

# FOOTNOTES

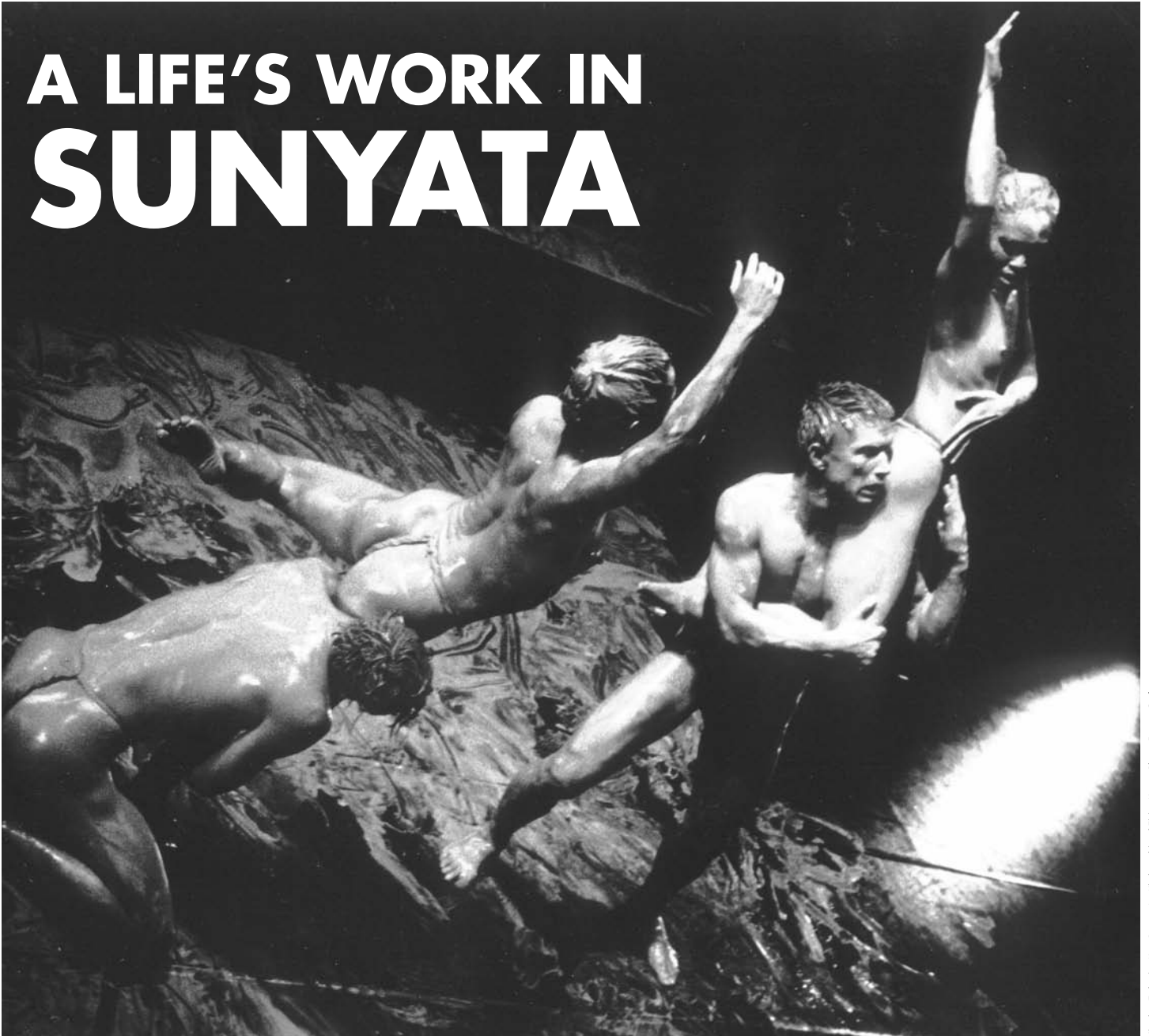
APRIL 2006

VictoriaDanceSeries.com

BY **FASTRAC**

#14

## A LIFE'S WORK IN SUNYATA

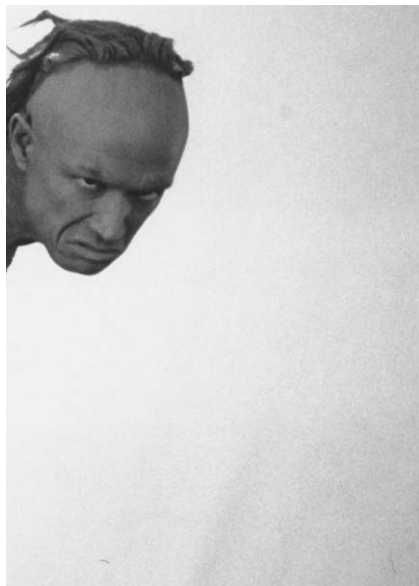


Mirosław Zydowicz, Kate Potter, Jay Hirabayashi and Zijian Kwan Photo: Frances Grafton

In the history of art-making, artists are known to return over and over again to one work that they consider seminal – the one piece that contains their experience and gives expression to their ideas. Over time, with each revisit, the artist

brings a new understanding to the work gained from the years lived between. For Kokoro Dance creators, Barbara Bourget and Jay Hirabayashi, *Sunyata* is such a piece. It has been a part of the company's repertoire for 15 years.

continues &gt;



Jay Hirabayashi Photo: Jerry Tam

The **Victoria Dance Series Society** is a non-profit, charitable 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.

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

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#### > continued

*Sunyata* is a Buddhist Sanskrit word meaning “emptiness.” The Buddhist accepts that life is suffering, that suffering has a cause, and that the cause of suffering is desire. Buddhists believe they are reborn again and again until they learn that suffering ceases when desire stops. The soul passes through states of grace and disgrace, and the cycle continues. One of the great mysteries of life is that we find beauty in the tragedy of our existence. As artists, Bourget and Hirabayashi pondered all of this and then they made a dance.

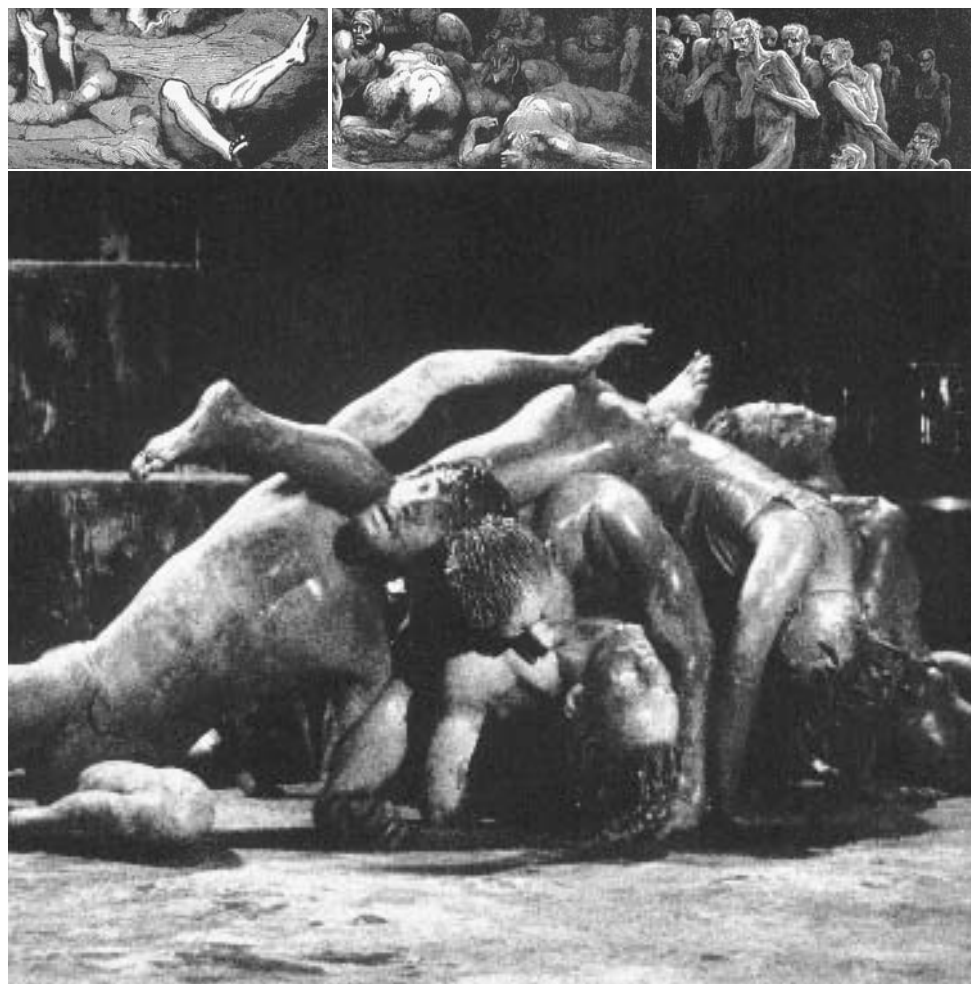
*Sunyata* is a portrayal of this cyclical journey. The piece travels from sensuous hell through timeless purgatory to heaven’s deliverance. East meets West, Buddhism mixes with Christianity, and butoh marries modern dance. The dance draws its physical imagery from the work of French illustrator Gustav Doré—specifically his etchings of Dante’s *Divine Comedy*. The three sections which comprise *Sunyata* — *Zero to the Power*, *Aeon*, and *Elysian Fields*—depict Dante’s journey through hell, purgatory and heaven.

Against an otherworldly backdrop designed by artists Richard Tetrault and Thomas Anfield, and in response to the music composed by Robert J. Rosen, the eight Kokoro dancers weave through an interactive set by Gerald King and Terry Podealuk. **FN**

*Kokoro premiered the first version of Sunyata in 1991. Vancouver critics hailed it as one of the best dance productions of that season. The 1997 remount of the work was performed to sold-out audiences and set box office records during its 9-day run. This third remount will open in Vancouver at the Vancouver International Dance Festival before traveling to Victoria April 7 and 8.*

Warning: Partial Nudity

Estimated Running Time: 2 hours 30 minutes



Hiromoto Ida, Jay Hirabayashi, Mirosław Zydowicz, Kate Potter, Susan Elliott, Karen Ofner, and Stou Hartle Photo: Paul Gibbons

## Butoh Basics

Typically, when one reads about the history of butoh, it is always prefaced as having grown out of the horrors of the Second World War, but in fact, the seeds for this new practice grew from the Japanese experience in the first half of the 20th century. During that time, life was hard in Japan. Industrialization had not progressed at the same rate as in Europe and North America. The country's economy was hit hard by the depression, and the military seized control of the government, leading Japan into a protracted conflict with the Chinese and eventually the Allies.

After the war, Japan was devastated. The citizenry had seen the horrors of Hiroshima and Nagasaki. Most of the country's major cities and transportation networks had been destroyed and food rationing continued for several years. The US occupied the country until 1952 and forced new systems and governing practices on the Japanese. There were many war trials and as many as 500 military officers committed suicide.

When one considers the struggle of daily life in a devastated, demoralized country it's no surprise that in 1959 Tatsumi Hijikata (1928 – 1986), performed a new dance with fellow dancer Yoshito Ono that he would call Ankoku Butoh (dance of darkness). This first performance was so shocking to contemporary Japanese society that Hijikata was banned from performing for some time.

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Hijikata had been interested in developing a dance that was contemporary, that was distinctly Japanese (but not traditional) and that offered a way to overcome the distance between the dancer and his/her body. The push was towards authenticity and connection, and away from artifice and show. Butoh practitioners begin with the premise that every body is the perfect body and that the goal is honest expression.

Butoh's original influences include French playwright and theorist Antonin Artaud and the German expressionist dance of Mary Wigman. The dance was developed not as a technique but rather as an attitude that drives the dancer to discover his or her own original way of dancing.

By the 1970's, butoh began to gain worldwide attention and is now an ever-changing, evolving art form. Its merits as a training method for dancers and actors are well noted. Butoh builds strength, flexibility and balance.**FN**

## FREE Classes

Barbara Bourget, Artistic Director of Kokoro Dance, will give two dance classes in Victoria later this month that will give insight into the training practices of the company.

### BUTOH DANCE CLASS

Wednesday, March 29

2 pm – 3:30 pm

Lynda Raino Dance

715 Yates Street

Open to anyone interested in learning about motivating movement through the use of interior imagery, this class will introduce the mindful attention to the body that butoh founder Tatsumi Hijikata introduced to the dance world 50 years ago. After a physical warm-up to get the blood flowing, students will learn how to use imagery to alter how we carry ourselves and how we move in space. Butoh alters our perceptions of time and space by changing our experience of our attention to these dimensions. Butoh is more of an attitude than a technique and its attention to respecting the body and its relationship to the environment and of giving meaning and intention to movement is a radical but useful way of approaching all forms of artistic expression.

### MODERN DANCE TECHNIQUE

Thursday, March 30

10 am – 11:30 am

Lynda Raino Dance

715 Yates Street

Open to intermediate/advanced students and professional dancers, this class begins with a standing warm-up that references techniques derived from Limon, Cunningham, ballet and yoga. After the warm-up the class is introduced to across-the-floor movement. Following the initial emphasis on strength, stretch, and stamina, Barbara will teach choreography from Kokoro Dance's repertoire.

To register for these classes, go to: [www.VictoriaDanceSeries.com](http://www.VictoriaDanceSeries.com) and click on "Community Outreach"

# DANCING THE DECADES

## JAY AND BARBARA TALK ABOUT LIFE, DANCE AND SUNYATA

*In addition to developing work for Kokoro Dance, offering workshops and teaching class, this Vancouver-based company, led by Barbara Bourget and Jay Hirabayshi, also produces the month-long Vancouver International Dance Festival every March. The Festival premieres a number of works and presents international dance artists. Most of the activity takes place at the Roundhouse Community Centre in Vancouver's Yaletown.*

*I met with Jay and Barbara in mid-February, conscious that they were about to get sucked into the vortex of producing their 6th annual festival. A couple days later, back in Victoria, I sent the following questions to Jay by e-mail.*

**STEPHEN WHITE:** Why butoh? What was it about butoh that resonated for you and compelled you to spend your lives as dancers working in this form?

**JAY HIRABAYSHI:** In 1980, Barbara and I were dancing with the Paula Ross Dance Com-

pany and we saw a poster that said "Ankoku Butoh – Dance of Darkness." It was for a performance at the Robson Square Media Centre. We did not know anything about butoh so we decided to check it out. What we saw was a performance by Koichi Tamano and his company Harupin-Ha and it burned an imprint in our psyches that remains to this day. I will describe one of the dances. Koichi Tamano appeared on stage in a crouched position. He was nearly nude with his body painted white. Wisps of cocoon silk were wrapped around his arms and fingers. He took about fifteen minutes to slowly stand up. That is all he did, but while he slowly stretched his body, the thin strands of silk also stretched and tore. The piece was mesmerizing. Time stopped. Our breath stopped. We felt we were witnessing creation, the birth of humanity, as well as its fragile evanescence. We were arrested by the detail, attention, and focus of this astonishing performer. Never had so little movement

said so much.

In 1986, we decided to form our own company that we called Kokoro Dance. Koichi Tamano's performance had gnawed its way from our memory into our bones and we knew that we would have to depart from our past if we were to step into a different future.

**sw:** What is the most commonly misunderstood notion about butoh?

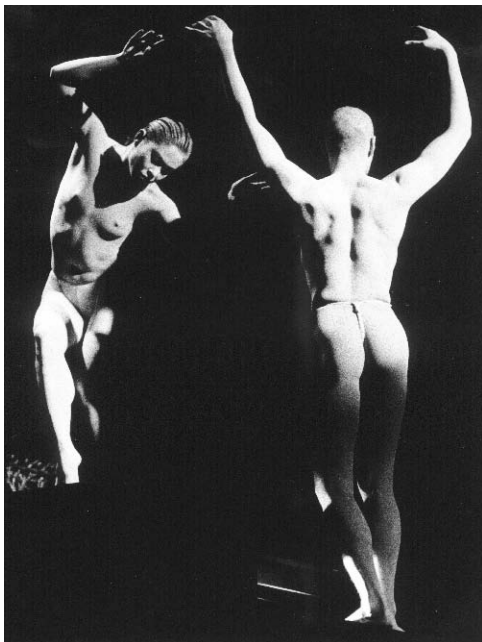
**JAY:** Butoh is thought of by many people as being a traditional Japanese form of dance but its history is less than 50 years old.

**sw:** I understand that *Sunyata* is a piece that has been with you since it premiered in 1991. Can you talk about the journey you've taken as creators with this piece – how it has grown over the past 15 years?

**JAY:** The seminal piece that was the beginning of *Sunyata* was a 20 minute work that Barbara choreographed called *Dis/0 to the Power* where four dancers emerged from a vat of liquid clay to the accompaniment of a string quartet and a timpanist playing music composed by Robert J. Rosen. That work was created in 1987, Kokoro Dance's second year of existence. In 1989, we developed the work into an 80-minute piece for eight dancers, three taiko drummers, a percussionist and a cellist to an expanded score by Robert and with a new title, *Zero to the Power*. In 1990, we created a duet to music by Robert that we called *Aeon*. Robert suggested that if we were to add a "heaven" section to the "hell" of *Zero to the Power* and the "purgatory" of *Aeon*, we would have a trilogy of works analogous to *The Divine Comedy*. As we were not really drawn to a Christian view of the universe, Barbara choreographed a



Jay Hirabayshi and Barbara Bourget Photo: Bruce Law



third section called *Elysian Fields*, but we titled the whole work *Sunyata*. We premiered *Sunyata* in 1991 but could only afford to include five dancers and one musician. The work was well-received but we felt we could do better so, in 1997, we remounted the work with eight dancers and five musicians at the Vancouver East Cultural Centre. Unfortunately, only Vancouver audiences were able to see the work. We decided to remount the work to celebrate our twentieth year in dance and to tour it so that more people could experience what to us is a heartfelt journey through life as we know it.

**sw: You are both mature artists – ok, I'll say it "old" to be still dancing – is there something about butoh that allows a dancer to have a longer career?**

**JAY:** Kazuo Ohno gave his first public performance at the age of 49 and did not become famous until he was in his 70s. Butoh is as physically demanding as ballet

but it does not require the technical skills that in ballet are rarely maintained by dancers past their mid-30s. In Japan, there is a different attitude about age than there is in the West. You are not considered to really know what you are doing until you are 77 years of age. Ballet fantasizes an idealized body that is young, light, and ethereal. Butoh finds beauty in humanity with all its blemishes and bumps. As we grow older, we become better butoh dancers. We have more to say and we know how to say it better. *Sunyata*, however, is definitely a challenge to perform as it is two and a half hours long and Barbara and I perform the whole time.

**sw: What are the primary things you impart to new company members who may not have previous experience with butoh.**

**JAY:** Dance can be a very narcissistic art form and many young dancers are too concerned with how they look and they don't know that what they look like is less important than having something to say. Many dancers new to butoh try to emulate the look of a butoh dancer without understanding that in butoh, you cannot pretend to be something you are not. Butoh is about being a flower, not miming one. This goes for other dance expression as well. There are ballet dancers that I consider to be good technicians and there are ballet dancers that I consider to be

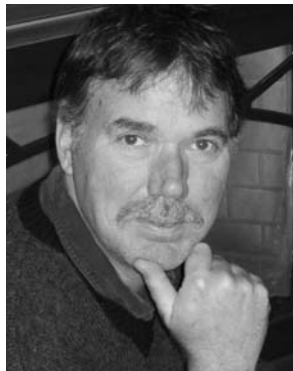
butoh dancers. The latter transcend technique to become meaningful movers. They are not pretending to be swans. They are swans.

**sw: Aside from a life partnership, the two of you are also co-creators. How does this work in the studio – how do you develop a work together?**

**JAY:** We are each other's harshest critics but we are also each other's biggest supporters. We challenge each other and push each other. Sometimes we insult each other. But we also love each other so however painful a creation process may be, in the end we know that what hasn't killed us has made us stronger. We have created over 170 works either singly or in collaboration with one another and each process has been different so there is not a simple formula that we follow. One or the other of us will initiate a project and the other will join in—sometimes enthusiastically and sometimes with aggressive reluctance. We contribute choreography to each other's initiatives and discuss the work constantly until it is done. Sometimes, as with *Sunyata*, the conversation continues for two decades.**FN**

# KOKORO DANCE

# DANCE SCENE



Stephen White Photo: Stuart Copeland

March is a busy month for dance. I am back and forth to Vancouver so much I could practically fly the helicopter! (Thank you to our sponsor Helijet Airways).

In early March I was in the audience at the Norman Rothstein Theatre in Vancouver to see a mixed program of dance works from a range of Vancouver artists that was presented as part of the Cutzpah! festival. Highlights for me

were a work choreographed by Alison Denham who was here in January and is part of Wen Wei's company. The piece entitled *The Way of Two* was danced by Denham and Darcy McMurray. It was a short work – maybe seven minutes – beautifully danced with precise ensemble work, lots of lift, strong arms and legs, and a disarming joyfulness. It was a refreshing work that made me interested in seeing more of Alison's choreography in the future.

The real knockout for me on that same bill was the work of a Vancouver company called Science Friction led by co-creators Shannon Moreno and Farley Johansson. The piece was a little bit theatrical, with the dances being developed from situations and character relationships, but the content, the physicality was well, amazing. Five very talented dancers managed to fuse street dance, hip hop and pure athleticism to create a sexy, muscular 20-minute work that demanded your constant attention. This was one of those pieces that is packed with "wows!"

Other premieres in Vancouver this month include battery opera's *[storm]* which was partially developed here in Victoria last January and Crystal Pite's new large work for six dancers that opens on March 24. Both openings are eagerly awaited in the community. battery opera's will be presented in Victoria in February, 2007, in a co-production agreement between us and the Belfry Theatre. *[storm]* is part of the Belfry's annual Festival.

## Planting the Seeds

This July, the Victoria Dance Series is planting some seeds that may grow into something wonderful. Lee Su-Feh, a co-Artistic Director of Vancouver's battery opera, recently saw a work at the Dance Centre in Vancouver performed by Victoria's own Jung-ah Chung. For those of you who are not aware of Jung-ah, she is without question, Victoria's busiest dancer. She has performed with Constance Cooke, Ballet Victoria, Suddenly Dance, Tripod Collective and most recently she presented her own work at Lynda Raino's Dance Studio. Jung-ah's jaw-dropping flexibility and balance, not to mention beautiful line and extensions make anything she interprets better than it ever was in the mind of the choreographer. That's why she's so busy.

Su-Feh was very interested in Jung-ah when she saw her in Vancouver and, well, one conversation led to another and somewhere along the line, the Victoria Dance Series got involved

so that now we have offered to put the two women together in a studio for a week this July and see what happens. It's, of course, a perfect project to be supported by the Series because of our long affiliation with battery opera and because the work involves a Victoria dancer.

Su-Feh will also be offering daily classes to the general public, July 17 through 22. When she offered these classes in January, 2005, 80 people signed up to participate for 15 available spots! The sessions use principles distilled from qigong and martial arts as a starting point to investigate the expressive body. Using breath work based on qigong and yoga, Su-Feh works to integrate the thinking body and the intuitive body as it moves through space.

Information about the classes and an opportunity to register on-line will be posted on our website in May 2006.

## More Seeds

In our last newsletter you read about the three-week, January, 2006, residency of Wen Wei Dance we hosted in Victoria. We are happy to report that we recently received support from the Canada Council for the Arts to bring another company to Victoria over three weeks in January, 2007. The company is The Chimera Project from Toronto, under the direction of Malgorzata Nowacka. While they are in town, Mal and her six dancers will develop a new work entitled *Drawing the Line* or *The Hidden Spot*.

In addition to having time in the studio to work on their new piece, we are currently having conversations with the folks at the McPherson Playhouse about giving the company access to the stage, lights and sound over a few days so that they can begin to play with what the finished work will look like. It's not often that dance companies have access to technicians and equipment while they are developing a work. It's hoped that introducing these elements early in the process will lead to a better integration of the technical aspects in the final production.

Once again, the resident company will offer free classes and workshops and the residency will culminate in a studio showing for a group of visiting presenters from across Canada.

## New Orleans, BC

On April 6, Ballet British Columbia will open John Alleyne's newest choreography, *A Streetcar Named Desire*. The company has been developing this work over the past season and recently completed a creative residency at the Kay Meek Centre in West Vancouver. *Streetcar* has been selected to open our tenth anniversary season in September, 2006.

Former Ballet BC publicist Richard Forzley has been documenting the development of this new work. Below is an extract from Forzley's series of articles, offering an inside look at the creation process. This piece focuses on the role of the "librettist" – the individual who takes the original play and adapts it for dance. In this case, that individual is the celebrated Canadian playwright John Murrell [*Waiting for the Parade*]. Murrell and Alleyne have



collaborated before.

Here's a description of how they are developing *Streetcar*:

Today the dancers have their first look at John Murrell's scenario for the new ballet. Although based on the familiar Tennessee Williams text, Murrell has had to rely on his visual sense to develop the story line without the benefit of explanatory dialogue [in order for the work to be "choreography ready"].

"It's a play that I know extremely well since I've had almost a lifelong fascination with Tennessee Williams. I have worked with John [Alleyne] on several ballets now and our process always

starts with a long and very thorough discussion about the source text so that I know what interests him about it. If I fail to capture what drives the primary artist, in this case John, it doesn't matter how well written the scenario is, I have failed."

Murrell and Alleyne begin by discussing structure—where is the beginning, middle and end of the story—and what are John's instinctive impulses about the piece. "I want to get both his conscious and unconscious responses to the story," Murrell says. "At this point, I try to merge my notes with the original document. Sometimes, as in the case of *The Faerie Queen*, the process is easy. In that case he was very specific about the characters and the part of the story he wanted to use.

"In the case of *Streetcar*, we developed a kind of shorthand based on our working experience together. He can think blue sky creatively and I take notes. Hopefully I bring that back to him in the first draft. The other thing I try to do—actually the hardest part—is telling the story just with images, movement in space and instrumental music. Even though there may be a synopsis in the programme, you should be able to understand the story without reading about it first. That's the biggest challenge.

"Working with John has been an invigorating experience for me at this stage in my creative life, allowing me to forget about the avalanche of words and simply use the human figure coming into a space and leaving a space and interacting with others to music that is yet to be written."

The difficulty of working with this particular play is compounded by its familiarity to audiences worldwide and the archetypal characters playwright Tennessee Williams created in Blanche, Stella and Stanley. "We all have various associations to this play so I had to chip away at the filter of Vivien Leigh, Jessica Tandy, Marlon Brando and the other great actors who have imagined these roles and free my imagination to get to the basic

archetype and what Williams was really after.

"I felt that we had a chance to open up parts of the story that in a spoken play or even a musical version you can't do. For example, in reading the text there is a powerful relationship between who Blanche has become and who she once was, perhaps one of the most important relationships in the play. We know that she was a very different human being at Belle Reve with her young husband than the damaged woman that is in front of us in New Orleans."

Murrell also thinks that Blanche's time at the Flamingo Hotel changed her significantly, morphing her into a different woman by the time she arrives at Stella's apartment. Alleyne says, "Because of some of John's suggestions, I felt there had to be a character named Young Blanche as well as a character called Blanche DuBois that would really allow us to explore something unique."

Obviously another great advantage to this technique is being able to actually see Alan, the young husband who is only talked about in the play, interact with Blanche. "Somehow being able to do that just through movement without having to characterize Alan and his friend in dialogue leaves it in Blanche's wonderful and dreadful memory world so that we know we are seeing that world through her eyes. Although it may not be what really happened, it's something deeper than what really happened - it's the thing she remembers." **FN**

You can read more of Richard Forzley's inside look at the development of *Streetcar* at [www.balletbc.com](http://www.balletbc.com)



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## A sneak preview of the 2006-2007 Season!

The new brochure is at the printers and as current subscribers you will receive yours in mid-April. Once again, you'll have a chance to renew your subscription and get first pick of great seats before we put tickets on sale to the general public.

### BALLET BC

#### A Streetcar Named Desire

Gala: 10th Anniversary Season opening  
September 29 & 30, 2006  
Choreography: John Alleyne  
Tennessee Williams' Pulitzer Prize award-winning play *A Streetcar Named Desire* is danced to an original jazz score by Victoria's Tobin Stokes.

### WEN WEI DANCE

#### Unbound

October 26 & 27, 2006  
Choreographer: Wen Wei Wang  
In this dynamic work for six dancers, Wen Wei fuses traditional Beijing Opera, Chinese classical dance and ballet in an unforgettable evening of muscular and dangerous partnering, solid ensemble work and poignant solos.

### AILEY® II

February 27 & 28, 2007

Ailey®II will present a dynamic evening of mixed repertoire

### ROYAL WINNIPEG BALLET

#### Dracula

March 30 & 31, 2007

Choreography: Mark Godden

Since it last appeared in Victoria, Mark Godden's *Dracula* has become an international film sensation. Complete with flying bats, dancing gargoyles and mysterious transformations, *Dracula* is contemporary ballet at its atmospheric finest.

### DECIDEDLY JAZZ DANCE- WORKS

#### New Work

April 3 & 4, 2007

Choreography: Vicki Adams Willis

Victoria favourites, DJD return with a new, blues-infused production with phenomenal blues/gospel vocalist, Jackie Richardson.

### ADDITIONAL SHOWS

### ALBERTA BALLET

#### Nutcracker

with the Victoria Symphony

Nov. 24 & 25, 2006

Nov. 25 & 26, 2006 @ 2pm

Lush costumes and Tchaikovsky's memorable music played live.

### BATTERY OPERA

#### [storm]

March 13 through 17, 2007 @ 8 pm

Creators: Lee Su-Feh and David McIntosh  
A co-presentation with the Belfry Theatre  
Since bringing their controversial show *Spektator* to Victoria in the fall of 2003, battery opera's David McIntosh and Lee Su-Feh have tossed and turned a piece originally titled *Cyclops* into *[storm]*.



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