

## FOOTNOTES

NOVEMBER 2005

VictoriaDanceSeries.com

BY FASTRAC

#12

# TWELVE MONSTERS

## les ballets jazz de montreal



I'm an early morning guy. Always have been. My friends and colleagues can attest to receiving e-mails from me at 5:00 am on a regular basis. There's something about the quiet of the morning, working in my home office under the circle of light from an overhead desk lamp. I like the solitude it offers. It's definitely "my time" and when I am out of town and don't have that time as part of my daily routine, I get out of sync.



Photographer: Serguei Enckinian

And then there are people like Louis Robitaille, Artistic Director of les Ballets jazz de Montreal whose first words when we spoke on the phone recently were "This is pretty early. I'm a night person." Truth is, I was speaking to him from my office phone at 5:30 am our time and he was grumbling about doing an interview at 8:30 his time. Louis had just flown back to Montreal the day before after 17 engagements in a tour that took the company to Germany, Luxembourg, the Netherlands, Belgium and Switzerland. We'll chalk it up

to his not having really settled into a North American time zone that despite the grumbling he was very animated when he began to talk about how Crystal Pite's *The Stolen Show* was so well received on the tour.

"It was a very intense tour, very good, heavy, tight schedule. But the new team is fantastic," said Robitaille. Four of the company's 12 dancers are new this season. I asked him how he came to select these new dancers. "First and foremost I look for a dancer who has personality and can project that personality from the stage. The

company doesn't use a typical audition process. Instead dancers may be with us for a week or for even three weeks, taking daily class, learning repertoire. This gives me and the company a chance to get to know the dancer and get a sense of how they might fit with everyone."

And that's an essential requirement when one considers that this small company averages 65 to 75 performances a year, most of them on tour. The dancers and crew spend all their time together in rehearsal, performance and as strangers in

continues &gt;



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**Footnotes** is prepared by Stephen White and proofed by Anne Moon.

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a strange city on their days off.

"I have twelve monsters on stage, you know," continues Robitaille. "They are each very individual. They have to be able to dance. When I am looking at a dancer to hire I look also at his or her aesthetic - their size, their looks - and of course their talent. Every dancer must have a solid foundation in classical ballet technique. We start each day with a ballet class, so the dancers need to be precise and technically proficient. A dancer needs a background in classical dance for technique, modern for grounding and jazz

for movement. When he adds skills in

gymnastics, acrobatics or theatre to these three essentials, he becomes even more valuable."

Himself a dancer, with a solid international reputation, Robitaille has worked to ensure the dancers and the dancing at BJM are front and centre in the company's work. He is concerned that the experience for the dancer on and off the stage is as positive as it can be. To that end, Robitaille works to keep company members for many seasons, offering a 40-week contract with benefits.

Robitaille is now in his eighth season with Ballets jazz and just a year ago, the company changed how it refers to itself. Although the registered name continues to be les Ballets Jazz de Montreal, the new logo is *bjm\_danse*. This new abbreviated moniker is more than a new graphic identity. It actually speaks to an evolution in the company's work that Robitaille has been stewarding since he first stepped into the role of Artistic Director. "Jazz dance in the traditional sense has not evolved at a rate that has maintained people's interest," he says, somewhat disdainfully, "plus BJM was having difficulty changing people's preconceptions of what the company is. People were still stuck with this idea of what the company was in the 1970s and the 1980s. But that old style jazz dance is dead.

"Crystal's choreography was a bold statement for the company. It's very contemporary, very conceptual. It also marked the first time in the history of BJM that we produced a full length work. Because it was developed over three years, Crystal had an opportunity to get to really know the dancers and feature their strengths in the work. Typically a guest choreographer comes to us with no previous knowledge of the dancers, works for five or six weeks creating a new work and leaves just as she is getting to know the company and their abilities. Pite has a natural sensitivity to her environment and her connection with the artists was phenomenal. She was able to develop certain sections in the work for specific dancers."

When he is asked to reflect on his eight years with the company Robitaille expresses some satisfaction with the distance it has traveled. "I think I have returned the company to its roots, maybe not strict jazz dancing but I have worked to capture the spirit of jazz - the freedom, liberty, energy and sense of improvisation that is part of jazz music. It's like being a teenager. It's this personality that makes us unique in Canada. The focus on classical technique has improved the quality of the dancers and although it has been slower than I expected when I took it on, the attitude of audiences, producers and critics has shifted. They like us now."

Recently the company undertook a process that included convening focus groups to express their sense of what BJM represents. The adjectives they picked included works like original, stunning, moving, impeccable and fun. Robitaille says, "I couldn't have done better!" **FN**

# PI TE ON PI TE

Crystal Pite is one of Victoria's greatest cultural exports. Now enjoying an international career, Crystal grew up here and trained with Maureen Eastick at Pacific Dance Centre. When I caught up with her, she had just returned from Holland where she had created a new 30-minute work for the celebrated Netherlands Dance Theatre 1.



Photographer: Lukas Eisele

**Stephen White: You've been very busy creating new choreography since we last saw you at the McPherson with Lynda Raino in *A Conversation*. What have you been up to?**

**CRYSTAL PI TE:** Since *A Conversation*, I finished and premiered *The Stolen Show* for Les Ballets Jazz de Montreal — a full-length work that I created for them over the three years I was there as resident choreographer. I then collaborated with former Frankfurt Ballet colleague Richard Siegal, creating and performing in *Double Story*, which premiered at the National Arts Centre and then went on to tour to Halifax, Vancouver, Calgary, Whitehorse, and then Essen and Frankfurt, Germany [Editor's note: It comes to Victoria in May 2006]. Then I went to London and created a new work called *Unstill Life* for Transitions Dance Company at the Laban Centre, after which I choreographed for the film *The Score*, created by the Electric Company for CBC. Recently I performed with Vancouver's Peter Bingham in an hour-long structured improvisation called *Vanishing Point*. And a few days ago I got back from Holland where I've just been working for over two months, creating a new work called *Pilot X* for Netherlands Dance Theatre 1.

**SW: This year we will see two of your works in Victoria, *The Stolen Show* and in May 2006, *Double Story*. What would you say these two dramatically different works (one is large, the other very intimate) have in common?**

**PI TE:** I think that there are certain elements that can always be found in my work up until this point. I like to pay attention to detail and timing. I like the element of risk and chaos inherent in improvisation, mixed with a rigorous respect for structure and consistency. There is nearly always a pinch of humour somewhere, whether it is overt or subtle. Both *The Stolen Show* and *Double Story* involve the use of text and props, storytelling and narrative devices, and both of these works expose, in different ways, the guts of creative process and the smoke and mirrors of theatrical experience.

**SW: When you first receive a commission, what do you do to prepare before you walk into the studio and begin working with the company?**

**PI TE:** It depends on the situation. For Netherlands Dance Theatre, I didn't know the dancers at all, so much of my preparation was based on speculation: in this case I knew I'd be working with some of the world's best, but I didn't know how they would respond to me - if my methods would work for them. Before I went there, I focused on music, structure, content, design, and

created some small phrases of choreographic material. That's usually how I prepare. Of course, it's different working on something for me, or other dancers that I already know well, like the dancers of Les Ballets Jazz. In those cases, I tend to start with what I perceive as the strengths of the performers I'm going to work with, and then try to build the work to suit them. I believe it's possible to serve both the performers and the piece they are performing in, although it's not always easy to find that balance.

**SW: I know you as being very clear about how you want a production to look (lights, sound, sets and props). Do you work from an original impulse or idea and return to that impulse as you build the "look" of a piece? Or does the "look" evolve as the work grows?**

**PI TE:** Again, it varies from work to work. Sometimes the work begins as a single image - usually that image sits in my head already fully "produced", it is on stage, costumed, lit, and moving. Other times, the content of the work will direct the aesthetics of it (or the budget will.) But I am very hands-on with all the production elements of the works I make. Design is an essential part of my creative process; another layer of understanding and expression that is inextricable from choreography. And yes, the look evolves as the work does... so many factors come in to divert you from your original impulse. Part of the process is knowing what to fight for and what to let go of. **FN**

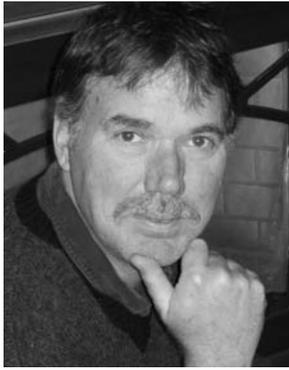
*Editor's Note: Pite's choreographic debut was in 1990, at Ballet British Columbia's first choreographic workshop. Since then, she has created new works for Netherlands Dance Theatre 1, Ballett Frankfurt, this work for Les Ballets jazz de Montreal (including a term as Resident Choreographer 2001-2004), Ballet British Columbia, the Alberta Ballet, Ballet Jorgen, and several independent dance artists. In 1995 she was presented with the Clifford E. Lee Award for Choreography and was choreographer in residence at the Banff Centre for the Arts. Pite received the Bonnie Bird North American Choreography Award in 2004, and created a work for Transitions Dance Company at the Laban Centre in London. She has choreographed and performed in several films including *Subways*, directed by Daniel Conrad for CBC, the feature film *One Night Stand*, directed by Mike Figgis, and *The Score*, created by Electric Company.*

## Pre-Show Chat with Pite

**7:20pm  
Nov. 18 & 19  
West Lobby  
Royal Theatre**

Join Crystal Pite, Choreographer of the piece to be performed by Les Ballets jazz de Montreal, and Stephen White, Producer of the Victoria Dance Series, in this informal background on the evening's performance.

## DANCE SCENE



Stephen White. Photo by Stuart Copeland

One of the great perks of this job is that I get to travel and see some extraordinary dance. Over the last month, my work has taken me to Montreal for the Annual General Meeting of the CanDance Network, our national association of presenters with members stretching from St. John's, Newfoundland, to Victoria. While I was attending the meetings, I had the opportunity (thanks to our very generous hosts

Pierre Des Marais and Clothilde Cardinal, producers of the vibrant Montreal Series entitled *Danse Danse*) to see a very special work by French choreographer Jean-Claude Gallotta entitled *Trois Générations*.

The premise for this work is very simple. Take the same 30 minute choreography and have eight 10 year olds (four girls, four boys) dance it, followed by eight extraordinary 30 year olds, and finally eight 60 year olds. While the premise was simple, the result was profound. A central pas de deux that featured a young girl repeatedly breaking the fall of a young boy was a child's game in the hands of the 10 year olds, a sensual/sexual interplay when danced by the 30 year olds and a poignant scene of loss and foreboding when danced by the 60 year olds.

Of course I am a sucker for this kind of stuff, so the emotional

weight of the work had a strong impact on me. Add to this that the dancing was exhilarating. The core company of 30 year olds was very strong, but the young kids were really amazing. This was complex contemporary choreography they were dancing, not cutsey patty-cake playground stuff, and they carried it off brilliantly. And what an inspiration to see such lithe and lively 60 year olds – some with bodies that had taken on their own unique shapes with age but regardless, the still had the ability to move with grace. A wonderful evening in the theatre.

Later, producer Pierre Des Marais told me that the company has two complete casts of children in order to satisfy French codes for child labour. The company travels with a large retinue of chaperones and tutors. It's a bit like moving a small village across the continent.

Just two weeks ago, Bill and I hit the I-5 and headed south to Portland with a stop in Seattle first to visit the folks at Pacific Northwest Ballet (PNB). Company Manager Dwight Hutton very generously gave up an hour and a half of his time to take us on a complete tour of the company's 60,000 square foot facility at Seattle Center. Originally built as a convention centre, PNB completely renovated the space about five or six years ago and installed nine gorgeous free-span (no pillars) studios with 25 foot ceilings that are flooded with natural light. There is a network of viewing galleries and balconies so donors and friends can watch a class or a rehearsal. The costume shop's regular staff of 11 can swell to as many as 75 seamstresses and pattern cutters on the big shows like *Nutcracker* or *Swan Lake*. There's a gorgeous Pilates studio, lounges, admin offices – but the best part of the complex is that down a series of backdoor stairs and through underground hallways the studios are directly connected to the beautifully refurbished McCaw Hall, where the ballet performs.

After several trips to Portland in recent years I've now decided that I only need the slightest excuse to visit this progressive city of downtown parks and unique architecture. This time the visit included some very dynamic dance.

The first night we were in town we visited the gorgeous, warm Newmark Theatre at the Portland Center for the Performing Arts, where a very supportive audience was treated to a mixed program of contemporary ballet danced by Oregon Ballet Theatre. This company's depth of talent and attention to technique continues to grow with very positive results. The program started strong with Jerome Robbins' classic *In The Night* set to music by Frédéric Chopin – one of four works that Robbins set to Chopin. Famed dance critic Walter Terry said of the premiere at New York City Ballet in 1970 "Have you ever seen a [Chopin] nocturne? I have, thanks to the choreographic magic of Jerome Robbins". And it's true. This is one of those rare dances where the footwork, the partnering, the turns, all seem to flow naturally and seamlessly from the piano score (played live in the pit). Most definitely a forerunner to Twyla Tharp's 1982 piece *Nine Sinatra Songs* that we saw in Victoria last year.

The final piece of the night was a new work by Artistic Director Christopher Stowell, which carried on in the style of the opener.

# Unless adapted by Carol Shields and Sara Cassidy

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Set to Cole Porter songs, some of them sung by soprano Pamela South, *Eyes on You* was a joyous, playful ode to the golden era of song, danced admirably by this young company who were clearly enjoying themselves. And that enjoyment flowed across the footlights. The audience was very appreciative indeed, and the whole evening seemed to be the right confection to launch a new season.

Aside from OBT, the other big dance presenter in Portland is White Bird Dance, who brings international and national contemporary companies to the city in a risky, exciting program that uses a variety of venues. We saw the North American premiere of Montreal's Compagnie Marie Chouinard's *bODY\_rEMIX/gOLD-BERG\_vARIATIONS* in a 400-seat auditorium on the campus of Portland State University. The house was packed with young urban professionals who were on their feet at the end of this extremely edgy work by one of Canada's most successful international touring companies.

Chouinard takes Glenn Gould's performance of, and conversation about the *Goldberg Variations*, and digitally re-masters it so that it becomes a series of barely recognizable guttural sounds. Her amazing international company of 10 dancers perform outrageous physical movement on crutches and walkers and other metal poles mounted on their heads and stomachs. The result – I grant you not to everyone's taste, by any means – is riveting. I found I was involved in the the vivid staging every moment as the dancers threw themselves into odd contortions and strange cou-

plings. The piece was a complete deconstruction of ballet, much of it performed by both the men and women on pointe – the difference being that often the dancers wore only one toe shoe, or they doggy walked across the stage with pointe shoes on their hands. There were many images that stay with me today. Images that are at once disturbing, freakish, exhilarating, muscular, sensual, and ugly.

There is an interesting local connection with Chouinard's company. Dancer Carla Muruca was born and raised in Victoria and has been with the company since 1999 after spending three years with Cirque de Soleil in Las Vegas. We talked with her after the performance and she told us that she is sixth generation Victorian. The family story is that her great-great-great grandmother brought the first piano to Vancouver Island on a ship that traveled around Cape Horn. She assured me that if we brought Marie's piece to Victoria, Carla would fill the Royal Theatre with all of her relatives. Who knows, we may give her the challenge of proving she's right! **FN**

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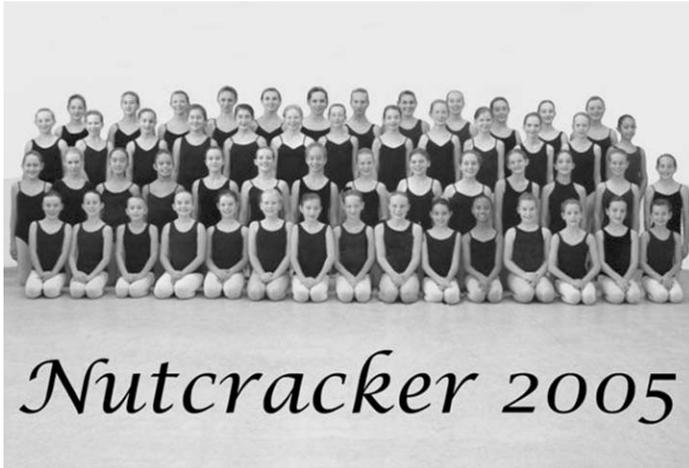
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# NUTCRACKER NOTES



## Where do little mice, angels and party-goers go before the curtain rises?

Things are humming at one of Victoria's newest dance studios these days. In addition to their regular RAD Ballet, ISTD Modern, ISTD Tap and Music Theatre classes, West Coast (Ballet) Academy of Performing Arts' faculty member Gina Sinclair-Davis is training 50 young mice, angels and party-goers to participate in the Victoria Dance Series' presentation of *Nutcracker* with the Victoria Symphony.

West Coast (Ballet) Academy of Performing Arts opened its doors in 2004 after identifying a need for a centrally located school that offered accredited training. Local businesswoman Pauline van Blokland (commercial interior designer and contractor) purchased a facility in Victoria West and put it through a full renovation just in time for a September 2004 opening. In their ambitious first season they racked up a number of accomplishments including auditions and rehearsals for *Nutcracker* 2004, hosting auditions for the National Ballet School, and offering students the opportunity to participate in local festivals.

One of the most interesting and unique features of this studio is the program they are developing with three high schools for students with a passion for the performing arts. Their half-day Musical Theatre daytime program provides a grounding in dance, voice and the speech arts.

The Victoria Dance Series is proud to have West Coast (Ballet) Academy of Performing Arts as a partner for this season's *Nutcracker*.

## All in Bloom

New this season, Shelagh MacCartney, proprietor of All In Bloom and She She Bags, both of Trounce Alley, will be setting up shop in the lobby of the Royal Theatre during the run of *Nutcracker* to offer you the opportunity to purchase one-of-a-kind Christmas items and keepsakes to remember your special time at the ballet.

All in Bloom opened its doors 15 years ago, originally with a product line that included beautiful china imported from France. But as styles changed and new products became available, MacCartney expanded the shop and began carrying an eclectic mix of merchandise selected to amuse and entertain her clientele. She focuses on unique items for the home that are also ideal as gifts. She's particularly proud of the line of amusing cards now in stock. When asked how she selects the merchandise, she says "It has to please me and make me laugh." Her whole approach to the store is to ensure the customer has fun and leaves having had a chuckle or two. And Shelagh and her staff approach the workday with the kind of lighthearted attitude that encourages a sense of fun.

A year ago, MacCartney opened She She Bags across Trounce Alley from All in Bloom. She She carries a large variety of purses and handbags from kitsch to elegant. She says "I want women who come to She She Bags to feel like they're going through their best friend's closet – trying things on, matching bags with shoes..."

So be sure not to miss Shelagh's unique merchandise in the lobby of the theatre. And if you like what you see, you'll find even more at her two stores. It's worth mentioning that a portion of the sales in the lobby support Victoria Dance Series' Youth Pass program, providing youth with the opportunity to see shows for \$7.50 each

## Nutcracker Donors

The following folks very generously donated to our campaign to buy *Nutcracker* tickets for kids who would not otherwise be able to attend the performance. The Boys and Girls Club of Greater Victoria is distributing the tickets for us. The kids will enjoy the show and afterwards be taken back stage to meet some of the dancers and receive a small *Nutcracker* to take home.

Muriel Andrews  
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 Robin Miller  
 Dale Shortliffe  
 Jane Tice

Because of their generosity, 30 kids will attend *Nutcracker* on November 26 at 2 pm.

Thank you! **FN**

# NEWS

## Mayfair Community Project

A year ago, Mayfair Shopping Centre's Director of Marketing, Karina Perkins and Stephen White put their heads together to come up with a unique way to encourage kids to get more involved in their communities in a significant way. The result was



the Mayfair Community Project that offered Victoria Dance Series' Youth Pass members a chance to win a \$1,000 shopping spree at Mayfair. Second prize was a double subscription to the 2005/06 season.

Youth who volunteered a minimum of 35 hours at the non-profit of their choice submitted a short statement about their experience volunteering and how that experience changed their perspective. Winners were selected based on that written

submission.

Savannah Carr-Wilson (right, in photo on left) receiving the award from Karina Perkins, is our winner in 2005. Kailah Wilkinson was awarded second prize.

We applaud these young women for their dedication to the community of Victoria and offering their time and energy to make our city a better place for everyone. Congratulations!

## The Big Apple Dance Tour

We bit into the Big Apple last year and we liked the taste so much we're heading back again in May, 2006. Bill has prepared a wonderful and varied itinerary that still leaves you time to do your own exploring, but fills your days with museums and walking tours and culminates in the spectacular Gala Opening performance of American Ballet Theatre's spring season at the Metropolitan Opera House, Lincoln Center. Read all about it in the flyer inserted with this edition of Footnotes. **FN**

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## QUARTER NOTES

### What's in a Name?

The 2006/07 season will be the Victoria Dance Series' tenth and we are planning a number of events to celebrate our decade milestone including an exclusive opening night gala for our donors, subscriber parties and a large scale community dance event that will be staged in the Inner Harbour in the summer of 2007. But the biggest change will be our name. Yup, that's right! We're shedding our skin and emerging fresh with a brand spanking new name and graphic identity. But you'll have to stay tuned because we'll be launching the new name and the 10th Anniversary Season next spring.

### Join the Adventure

Recently, the Board of Directors of the Victoria Dance Series stopped and looked backward for a moment to chart our progress over the past six years. They were shocked at what they discovered.

This table clearly demonstrates our explosive growth:

Year	Ticket Sales	Total Budget
2000	\$12,000	\$22,842
2001	\$37,905	\$118,687
2002	\$79,263	\$128,329
2003	\$333,931	\$398,539
2004	\$339,232	\$458,520
2005	\$561,756	\$696,388
2006	\$638,150	\$823,765 ( <i>projected</i> )

While we are extremely pleased that we have found an audience for dance in the region, now more than ever, we need the support of donors to make it all come together. In March, 2006, we will be sending you information outlining how you can contribute to the Victoria Dance Series and receive a charitable tax receipt. New this year, you will be able to target your donation to a specific program like buying Nutcracker tickets for young kids who couldn't attend otherwise, or supporting a dance class for people with disabilities. If you can't wait until March and would like to enjoy the tax benefit of contributing before the end of this year, give us a call at 595-1829 or contribute through our secure site online at [www.VictoriaDanceSeries.com](http://www.VictoriaDanceSeries.com) **FN**



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