

FOOTNOTES

MAY 2006

VictoriaDanceSeries.com

BY FASTRAC

#15

WHITE ON PITE

Underlying Pite's structural and formal concerns is a human centre, something that gives her work an enlivening emotional and often comical dimension... In Pite, there is a balance of the intellectual and the sensual; she moves audiences with her delight to be dancing.

– Hour (Montreal).

Crystal came to Victoria before the performance to do media interviews. I remember meeting her and remarking almost immediately: "You're so young." Crystal defiantly said "I'm 31!" At that time, I wasn't aware how much this beautiful, aware, modest woman had packed into 31 years.

Crystal was born in Terrace, BC, but raised in Victoria, and after performing original choreographies for her mother in the dining room at age four, was registered at Maureen Eastick's Pacific Dance Centre. Each season, Pite participated in local competitions, winning various honours. Eventually she augmented her winter classes with summer intensives at the School of Toronto Dance Theatre, the Banff Centre and the National Ballet School.

In 1988, at 17, she joined Ballet British Columbia, which was in its second year under the artistic leadership of Reid Anderson. In 1990, during Barry Ingham's term as Artistic Director, the American maverick choreographer William Forsythe was invited to Vancouver to create a work for the company. This led to Pite joining Forsythe's Ballett Frankfurt in 1996.

Over the next five years in Germany, Pite was often homesick for Victoria, her boyfriend Jay and her family but by all accounts this was an important, formative time. She had already successfully choreographed work at Ballet BC, and with a number of independent dance artists. Her work with the Toronto-based touring company Ballet Jörgen garnered the prestigious Clifford E. Lee award for choreography.

In Frankfurt, Pite was in the company of 40 dancers and creators. She experienced technical challenges (Forsythe's work is notoriously difficult) including demanding pointe work. She toured the world, per-

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I first met Crystal Pite shortly after she moved back to Canada in 2001. She was touring with Les Ballets Jazz de Montreal (BJM) that season. She had completed the first part of a three-year choreographic residency with the company and BJM's tour included her new and very inventive *23 Short Works* (later *24 Short Works*). This is the same piece that opened *The Stolen Show*, which we presented at the Royal in November.



Richard Siegal Photo by Chris Randle

The **Victoria Dance Series Society** is a non-profit, charitable organization dedicated to dance presentation and education.

Our Mission: 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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forming Forsythe's famous deconstructions of traditional ballet. But it was Forsythe's open creation process, where he gave consideration to everything and everyone when developing a work that would most impress Pite. It offered a new way working. And there was a charged atmosphere in the company, everyone was interested in creation. One afternoon Forsythe looked at a solo Pite had created for herself. Forsythe offered some ideas of how Pite might layer the choreography, shifting it into another structure. The experience was enlightening and would have impacts on her work for many years.

During her tenure with the company, Ballett Frankfurt produced two of Pite's works.

Fast forward to that fall day in 2001: Crystal is freshly back in Canada. She has just completed the first of a three-part residency with Les Ballets Jazz and there we are at Rising Star Bakery on Broad Street, having coffee between interviews. Crystal says: "I have always wanted to work with Lynda Raino." My heart skips and two months later we have a signed agreement. We're on our way to a piece called *A Conversation* that premiered in Victoria in April 2004.

I learned a lot about Crystal when we worked on *A Conversation*. I learned about her creative process and took a few lessons on how to commission new work. What I didn't know that day is that Crystal's Canadian career was on the cusp of taking off – and this small commission from Victoria came just weeks before her plate was very full indeed. I was new to commissioning and the Victoria Dance Series didn't have a lot of resources — so there was not much to pay. The first thing I learned about Crystal was the depth of her generosity. She committed to the project because she was honouring our agreement.

As she began creating the piece with Lynda it became clear she had something very important to say. Lynda, in her mid-50s, decided that this would be her farewell performance and Crystal graciously honoured this woman's profound life passage by working with her to create a piece about the ephemeral nature of dance, and the sum of a life's work. Crystal made a gift to another dancer. It was an extraordinary thing to witness.

We put Lynda and Crystal and the team in the McPherson Playhouse for a full week before opening. During that week, I often dropped in. Most times, I would see Lynda sitting on stage, in a corner, knitting. Crystal would be in the auditorium in quiet dialogue with lighting designer Ian Rye as they adjusted a light, or its angle. I remember Lynda saying, "I've never worked like this. They've been at it for days."

Pite often designs the costumes, the set and consults with the lighting designer. She has such a fully formed idea of a work – and she is a perfectionist. The result though, is that a Pite creation has real integrity.

The other thing I learned is that Pite is a performer. She has chops. Over the years, through the competitions, recitals, and touring, she has accumulated experience that lives deep in her bones. She's like Lynda Raino that way — a great sense of comic timing, a very good sense of how to construct a work so that it takes us somewhere.

I have seen all Crystal's work since she returned to Canada. She is a prolific creator. In her most recent work, *Lost Action*, which premiered in Vancouver last March, she signaled her move to a new direction. This work is darker, more profound — beautifully textured, with startling images and complex patterning performed by an amazing ensemble of dancers. It intrigued me and made me interested in seeing her next work. She is one of those artists, who gives you delight in watching the development of the work from one piece to the next. That's because there is always progression in her work.

Double Story is like *A Conversation*, in that it is a more intimate work created with a collaborating partner, Richard Siegal. It combines its creators' wit with storytelling, puppetry, and funhouse mirrors and it contains some breathtaking dance.

Crystal is now 35. How is it possible to have developed such a large body of intelligent, innovative work? Somehow, she has accessed a fount of creativity within and developed a way of working so that she is able to process ideas, images and influences like we eat food. She has said "I put a lot of importance on skill, accomplishment, technique and rigour." It shows. **FN**

Please Note: Double Story will play for 70 minutes, without intermission. Double Story comprises two pieces: The Bouncy Woman Piece, choreographed by Richard Siegal, and Man Asunder, choreographed by Crystal Pite with music by Diane Labrosse.

The Score

The third component to *Double Story* is the music, performed live. Montreal musician Diane Labrosse not only composed the score but will be playing it.



Diane Labrosse - Photo by Celine Côté

Labrosse approaches music with unconventional sounds and noises. Since 1985, she has been performing regularly on the scenes of conceptual, avant-garde and improvised music around the world. She has taken part in many renowned festivals in Europe, Japan, Australia, Canada and the USA. As a composer, she has created music for theatre director Robert Lepage (*The Geometry of Miracles and Zulu Time*), for dancers/choreographers Deborah Dunn (*Blackmail*), Andrew Harwood (*Sens cible, 6e Sens*), Louise Bédard (*What remains*) and film makers Patricia Rozema (*Desperanto*) and Luc Bourdon (*L'interview*).

She has created multi-media installations for Theatre Cryptic, Scotland, and Tura-ya-moya, Denmark, and has written works for small ensembles from Montreal, Toronto and Vancouver. Her discography comprises more than 30 recordings, most of which can be found on the Montreal independent label, Ambiances Magnétiques. She is also co-artistic director of Productions SuperMusique. **FN**

A Twist on the Pre-Show Chat

By now the audience for Victoria Dance Series presentations is well accustomed to arriving at the theatre shortly after 7 pm, finding a seat in the lobby and preparing for a pre-show chat. Well, just as you were getting used to this idea we will be taking a different approach with *Double Story*.

The pre-show chat will begin at 7:40 pm on both evenings in the auditorium. Richard and Crystal have constructed *Double Story* so that it begins in a more casual or informal way — with the two of them setting the stage for the performance.

To accommodate the pre-show chat, they are expanding this “entré” into the dance and will be taking questions from the audience while on stage.

Master Class

Crystal Pite: Dance Improvisation
Tuesday, May 16
12:30 pm – 2 pm

AT: Lynda Raino Dance
715 Yates Street (3rd Floor)
\$15 • www.DanceVictoria.com to register

Open to intermediate and advanced students with some experience studying modern technique — Crystal will teach a 90 minute class in improvisation.



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SIEGAL SPEAKS

Now meet Richard Siegal, who choreographed *The Bouncy Woman Piece* and dances throughout. Siegal spent seven years at Ballett Frankfurt (1997 through 2004) and now enjoys an international career, choreographing for festivals in countries around the world. He has a number of new projects in the works this season.

I caught up with him in April, when Crystal and he were rehearsing *Double Story* prior to opening in Toronto.

Stephen White: What was the genesis for this project?

Richard Siegal: In the summer of 2000, José Navas invited me to participate in a choreographic seminar in Montreal. The format brought together five choreographers and five composers who worked together with a group of dancers on a rotational basis for five days. At the end of each day, each team would show the work they created to the public. It was, among other things, an exercise in speed and creating from the gut. On the third day, I was teamed up with Diane Labrosse and Montreal-based dancer Sophy Jansen. The resulting solo was the basis for *The Bouncy Woman Piece*. The work took another turn in 2001 when I was able to bring Diane to Frankfurt to make *Monster Johnson*, a short group piece based on the same ideas and content. In 2002 I was invited to share an evening at Dance Theater Workshop in New York City. My idea was to return to the original solo format for one woman. I proposed to Crystal, who had recently left Ballett Frankfurt, to dance the part. The resulting work, *xcongruenttoxprime*, was very close to *The Bouncy Woman Piece*.

SW: How would you describe your approach to choreography - what is it that you are most interested in exploring? Would you describe it as "impulsive" or more "well considered/designed?"

RS: It's been very interesting for me to witness another choreographer's way of thinking and constructing a performance. I have rarely gone into a studio with a clear plan of what I would make. Whereas Crystal approached the making of *Man Asunder* [the second part of *Double Story*] as a filmmaker might storyboard a film before shooting it, I am most apt to continue in the vein of José's seminar and to walk into a studio with some vague notions and a video camera and start making. In a sense, the creative relationship between my imagination and my presence in a space remain intact. It is in retrospect after I have put something out that I can begin to define it critically. I enjoy that process of discovery. It feels like learning.

SW: How important is humour in your work?

RS: In this work, it is very important. One of the delights in working with Crystal is our shared sense of humour. It's a pleasure to be with someone who can make you laugh so often (and



Richard Siegal Photo by Louise Verri

who laughs at your jokes). That humour finds its way into the work. Often, however, the humour of *Double Story* can be quite dark. It may serve to add a sense of irony to the subjects we explore.

SW: When you consider *Bouncy Woman* in the context of your recent work where does it fit and how is it similar to or different from that work?

RS: Another approach to choreographing I have taken has been an investigation into choreographic systems and collaborative authorship. *Double Story* is a great example of a classic collaboration technique in which the territory of decision making is very discrete. In other works I make I look to create an environment in which work is made, as opposed to "making" the work. The strategy is to blur the boundaries of authorship (to varying degrees) so that all participants bring their decisions to bear on the product. Collaboration is not necessarily the subject of this work. But this manner of making things expresses my belief that the beauty of systemic complexity resides in relinquishing individual control to the infinitely more qualified organizational abilities of communities.

SW: What is it that you find compelling about dance as an expressive art form as opposed to, say, "theatre" or "writing"?

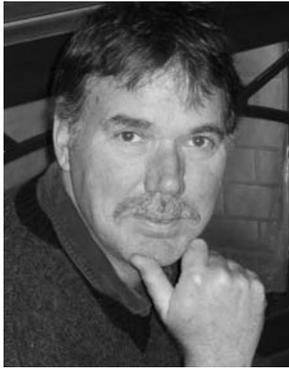
RS: I think there is definitely something singular to dance as opposed to theatre. Recently, I have been reading an essay by Paul Valery called *The Philosophy of Dance*. It was written in 1936 but may be of particular use to us now. I think we are living in an age which was preceded by a wonderful creativity which sought to hybridize artistic expression in an effort to generate new forms. The nature of dance remains intact but is couched in these experiments. It may be what a spectator means when she exits a performance and wishes there was a little dance with the dance. Valery's essay speaks to this subject at a time when the body alone in motion was sufficiently shocking to put the spectator into a state of not knowing. How the dancer achieves this, how he is transformed by dance, is central to the essay and is a definition of the singular nature of dance.

SW: What would you hope an audience leaves with after seeing your work?

RS: That would depend on the work. In the case of *Double Story*, I hope people leave with a competing sense of ambiguity and satisfaction. It is a narrative riddle which speaks in the language of storytelling but does not desire to be fully decoded. I hope the people take pleasure both during the performance and afterwards pondering what the show suggests, how its interpretation changes over time. **FN**



DANCE SCENE



Stephen White Photo: Stuart Copeland

Oh, what a night. The Queen Elizabeth Theatre in Vancouver was packed to the rafters April 6. The air crackled with excitement. The evening was promoted as Ballet BC's largest creation – Artistic Director John Alayne's return to full-length ballet. The first since *Orpheus*. Rumours about the “difficult” creation process had been circulating in the dance community for months. Added to this (for

me) was the anticipation of hearing Victoria composer Tobin Stokes' original jazz score.

We were not disappointed. *A Streetcar Named Desire* is in my opinion, Alayne's strongest work to date. I know I am out on a limb on this one — there are so many people devoted to *The Fairy Queen*, (and I'm one of them) — but this work has Tennessee Williams' profound, heartbreaking story at its core. And the ballet has such integrity — there is nothing superfluous; everything contributes to the whole. The costumes, the set and the lighting are gorgeous. And the dancers...Simone Orlando was born to dance Blanche and Donald Sales is an understated, brooding, brutish Stanley. Stella is beautifully danced by Courtney Richardson and there is real heat between her and Sales.

The beauty of this version is in the adaptation provided by John Murrell who wrote the “script”. In a departure from the original Williams' play, Murrell puts Blanche's past life on stage, portraying the events that brought her to her present state. This addition not only adds texture to the story, it intensifies the emotional punch by putting the tragedy in sharper relief.

Alayne's choreography is beautiful — a further refinement of his already interesting contemporary ballet vocabulary supported by a complex, layered jazz score by Stokes. What a night. I was on my feet. I am very excited that this new work will open our 10th Anniversary Season in September.

Yolanda Gets Her Man — and a New Job to Boot!

Dance Victoria has taken a giant step forward and is very excited to announce that as of May 1, 2006, Yolanda M. Meijer is joining our team as Director of Development.

Yolanda has been a friend of mine for some time — one of those strong, instant connections one (rarely) has where upon first meeting there is a familiarity; a bond. We felt comfortable with each other immediately and have enjoyed many intense conversations about issues and ideas ever since — as well as couple of laughs. Over the past six years, Yolanda has been working at the Art Gallery of Greater Victoria where she had a significant impact, reorganizing the way in which the Gallery approached member-

ship and giving, bringing new sponsors to major exhibitions and dramatically increasing the net revenue realized from special events.

As we have been telling you for some time, our intention in 2006/07 is to raise the barre at Dance Victoria — enhancing our presentations with more opening night receptions and parties, adding a special event, enhancing donor benefits and attracting more sponsors. This will be Yolanda's responsibility.

Yolanda was born in White Rock in 1966 to Theo and Marjan Meijer who had emigrated from The Netherlands in 1960. Yolanda's dad (now retired) taught Law, Economics, Western Civilization and the Theory of Knowledge while also coordinating the International Baccalaureate program at the Abbotsford Senior Secondary School. Marjan was a purchasing agent for a company that created patented software for the lumber industry. Yolanda's older brother lives in Gordon Head with his wife and two kids. Her favourite childhood memories involve having the freedom to roam her neighbourhood and play with friends in the world's best tree house, which became a centre of activity.

Three years ago, Yolanda made a decision that has changed her life. Here's how she puts it: “I always knew that I wanted to have the amazing experience of being a parent and when Plan A (doing it with the love of my life) didn't pan out, I went for Plan B (having a baby on my own). Having a child has been everything I thought it would be. I am very fortunate to finally find the love of my life — I just never anticipated it would come as a little boy.”

The thing I most admire about Yolanda is her loyalty to family. She is a people person, charismatic, attractive and intelligent. She also likes to plan – and as my friends will tell you I am a big advocate of planning. Dance Victoria will give her the chance to work from home, be more flexible with her hours so that she can respond to Oliver when he needs her. For Dance Victoria, adding Yolanda to our staff of 1.5 means a whole new level of operations. I'm thrilled to be working with someone for whom I have so much respect.

Welcome Yolanda!



Life after Kokoro

In all my years as a producer I have never presented a work (theatre, music, dance or otherwise) that polarized the audience so dramatically. And there have been some controversial programs in my tenure at Dance Victoria but, without a doubt this one tipped the reaction scale. If you are one of those people who left at intermission you'll have to trust me when I tell you that at the end of both performances, many of those remaining gave *Sunyata* a standing ovation. The auditorium was filled with bravos and sustained applause.

What was interesting to me (now that I have some perspective) was my personal journey. We all want everyone to like us – and I have a larger need than most people (I used to be an actor). That was one tough weekend — oh my! — made worse when one subscriber contacted me to say that I had “violated the trust she had put in me when she bought season tickets”. Ouch, that hurt. That “trust” is the most important part of the relationship I have with you.

In my mind I take you along to every dance performance I see. I'm constantly asking myself, “is it important for Victoria to see this work?” There is a lot of dance I don't bring because, from my perspective, it isn't advancing the art form or changing our perceptions, or it's not well developed.

Despite the fallout, I still stand by my decision to present Kokoro, in part for all those people who contacted me to say the show was “life affirming,” “hypnotic,” “life changing,” and, yes, even “brilliant.” Secondly, because Barbara Bourget and Jay Hirabayashi are principled artists who have dedicated their lives to their art form at great personal cost. As teachers they have influenced at least a couple of generations of dancers in Canada. And I support this company because they give expression to the big ideas.

Is there a chance that you'll see something in the coming seasons that will not be to your taste? Absolutely. But will that work have integrity — trust me, it's a priority.

On the Menu: Sept 29, 2006

Cornmeal crusted ahi tuna with cilantro orange relish and oven toasted yam fries. Po-Boy fried oysters, served on french bread with smoked paprika aioli and cucumber pepper grass salad. Cajun wrap with chicken confit and shrimp salad. Carved pork loin stuffed with andouille sausage and served on saffron risotto, finished with a balsamic cream. Crabmeat au gratin in a spicy blend of cheese and cream with pickled green beans and okra potato salad. Grilled tiger prawns in a remoulade sauce with horse radish and capers. Jerk beef satay with five pepper jelly and pickled okra. And to finish, French-bread pudding soaked in whiskey-butter sauce, topped with French vanilla cream. Hungry yet?

Add a fantastic jazz trio, put all of the Ballet BC dancers in the room, offer a complimentary drink to get things going and then whip it all together with a generous dollop of Louisiana bonhomie. Voila! You have the **10th Anniversary Dance Victoria Gala Opening Night celebration** at the Marriott Ballroom immediately following Ballet BC's performance of *A Streetcar Named Desire* on September 29, 2006.

This is the party of the Fall Season — you won't want to miss it. Tickets are \$50 (+GST and service charges) and are available at the McPherson Box Office (386-6121).

We sincerely hope you join us!



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QUARTER NOTES

Spring Renewals!

By now you will have received the 10th Anniversary subscription brochure and I trust you will have renewed your subscription.

If, for some odd reason, you did not get a brochure — please call us at 595-1829 so that we can immediately rectify the situation. If you are having trouble deciding which performances you'd like to see, I am happy to answer your questions.

New website

The shiny new www.DanceVictoria.com website is up and running, ready for you to explore.

Recently we added information about local dance studio spring recitals and summer school programs so there is loads of information in the Dancer's Resource Centre.

Audience Survey

Tucked in with this newsletter is our end of year survey.

These surveys help us understand you a little more. They tell us what are the most effective ways to advertise. When the information is collated, we present it to potential sponsors so that we can tell them in general terms about the audience for Dance Victoria. We ask that you please take the time to fill it out and return it — or just go to www.DanceVictoria.com and click on "Survey" and send it to us electronically.

On June 5 we will randomly select one of the surveys and offer that lucky person two free tickets to the Belfry Theatre's summer show, *Mom's the Word 2: Unhinged*.



Crystal Pire and Richard Siegel Photo by Chris Fanelle

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