

## FOOTNOTES

MARCH 2005

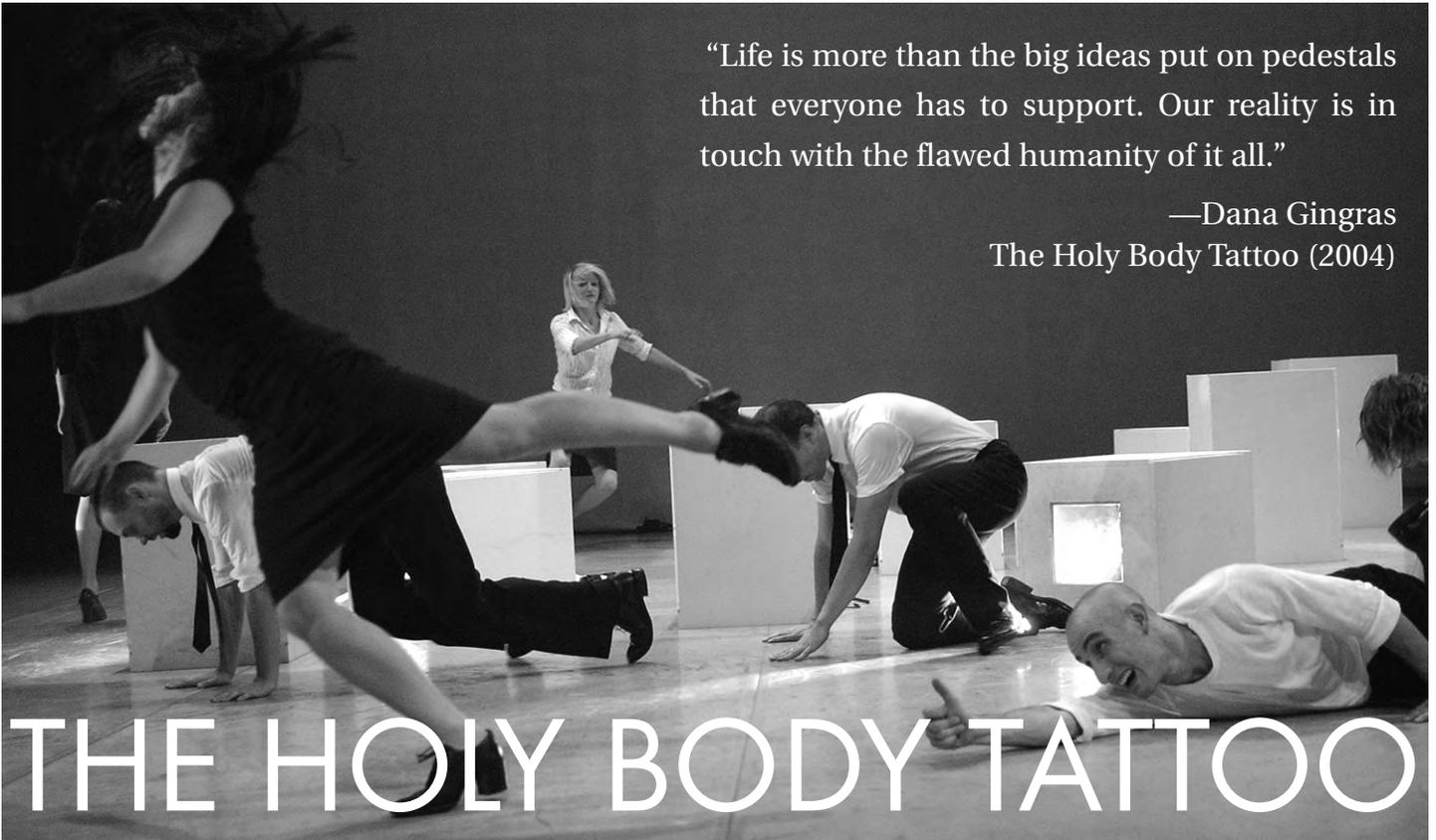
VictoriaDanceSeries.com

BY FASTRAC

“Life is more than the big ideas put on pedestals that everyone has to support. Our reality is in touch with the flawed humanity of it all.”

—Dana Gingras  
The Holy Body Tattoo (2004)

Dor Helicic, David Finewelling, Sonja Perrensen, Sarah Doucet, Blair Nerfield, Finlay Johansson. Photo by Chris Randolf.



## THE HOLY BODY TATTOO

*monumental* is by far the biggest work ever created by Vancouver's celebrated The Holy Body Tattoo. A piece for nine dancers, the work has been developed in the studio over the past three years, but the idea germinated many years ago.

The piece investigates the intersecting dimensions of minute and epic scales of human endeavour in the workings of everyday life. Choreographed by The Holy Body Tattoo's co-artistic directors Dana Gingras and Noam Gagnon, *monumental* emerges from an accumulation and distillation of previous stage works. *monumental* is arranged into three sections. The choreographers use movement, sound, image and text to explore how fear, trauma and power operate within large gatherings of people and within individuals. The work also explores how these forces are produced as strategies of manipulation and governance. The Holy Body Tattoo is particularly interested in how life's intricate experiences mark and shape bodies and social space. To this end, *monumental* is an investigation of how people are shaped and scarred by trauma, shock and power. The work suggests that small and everyday acts can be as *monumental*

as the disruptive conditions that constitute catastrophe and disaster, suffering and loss. *monumental* is timely and relevant given the extraordinary and disastrous events that occur in the world on a regular basis. In the performance, the layering of everyday encounters operates as a sort of ethnographic investigation through dance and multimedia of the significance of small gestures in extraordinary circumstances.

In *monumental*, Gingras and Gagnon embrace the opportunity to explore their ever-evolving choreography through rendering the complexities of life in relationship to heroic, larger than life edifices. The Holy Body Tattoo's stage for *monumental* is minimal. Stark blocks of varying height that change in character and purpose according to shifting patterns, colours and angles of lighting punctuate the movement of an eclectic ensemble of dancers in chic office wear. At times dancers are elevated and at other times diminished, by each

continues >



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:

Robert Milne, President  
 Anne Russo, Vice President  
 Nancy Glerup, Treasurer  
 Jane Tice, Secretary  
 Wendy Vernon, Director

Our staff is:

Stephen White, Executive Producer  
 Paula Jardine, Community Dance Project, Artistic Director  
 Ian Rye, Production Manager, Technical Consultant  
 Bill Hamar, Administrative Assistant

If you would like to be involved with the Series, please call: (250) 595-1829 or email: [vicdanceseries@shaw.ca](mailto:vicdanceseries@shaw.ca)

More information is available online: [www.victoriadanceseries.com](http://www.victoriadanceseries.com)

**Footnotes** is prepared by Executive Producer Stephen White. Anne Moon volunteers to read the text.

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other and by the stage set. The semblance of towering skyscrapers and statuary is evoked, testifying to urban, national, corporate and military might.

Human presence is both heightened and constricted in this environment designed to impress and overwhelm. Here, fear, emergency and power become forces to be reckoned with. This is immediately evident in the tremendous amount of skill and balance required for dancers to carry out the range of difficult and speedy movements on elevated pedestals of differing height. The dancers' execution of the choreography is then further complicated by the intensity and changing quality of light that projects from and onto these

boxes. The plinths, lighting and complex movements in some ways relate to aspects of architectural space (especially skyscrapers) and the built environment that mark experience by channeling human interaction, movement and social engagement. Although the dancing surfaces on top of the plinths are all the same size, the dancers are not. In addition to compensating for such differences, the dancers must carefully modulate themselves because although they are alone on their perches, they must be aware of each other. Moving at the wrong angle or being slightly out of time with the asymmetrical movements of the group becomes glaringly evident and could result in a treacherous fall.

Images by Dana Gingras and filmmaker William Morrison appear in conjunction with text by visual artist Jenny Holzer and accentuate The Holy Body Tattoo's investigation of larger-than-life edifices in relationship to everyday gestures. Texts and images address what is implicit but not visibly evident in choreographed movement. Filmic images of a wind farm, a highway overpass, and hydro-electric towers overlaid with body parts refer to the vast resources required to build and maintain energy and transportation economies and infrastructures. Immense amounts of human labour and public tax dollars have been invested in these monoliths of modernization that promise progress, comfort and convenience, yet also contribute to environmental, social and political chaos. Transportation routes and the enormous energy that is required to produce, maintain and operate them contribute to the potential of powerful empires to manage and/or colonize the movement of goods, resources, weapons and people through cars, trains, ships and planes.

The Holy Body Tattoo was founded in 1993 by co-Artistic Directors Noam Gagnon and Dana Gingras. The company has received both critical and audience acclaim with performances in Canada, the US and Europe. Employing multimedia aspects of film, video projection and music, the work of the company explores the nature of human endurance through ideas of surrender, fragility and broken elegance. The Washington Post described the company as "More art than dance, the highly visual work of The Holy Body Tattoo skyrockets dance theatre into new realms. Like a black and white photo seen as it develops, The Holy Body Tattoo's tight, fast repetitive movement slowly sears itself onto the mind clearly and indelibly." **FN**

*The above was drawn from a longer article written by Nancy Shaw. Shaw is cultural critic, poet and visual arts curator. Her most recent book of poetry *Busted* (Coach House Press, 2001) is written in collaboration with Catriona Strang. She has a PhD in Communication from McGill University and completed post-doctoral research in American Studies at New York University. To read the full article, go to [www.VictoriaDanceSeries.com](http://www.VictoriaDanceSeries.com) and click on "Library".*



## BLOG Jam

**March is Move It! month.**

Thirty-five local residents aged 18 months to 75 years are participating in a free week-long “intergenerational” movement workshop with Vancouver’s Joe Laughlin and Tara Cheyene Friedenberg this week. This workshop is yet another small step forward in our plan to build a big community dance performance over the next two years.

We asked the participants in the workshop to record their impressions of the workshop in our BLOG. Admittedly, we are just finding our way around having a BLOG and figuring out what the best way to use a BLOG might be, but why don’t you join the discussion? You can add your comments, or ask questions or just simply learn by osmosis when you go to our website and check out the BLOG. **FN**

## Volunteer Shopping



### The Mayfair Community Project

Hats off to **Karina Perkins**, Marketing Director at Mayfair Shopping Centre, for working with the Victoria Dance Series, the United Way and Volunteer Victoria to help us create a program that will promote and reward youth volunteerism in our community.

Last fall Karina and the Victoria Dance Series started with the idea that we wanted to move our partnership beyond the standard sponsor/client relationship. We had an opportunity to promote ideas common to both of us and that benefit our community. We invited Tony Goodman from the School District into our discussion, and he provided valuable insight. In fact, his input helped us refine our intentions and focus the program — the result of which is a community initiative that everyone is proud of, and that we launched earlier this month.

The program is open to all Victoria Dance Series Youth Pass members (membership is free and you can register for a Youth Pass on-line at [www.VictoriaDanceSeries.com](http://www.VictoriaDanceSeries.com)). Youth Pass members are encouraged to select from a variety of volunteer opportunities listed on Volunteer Victoria’s on-line database and after they have dedicated 35 hours of service to a local agency, they qualify for some pretty significant rewards, including a \$1,000 shopping spree at Mayfair Shopping Centre and subscription passes to the Victoria Dance Series!

Why develop a program that encourages youth volunteerism? I think our mission statement for the Mayfair Community Project, sums it up:

Mayfair Shopping Centre and the Victoria Dance Series are interested in promoting active engagement in our communities. We believe that people do make a difference to our city when they dedicate their time and effort to those who are less fortunate than ourselves or to working together to enrich the quality of life in the region. We also believe that we have a role to play in encouraging today’s youth to learn the value of giving back to their community. We hope that our efforts will seed a lifelong commitment to volunteerism. **FN** *Learn more at: [www.VictoriaDanceSeries.com](http://www.VictoriaDanceSeries.com)*

## Master Class

**The Holy Body Tattoo**  
Taught by **Noam Gagnon and Dana Gingras**

**Friday, March 25, 2005**

**11 am - 12:30 pm**

**Lynda Raino Dance**

**715 Yates Street**

**\$15**

**Register online: [www.VictoriaDanceSeries.com](http://www.VictoriaDanceSeries.com)**

Open to adult students with some modern dance training. Gagnon and Gingras will use The Holy Body Tattoo repertoire as a means to explore partnering, improvisation and creation skills.

## Pre-Show Chats

**The Holy Body Tattoo**

**Thursday, March 24 and**

**Friday, March 25**

**7:20 pm**

**Upper Lobby, McPherson Playhouse**

Meet the Artistic Directors/Choreographers of *monumental*, Noam Gagnon and Dana Gingras, in an informal discussion about their work past and present, and how they developed the piece over a number of years.

**Decidedly Jazz Danceworks**

**Tuesday April 5 and**

**Wednesday April 6**

**7:20 pm**

**West Lobby, Royal Theatre**

Hannah Stilwell, one of the founding directors of DJD, will speak about her Cuban odyssey - the experience developing *BULLA!* over the past three years, both at home in Calgary and away in Cuba.

## DECIDEDLY CUBAN

While Decidedly Jazz Danceworks (DJD) has always dug at the roots of jazz dance, including West African dance, Bharat Natyam from India, and flamenco from Spain, Cuba “officially” caught the attention of co-founders Hannah Stilwell and Michele Moss when they attended “Afro-Cubanismo” at the Banff Centre in 1994. In 1999 both women traveled to Cuba to study, and in 2000 Stilwell moved to Cuba to continue her studies in a serious way. She lived in Cuba off and on for a couple of years, and while she has settled back in Calgary, she continues to travel to Cuba four or five times a year for professional reasons. I recently had the opportunity to ask Stilwell about DJD’s experience in Cuba.

**STEPHEN WHITE: How did this Cuban odyssey begin?**

**HANNAH STILWELL:** Apart from the interest in the obvious historical influences that Cuban music and dance had on the development of North American Jazz, the dances and music unto themselves are fascinating, compelling, and impossible to resist. With slave trade, different peoples from various parts of Africa arrived in the Americas and developed, changed, and preserved music and dance in different ways, depending on their location. In Cuba, the African drums managed to survive in a way they did not in North America, breeding incredibly complex rhythms and an astounding attention to rhythm in all of the subsequent “Cuban” developments. The Yoruba people of Nigeria are one of the groups who were dominant in Cuba after slave trade commenced, and their dance is very focused in the upper body. The feet are quiet and specific, and the upper torso and arms move in undulating, polyrhythmic ways that we don’t see in most North American dance, including jazz. The subtlety, sensuality and the difficulty of this movement captured me immediately and I continue to revel in the Cuban way of moving the body.

**SW: How did you go about pulling all the pieces together to make this show happen?**

**HS:** In Banff, and when I first went to Cuba, I met several members of a famous folkloric group called Los Muñequitos de Matanzas.

One of them, Israel “Toto” Berriel, was embarking on a solo project, which combined traditional Cuban folklore with a more North American sensibility of funk and R&B. When I heard his ideas, my mind was filled with images of dance that I had never seen. As well, the first thing that I noticed about Cuban dancers,

whether they be folkloric dancers, salsa dancers, professional modern dancers or children on the street, is that they move with what I would call a jazz sensibility, or aesthetic. One of the things that we love about jazz dance is that one of its driving, primary forces is rhythm, and ALL of Cuban dance has strong rhythm as its impetus. When I saw Cuban society dancing, I began to dream about a collaboration with the Decidedly Jazz dancers and Cubans, and with Canadian jazz musicians and their Cuban counterparts. The idea always had a very heavy Afro-Cuban Folkloric influence in my mind.

Vicki Willis, upon hearing of my dream, offered up the company dancers to do the project, and the support of the company’s infrastructure. I immediately invited Kimberley Cooper to be my collaborator on the choreography and direction of what was to become *¡BULLA!* because I love her take on jazz, she had visited me in Cuba and loved it the same way I did, and we work very happily together.

Meanwhile, in Cuba, I was eyeing various musicians and dancers who would be ideal for the project. When it was finally a “go ahead” after five years of dreaming, I went to Cuba and started the long process of obtaining an invitation to the Havana Jazz Festival and inviting the Cubans to come to Canada.

**sw: How did you find the dancers and the musicians? Did you visit studios in Cuba?**

**HS:** Finding brilliant dancers in Cuba is not difficult. Since my time there in ‘99, I have kept a mental list of all the dancers I would love to work with. When the time finally came to select dancers, Kimberley and I went directly to the studios of Conjunto Folklorico Nacional de Cuba. One of our company dancers, Ahmed Hodelin, was dancing there when I invited him to Canada in ‘99. We probably gravitate toward the folkloric dancers because of their astutely rhythmic bodies, their abilities to embody character, and their ability to improvise. They are without affectations and also exemplify masculinity and femininity. All of the dancers who dance at



Conjunto Folklórico are also trained in modern dance and technique, so they are beautifully versatile.

Once we settled on the Canadian musicians, we enlisted their help to finalize the list of Cuban guests. I had already decided on two men from Matanzas who worked on that inspiring project of Toto's, but we needed more "jazz" guys. The Canadian musicians are all members of an Edmonton band called Bomba!, all of whom I first met at Afro-Cubanismo in 1994. In that configuration they play everything from traditional Latin music to killer Latin jazz, and they are all great jazz musicians in their own right, working with groups outside of Bomba! as well. In March of 2004 I traveled to Cuba with these three, Chris Andrew, Rubim de Toledo and Mario Allende, and we settled on the rest of the Cuban musicians by going to clubs and nosing around. All of us were very familiar with the Cuban music scene both in and out of Cuba, so again, our own personal interest and professional development over the last ten years made the process relatively easy.



Photos by Trudie Lee

**sw: What did the dancers bring to DJD that was new?**

**HS:** The Cuban dancers bring an entirely different idiom, way of moving and approach to jazz dance. They are frantically trying to learn "jazz", as it does NOT exist as a common dance form in Cuba, but what they bring via their traditions is a piece of jazz that we are delighted to have. Jazz is an expression of the mixing of African cultures with the variety of other cultures that exist in North America, I think of Cuban dance as jazz by another name. The imperative values of jazz exist in their dance. What they bring that you will see is a way of moving the torso and arms that is difficult for a North American to accomplish, but that movement serves as inspiration for much of Kimberley's and my choreography. Of course we "jazzify" it in our own way, so the ideal is that you will see jazz dance in the tradition of DJD with a new twist.

**sw: What would you like the audience to leave with at the end of the performance?**

**HS:** We hope that they leave not only feeling elated from having watched us, but with more curiosity and/or a more informed view of one of the most important and very often ignored influences in Jazz music and dance – Cuba. Perhaps it is due to politics, but the role of Cuban musicians and dancers in the evolution of jazz is often left out of history books.

**sw: Are you now hooked on the idea of international collabora-**

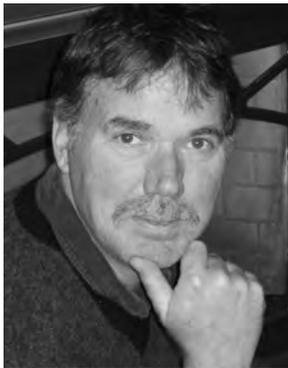
**tions? Can we expect collaboration in the future?**

**HS:** International collaborations are extremely costly, so we imagine that they will not be very commonplace for us, but it is a natural fit that DJD work with artists from other countries where Africa and Europe collided. Jazz exists here because of that collision in the United States. It is extraordinarily exciting for our artists to delve deeply into the roots of jazz and almost "rewrite" history as we create, based on our own personal outlook on these cultures and their movement. If the money were available, we would absolutely be planning collaboration. I'd love to dip into Brazil in the near future, so who knows? **FN**

**HANNAH STILWELL, ARTISTIC DIRECTOR, ¡BULLA!**

*Hannah Stilwell is a performer, teacher and choreographer entranced by the relationship between audible and visual rhythms. Throughout her career, she has dedicated herself to the discovery of many dance forms that have fused over the past century to become jazz dance. Her work has taken her to Africa, Cuba, Jamaica, Europe, India and throughout North America. She holds a BA from the University of Calgary where she has taught dance since 1982, and is a founder of Decidedly Jazz Danceworks where she artistic directed Optic Verve, Classic Jam, and, with Kimberley Cooper, co-artistic directed Velvet and now ¡BULLA! Currently, Hannah is guest teaching and freelancing in Canada, the U.S. and Cuba, as well as guiding cultural tours of Cuba.*

## DANCE SEEN



Stephen White. Photo by Stuart Copeland

I always dreamed of creating a dance festival in our city – one that would bring together a variety of the best dance in Canada, big and small, and offer us a glimpse into what our dance creators are thinking about and how they are communicating those ideas in innovative ways.

Well, was it Oscar Wilde who said “Be careful what you wish for...”? It’s not a festival per se,

but we do have two very different companies in town whose performances are mere days apart, so for the dance aficionado, although not a festival, it’s a bit of a feast. Those of you who have bought tickets to both have a great opportunity to see new work at the opposite ends of the modern dance spectrum: the edgy contemporary thinking person’s dance from The Holy Body Tattoo and the Latin infused, infectious fun jazz dance from Decidedly Jazz Danceworks. I love it all, of course, and I think you will too. Oh – and if you haven’t purchased tickets for one or the other and would now like to see the show, call me at 595-1829 and I’ll ensure you get the subscriber discount.

Our presentations of Canada’s leading dance companies at the Royal or McPherson are, until now, the most visible thing the Victoria Dance Series does. The performances grab the attention of

the very generous print and broadcast media in Victoria. In turn this is supported by our comprehensive advertising campaigns, mail outs and posters. But behind that little curtain, there has been someone twisting the knobs and pulling the levers, and the work of the Series is about to change somewhat. Sure, our main focus will continue to be the presentation of fantastic dance experiences at our civic theatres, but over the past four or five months we have been working quietly, laying the groundwork for a large scale community dance project that we will be telling you more about over the next two years.

In November 2004, **Paula Jardine** joined our team to help us create this project. We knew we wanted to do something large and free in the Inner Harbour in the summer of 2007 to mark our tenth anniversary of presenting dance. Our vision is to reach out to the community with workshops and forums that will culminate in a free public performance in Victoria’s Inner Harbour in July, 2007. The project will invite participation and contribution from as many as 200 members of the community, drawn from dance clubs, studios and other interest groups and will incorporate promenade, spectacle, live music and dance.



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Paula has helped us put a shape and context to this. The plan she helped us develop is so strong, and her vision so clear that we hired her and now she is the Artistic Director of our Community Dance Project. Over the next two years, Paula will be putting together workshops and contacting various dance studios and clubs, inviting all of them to help us build this big spectacle. We are, of course thrilled to have her on board – as Jardine is a bit of a legend in Western Canada. She is the founding Artistic Director of Vancouver’s Public Dreams Society, responsible among other things, for the huge lantern festival at Trout Lake, Illuminares – which of course spawned our own Luminara.

So welcome, Paula. We look forward to the adventure. We encourage the Footnotes reader to find out more by visiting [www.VictoriaDanceSeries.com](http://www.VictoriaDanceSeries.com) on a regular basis, where you’ll learn about the project as it grows.

The Victoria Dance Series also reached a rather sad milestone in February. Doug Durand, Founding Producer of the Series, had been working with us over the past few years in a part-time contract position as Community Outreach Director. In January this year, Doug got a new full time job at the Office of Cultural Affairs at the City of Vancouver. The responsibilities of this new work, coupled with his part-time studies at Simon Fraser University, made it impossible for him to give his work with us the attention he wanted to afford it. On a Sunday in February, he called to say that he would have to give it up. Doug will continue to be part of our Community Dance Project Advisory Committee, which is terrific. But I think it is important that we recognize the invaluable contribution he made to this community by having the vision and the tenacity to create the Victoria Dance Series, eight years ago – and to argue eloquently for our need to create strong connections with our community by offering them an opportunity to participate in our outreach programs. Thank you Doug. **FN**



Linda Raino & Crystal Pite. Photo by Vince Klassen.

## The World According to Us

In the lobby on the second night of *A Cinderella Story*, a woman approached me to ask a few questions. Turns out that she has been a subscriber to the Dance Series from the very beginning, and has enjoyed the performances she’s seen. She congratulated me on the growth of dance in our community – both in terms of its visibility and in the diversity of programs available on the Series. All of this was very flattering, but then she began to ask some questions that troubled me a little. Our conversation made me realize that she’s probably not alone. Her questions had to do with *who is the Dance Series and how does it all work?*

So here it is – as simple and boiled down as I can make it. The Victoria Dance Series is an independent not-for-profit charitable organization. We are the folks that bring all of the dance companies in the Series to town each year. As the Executive Producer, I select a season of shows that you see. The Dance Series rents the theatres, we contract with the companies, we advertise the shows and we sell a subscription package.

Additionally, we produce the newsletter, arrange for Master Classes and offer various free workshops to the community.

Lately we have started commissioning new work (such as last year’s piece, *A Conversation*, by Lynda Raino and Crystal Pite) and we have put companies into studios in Victoria for a few weeks so that they can continue to develop new work.

We receive grants from three levels of government, from private foundations, and local business sponsors. As well, we rely on the generosity of our donors – people like you – who will receive a tax receipt for any donation given.

And regarding donations – we now list all our individual donors on our website and we have a new feature – you can make your donation on-line through our secure site using your credit card. It’s right on the homepage at [www.VictoriaDanceSeries.com](http://www.VictoriaDanceSeries.com)

So there, in a nutshell, is the world according to us. I am always willing to clarify this even more if you want to speak with me personally at 595-1829. In fact, as my friends will attest, I have a hard time not talking about the Series! **FN**

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](http://www3.telus.net/victoriacondo) or phone 381-5581.

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



## Looking into our Crystal Ball...

Long time subscribers to the Victoria Dance Series are aware that each year I have promised to make every effort to get our subscription packages out to you earlier, so that you can consider a dance package when you're selecting subscription tickets for the Belfry, Pacific Opera or the Symphony. But call it wisdom gained from being in the trenches, I suppose. I have come to realize that my attempt to get the season on sale earlier is a bit like charging at windmills. I envy my colleagues at the Opera, who have the next three seasons already planned and their star singers contracted. The world of dance is not so well prepared.

Here's what I do know. Next season we will welcome the National Ballet of Canada in September who will present a mixed rep program that includes a scene from Kudelka's Swan Lake (and pssst, there's a live orchestra!). In November, les Ballets jazz de Montreal (now called bjm\_danse) are bringing Crystal Pite's big, ambling, wickedly funny and brilliantly danced Stolen Show.

We had such a good time with Alberta Ballet's lushly staged *Nutcracker* this season that we invited them back. The Victoria Symphony will once again provide the accompaniment. In the new year, RWB will bring a new choreography of *Messiah* (again with live music), followed by Vancouver's Kokoro Dance in April—a west coast butoh company whose work is quietly profound.



Mariko Kida and Hokuto Kodama in Alberta Ballet's *The Nutcracker*. Photo by Peter Pankiv

The final show of the season is currently in negotiation – and that's the hold-up! But look to receiving your opportunity to re-subscribe in late May.

New this season, we will finally offer you the opportunity to build your own package subscription, to a minimum of any three productions. **FN**

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