human being into an animal and vice versa. In the last eight weeks of creation we put together this collection of ideas into a structure that we thought would make sense and tried to develop the ideas further, and came up with *Spektator*.

I try not to come into the studio armed with a bunch of movements to teach to the dancers. A new work gets developed, for me, usually from an image, a word, a sensation, which I take into the studio to improvise, to "fool around" with. In *Spektator's* case, some images were the fluttering of a bird, two opponents facing off. What follows is a chain of reactions and associations that may lead nowhere or may lead to other thoughts, ideas, readings, explorations and then back to the body. Sometimes ideas arrive in surprising ways. When we were working with Benoit Lachambre (a Montreal-



based choreographer whose work we admire) on one of the processes of *Spektator*, I started introducing an exercise to do with touching because I wanted him to understand more intrinsically my martial arts view of space and the invisible partner. This led to us both touching each other for a few hours in the studio and talking about how loaded touch is, the taboos, the ways to touch, not to touch. Then I became obsessed in figuring out the different ways touch could transform, be transformed and this eventually led to quite a bit of material in *Spektator* as well as *Cyclops* [the company's most recent work, premiered in Vancouver, spring 2003].

In this way the dancers contribute to the development of any work. They bring questions and ideas in their bodies and movement, which are the raw material for me to process through my own body. In return, they process our ideas and movement through their bodies and minds.

sw: There is a fair amount of text in *Spektator* that is pulled from a variety of sources. Who wrote the text and what was the process for incorporating the spoken word and the live music into the final piece? What role did your Dramaturge D D Kugler play in helping to develop the piece?

DAVID: I wrote the text, and composed the music with Chris Grove. Both text and music, although in the end produced by me, arise out of conversation/argument/and exchanging of ideas with Su-Feh and the work we create in the rehearsal

process. Usually as we approach a new work, there are some common sources of interest between Su-Feh and me, and also some exclusive and separate interests. These revolve vaguely around the possible world that is the piece we are going to make. Sometimes, for me, these points of interest start with a phrase, or an image, or the juxtaposition of the two in a short scenario. I usually write this stuff out as loose fragments; scenes, songs, dialogue, and then secretly experiment on my own with a few performers in a room where Su-Feh can't see it (it's often ridiculous, puerile, and offensive, and I don't want to use up too soon the suspension of judgment we have deposited in the beginning of a process). Then, with great gut-churning sensations of self-loathing and euphoria, text and music are brought into the rehearsal room and before Su-Feh's eyes, in chunks to see how everything interacts—the performers, the rhythm, the dramatic possibilities, the changes in context on both text and the physical space and

performance/performers. Sometimes we'll have the performers read "parts" or we'll use the text as a soundtrack or an intrusion to some action or scene we have devised or choreography that Su-Feh has created. Then the text or music goes away and develops some more to be reintroduced at a later date, etc... etc.... A lot of material gets discarded as it proves tangential to the core of the world we are creating, or because Su-Feh hates it and I end up agreeing, but I think it still exists as subtext in some ways, as conversations that inform the performers, and the artistic directors as the work develops.

LS-F: Kugler defines his role as a dramaturge—as someone who "interrogates and facilitates the artistic process." Many people assume that he works primarily with text but he interrogates us on all aspects of the work—movement, music, text. Sometimes in the process of this interrogation, we end up cutting stuff. Sometimes he lobbies for material that we want to cut out or just not emphasize.

sw: What do you hope audiences leave with after seeing *Spektator*?

LS-F: A feeling in the bottom of their gut—somewhere between their belly button and their loins—a feeling that they can't describe with language.

DM: Yeah.

Dance Training: Master Classes

Our first master-class of the season with principal dancer, Rex Harrington from the National Ballet of Canada was a huge hit with 30 students participating in the session.

Approaching Dance/Performance through Martial Arts is an intensive dance workshop, led by battery opera's co-artistic directors for Victoria's dance community. The workshop takes place on Sunday, October 19 at Lynda Raino's Dance Studio, from 2 – 5 pm. The cost is \$15, with discounts for Youth Pass holders and subscribers. For more details, read on about battery opera's community residency.

Call 595-1829 for further information or to register.

Reaching Out

Joining in our Community Outreach Program for 2003/04

By Doug Durand, Community Outreach Director

Our Program got off to a great start this season with a full range of activities while the National Ballet of Canada was in town and will continue with battery opera. What is Community Outreach, you ask? Simply put, it is any and all of the activities that we produce in addition to the performances you see on our stages. In fact, this newsletter is one of our outreach activities. So are the Pre-Show Chats for our audiences, Conversational Dance events and Master Classes offered to our dance community.

Victoria Dance Series FREE Youth Pass

Open to any students registered in grade 8 through 12 in a school in Greater Victoria, the Youth Pass allows holders to purchase rush seats to most performances for less than the price of a movie. In addition, holders can get discounts on Master Classes, join our Youth Council (assist us in developing new programs for youth), and enjoy a whole lot more. Go to www.victoriadanceseries.com and register FREE online.

Community Dance Residency: battery opera

14 – 19 October 2003

During the week before battery opera performs at the Conservatory of Music, David McIntosh and Lee Su-Feh, the company's co-artistic directors will conduct a number of dance activities as part of a week-long community dance residency.

McIntosh and Lee will be artists-in-residence at Parkland Secondary School in Sidney. They will teach dance classes based on their own unique approach to dance, through martial arts, as well as extending the students' skills in improvisation and helping them to develop their own choreography. McIntosh came to Parkland SS for a day in mid-September and got to meet and know the dance students and teachers at the school a little bit better. Everyone seems very excited and looking forward to having these award-winning artists at the school.

For more details on these or any of our upcoming Community Outreach projects, got to www.victoriadanceseries.com

Register on-line for your FREE Youth Pass



Lee Su-Feh and David McIntosh of battery opera. Photo by Jamie Griffiths.



We are proud to support the passion, athleticism and the beauty of the Victoria Dance Series, and we thank all of you for the privilege of your business over the years.


Daphy Sitnam
President and CEO Helijet International





Wendy Vernon: photo by Bonnie Light

Meet Wendy Vernon

This season we are introducing you to the members of the Victoria Dance Series Board of Directors. These folks volunteer their time developing policies, providing advice and stewardship to our young organization.

Wendy joined the Dance Series' board almost two years ago.

Growing up in Victoria, dance was a focal point of Wendy's life. She trained extensively with Vivian Briggs, who became her mentor. To extend the range of her experience, she studied at many institutions including the Banff School of Fine Arts. There she discovered her passion for modern dance and has championed the discipline ever since. Performing many times on stage in Victoria, led to six years with Bastion Theatre as a professional actor/dancer/singer. With a change in lifestyle, Wendy found it expedient to direct her energy toward teaching. She became a member of the Royal Academy of Dance, joined Vivian Brigg's staff, eventually taking over the studio, which continued to thrive under her direction. Following her marriage to musician Timothy Vernon she relocated her family to Ontario, where she established four studios working with local Boards of Directors. Thus began her fascination with boards and board development.

In 1990, the Vernon family moved back to Victoria and Wendy returned to the classroom at Camosun College, Banff and the Justice Institute of B.C. to improve her understanding of board dynamics and arts administration. She continues to teach at Pacific Dance Centre.

Currently, Wendy is President of the B.C. Association of Performing Arts Festivals, shepherding the organization through the challenges faced with the demise of the B.C. Festival of the Arts. Never one to rest on her laurels, Wendy is also Director and Past President of the Royal and McPherson Theatres Society, and President of the Greater Victoria DanceWorks Society.

At VDS Wendy has brought her extensive experience of boards and board operations to our organization.

It was *almost* the DEARTH of me!

Who knew? All my life (and let me tell you, that's getting to be a length of time) I thought "dearth" meant a whole bunch. Well, not just a whole bunch, a whole, whole bunch (a plethora in other words).

So in the summer when I began composing the newsletter introducing National Ballet, I used the word "dearth" when I should have used the word "plethora." And there it was—sitting smack dab in the middle of the front page.

I had a bunch of phone calls, and even an e-mail or two—and this is the best, I now have a volunteer who has offered to proofread every newsletter before it goes out. And to top things off, that volunteer is Anne Moon, a committed dance lover who also happens to be a retired journalist. Her career included a stint as entertainment editor of the *Toronto Star*.

So, in the end—except for my embarrassment—only good came out of my "dearth" experience. I found out people were reading the newsletter—and Anne Moon stepped forward to help us all out. Applause to Anne!

Reading Dance

For the past year, I have been subscribing to *The Dance Current*, a magazine from Toronto that is published nine times a year. It keeps me "in the know" about what is happening in dance across the country, offering profiles on important Canadian artists and features that focus on issues a professional dancer confronts in her or his career. I think it is an outstanding publication and encourage you to visit www.thedancecurrent.com to learn more. The October issue includes an interview with choreographer Mark Godden just as he was about to enter the studio to develop *The Magic Flute* with the dancers of the Royal Winnipeg Ballet, a show coming to Victoria in March 2004. Annual subscriptions are \$34.

POST-SHOW Talks

On Friday, October 25, and Saturday, October 26 we invite you to stay after the show for a post-show chat and an opportunity to meet the creators and company. These will replace our typical “pre-show” lobby chats, in part because we have no lobby for this performance!

Kaija Pepper Returns

Exclusive to Footnotes

I enjoyed Kaija's article in Footnotes last year about LOLA Dance so much, that I invited her back to help us understand the role of text in dance performance. Pepper has written two books on Vancouver dance history, published by Dance Collection Danse Press/es, and is presently at work on a biography of Peter Bingham (EDAM Dance). She contributes to local, national and international publications, including the *Globe & Mail* and *Dance Magazine*. Her quarterly column, View from Vancouver, has run in *Dance International* for almost a decade. Kaija contributes a monthly column in the *Courier* newspaper for The Dance Centre, and edited their members' publication, *Dance Central*, from 1995 to 2003. She lectures on dance history and critical thinking at MainDance, Simon Fraser University and The Dance Centre.

Royal Winnipeg Ballet School: National Audition Tour

On October 18, 2003, the Royal Winnipeg Ballet School will be holding auditions at the Canadian College of Performing Arts (1701 Elgin Rd.,) in Victoria. They will offer two Master Classes to interested students from 10 – 13 years and 14 + years. If you know a talented youngster who is interested in studying at this internationally recognized training institution visit www.rwbschool.com or phone 1-87-RWB-SCHOOL for an appointment and more information.

IMPORTANT NOTE:

battery opera's *Spektator* will play in the Victoria Conservatory of Music's gymnasium, not the Alix Goolden Hall. Enter the performance space from Quadra Street at the corner of Quadra and Johnson Street.

This show is **general seating**, so arrive early for best seats. The seating is plastic chairs on risers, and while we have made every attempt to rent the most comfortable plastic chairs available, some of you might wish to bring a cushion.

Warning: *Spektator* contains scenes of nudity; not suitable for children.

A Victoria Condo has been home to Dance Series artists while they work in Victoria. The comfortable and welcoming, one bedroom suite overlooks Beacon Hill Park and is steps from the downtown Inner Harbour, Dallas Road waterfront, and Cook Street Village. Consider A Victoria Condo for your out-of-town friends and family. Find pictures and details at www3.telus.net/victoriacondo or phone 381-5581.

The Victoria Dance series is grateful to have the support of "A Victoria Condo"

