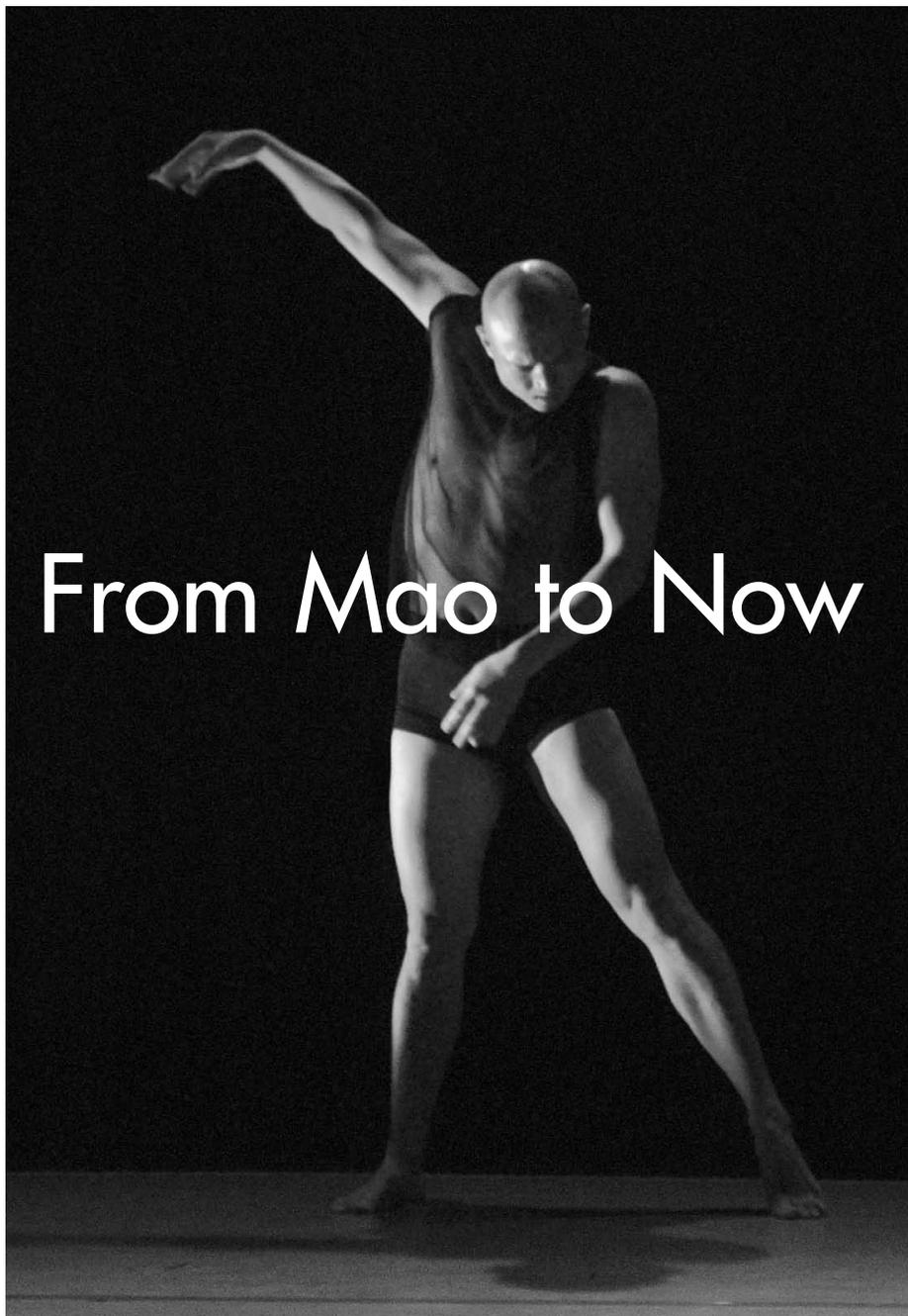


FOOTNOTES

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From Mao to Now

Wen Wei Wang Photo: Chris Randle

Wen Wei Wang, choreographer of *Unbound* came to Canada from China for the first time in 1986. When *Unbound* premiered at Ottawa's Canada Dance Festival in June, 2006, Artistic Director Brian Webb asked Wen Wei to write about his experiences as a young dancer in China and his eventual emigration to Canada where he continued his artistic development.

Below is part of a larger, fascinating story. For the complete article go to DanceVictoria.com and click on "Library"

Dance entered my life at the age of five when I first saw a ballet performance in the industrial city of Xi'an, China, where I was born. I clearly remember a beautiful girl running away to a mountain where her hair turned white. Then a Communist soldier found her and brought her back to her village. They fell in love. That was the first ballet I saw and I will always remember returning home to borrow my mother's white silk scarf to put around my head. Then I demonstrated in front of my family and friends most of the steps from the beautiful solo I had seen the white haired girl dance. After that some people called me a little girl, but I didn't mind.

Of course the ballet I saw was actually called *The White Haired Girl*. It was created during the Cultural Revolution. That ballet and another one, *The Red Detachment of Women*, were very popular at that time and are still revered in China. They were the first ballets created with a Chinese theme. Chairman Mao's wife, Jiang Qing, had a lot to do with the creation and promotion of these ballets which were used as propaganda for the Communist regime. I had little awareness then of the politics involved. I just loved the dancing.

When I was very young I was a quiet person but I read a lot of books. My parents were both teachers and we lived at my mother's school. At that time in China families lived where they worked so my parents, two older sisters and I lived in one room of about 150 to 200 square feet. In that room we had one bed, a little bigger than a double bed, one table and two chairs. We also had a stove and wardrobe for our clothes. The only picture hanging on the wall was a portrait of Chairman Mao.

After my imitation of *The White Haired Girl*, word got around that I could dance. My parents had me show off my dancing to everyone who came to visit.

When I was six years old I was enlisted in a special performing arts residential

continues >

Fairley Johnsson & Karissa Barry Photo: Chris Rendle



> continued
 school for talented youngsters. At that school, all the students learned Chinese dance, music and singing as well as getting a basic education. We were taught more of the dances from *The White Haired Girl* and *The Red Detachment*

of *Women* than I already knew. My School was a Red Guard School. We spent a lot of time performing songs and dances that supported the Mao government's political philosophy. We performed for peasants, workmen, schools and army groups in many locations around Xi'an, including fields, halls and some big theatres. I still remember the words of one song that went something like this, "In the East the sun rises. In China we have Chairman Mao. He brings happiness to people's lives. From darkness into light, he is the sun."

Much of the dance training at the Red Guard School was folk dance. We performed one very popular dance at special occasions dressed in a green army uniform, an army hat, with a wide leather belt around our tunics. A red band was wrapped around our upper right arms and we carried Mao's red book in our hands. Special folk dance steps were performed together in a solid line and on the spot to symbolize our protection of Mao from his enemies. We would stamp our feet and gesture menacingly into thin air. Looking back on all this I can relate these experiences to some sequences of the current *Lord of the Rings* films.

I was considered to be the best dancer of the Red Guard School. As I was the star pupil, one of the school choreographers created a special piece for me and a young girl to perform wearing Tibetan costumes accompanied by a song expressing the Tibetan people's love for Mao. The steps

and movement patterns were based on the folk dances of Tibet. The duet became so popular that all the elementary schools in Xi'an selected their top students to come to our school to learn it. My partner would teach the girls and I the boys. We stood on separate ping pong tables made of stone and demonstrated the steps for the hundred or so visiting students. That dance, which was created for me and my partner became the signature piece of the elementary schools in Xi'an.

I was thirteen years old when I auditioned for the Army Dance School located in Lanzhou, the capital city of the North West Territory of China. There were eight of these dance schools throughout China, all of them attached to army dance companies. It was official policy of the Mao regime that the army be an active presence in all aspects of Chinese society, including educational and cultural matters. The army was not just there to protect the people. I grew up believing in the wisdom of Mao. I always wanted to wear a uniform and have the honour of belonging to the army. Together with most people in China, I loved Mao. He was a god - and his teachings were like a religion.

When I attended the audition for entry into the school I was so nervous that during the preliminary physical inspection my blood pressure tested very high.

I was therefore not accepted. My mother managed to talk to the Director of the school to tell him how much I loved dance. After waiting a week I was told I could join the school. My family was so proud. Their only son was accepted into the army where he could study and perform dance. **FN**

Continued at www.DanceVictoria.com
 (click on "Library")

Wen Wei Dance Unbound is at the McPherson Playhouse Thurs. Oct. 26, and Fri. Oct. 27, at 8 pm. Tickets: McPherson Box Office 386-6121. If you don't already have tickets or need some extras for a friend or visitor, be sure to ask for the Friend of Subscriber rate and receive the subscriber discount.

The performance is about 70 minutes in length.

DANCE VICTORIA

DANCEVICTORIA.COM

The Dance Victoria 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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 Stephen White

Director of Development
 Yolanda M. Meijer

Administrative Assistant
 Bill Hamar

Technical Consultant
 Ian Rye

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

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If you would like to be involved with the Dance Victoria, call: (250) 595-1829 or email: producer@dancevictoria.com

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



Master Class: Wen Wei Wang

Wednesday, Oct. 25

11:30 am to 1 pm

Lynda Raino Dance

715 Yates Street, 3rd Floor

GOTO: DanceVictoria.com to register: \$15

Wen Wei was an inspiration to a group of twenty local dancers when his company was in residence in Victoria last January. His mix of Tai Chi, classical Chinese dance and modern technique will introduce the experienced dancer to a new perspective on training.

Tailspin

Many of you will have read in our house program about Dance Victoria's support for a new dance company called Tailspin. Tailspin is an "integrated dance company", which means its membership includes wheelchair dancers and able-bodied dancers. Local choreographer/dancer Lori Hamar is the "Artistic Director" and Terry Wiens is providing administrative support in his capacity as project coordinator.

On our busy opening weekend, I went from opening night to the post performance Gala. The next morning, Bill and I hosted a brunch in our home for 18 members of the Vancouver dance community who had made the trip across the Straits to our opening. Afterwards we drove downtown to deliver food to Ballet BC dancers backstage at the Royal and then I took a moment to visit the studio at Gordon Head Recreation Centre, where Tailspin is developing its dance vocabulary.

I don't want to get too sentimental here, but sitting on the sidelines, watching Lori lead the group through some very basic upper body movement exercises to the accompaniment of Kate Richmond on piano, I was brought back to earth. I was struck by how important the work of Tailspin is and how essential it will be in our community in the years to come — changing perceptions about disability. All the Galas and Opening Nights are fantastic "feel good" events, but supporting a community initiative like Tailspin is a defining and unique feature that gives depth to our programs at Dance Victoria.

Pre-Show and Post-Show Chats

Thursday, Oct. 26 immediately following the performance

Friday, Oct. 27 @ 7:20 pm

We're trying something a little different with *Unbound*. On our opening night (Thursday), rather than assemble in the lobby at the McPherson prior to the show, we'll be asking those people who are interested to stay in their seats after the performance to meet Wen Wei and some of the dancers and to ask questions about the work you've just seen.

On Friday evening, in the lobby at the McPherson, company manager and Vancouver dance presenter Barbara Clausen will speak about the development of Wen Wei's work at 7:20 pm (prior to the performance). Clausen runs New Works, a unique organization providing management and production support to artists and projects in the performing arts. She initiated dance programming at the Firehall Theatre, and has also programmed dance series at the Playhouse Theatre, the Waterfront Theatre, the Vancouver East Cultural Centre and the Roundhouse Community Centre. Barbara was one of the founders and spent four years as the first Executive Director of the Dance Centre, and was for three years a Dance Officer at the Canada Council in Ottawa. **FN**



To mark the occasion of our 10th Anniversary Season, Dance Victoria asked writer Robin J. Miller to research and write about the history of dance in the Capital region. This is the first of a four-part series that will continue in *Footnotes* through the season.

DANCE IN VICTORIA PART I

Where it all began: Dorothy Wilson

By Robin J. Miller

When Stephen asked me to do a series of stories on the history of dance in Victoria, little did I know that I would uncover a personal connection to the woman who started it all in this town: Dorothy Wilson. Turns out my mother remembers Dorothy very well from her time as a teenaged singer with Stanley Park's Theatre Under the Stars in the early 1940s.

Dorothy had just come over to Vancouver from Victoria to take over June Roper's spot as director of the B.C. School of Dancing, which included the job of choreographing many local musicals. "She was a martinet, very strict — you had to get the technique right and the vocabulary right even when you were a singer not a dancer," my mother says, "but her students adored her."



Born in England in 1893, Dorothy Astle emigrated to Victoria when she was ten. Here, she took ballet classes with two French teachers known only as Madame Fay and Madame Valda, and secretly harboured a grand ambition to become a ballerina. Her very proper parents said no, so she followed the more accepted path and married and had children instead — only to fall into a professional dance career almost by chance.

Vancouver dance writer Leland Windreich explains, in his 1998 book *Dance Encounters*⁽¹⁾, what happened after Dorothy taught her six-year-old daughter Doreen a ballet routine for a school play: "Other mothers, vastly impressed by this display of talent, wanted their daughters to learn dancing and brought them to Wilson, who periodically relocated her living room furniture to create a makeshift studio. As the ranks swelled, she moved her classes into a church hall. By 1922 she had appropriated the ballroom of a mansion on Cook Street."

In 1927, a mysterious Russian added further cachet to the Wilson school. An article in the local paper recounts that Nicholas Rusanoff, formerly of the Imperial Russian Ballet, Moscow, and of New York, London and Paris, "after a careful survey of conditions in Victoria, has decided to associate himself with Mrs. Wilson in the school." An advertisement next to the article details the curriculum of the newly re-named and re-located Russian Ballet

School of Dancing on Broughton Street, which was to include social dancing — the Black Bottom and all types — as well as ballet, acrobatic dancing, limbering and stretching. (The ad also carefully warns that "stretching and acrobatic dancing is dangerous when directed by unreliable and unscrupulous instructors.")

Dorothy Wilson was obviously not unreliable — she worked to improve her ballet and teaching skills constantly, in Seattle, Los Angeles, San Francisco and London — but the Russian disappeared after a year.

In 1936, Dorothy mounted perhaps her greatest triumph: the North American première of the full-length comedy-ballet, *Coppélia*. (San Francisco likes to think it holds that honour but Victoria, in fact, beat that city by three years.) Dorothy's daughter, Doreen, danced the role of Swanilda on the stage of the Royal Theatre. Sixteen-year-old Ian Gibson (see page 5) was Franz, the boy who rejects his true love Swanilda for *Coppélia*, the mechanical doll, danced by Phyllis Addison. Wynne Shaw — whom we will discuss in the next article in this series — was one of Swanilda's six companions. A young painter named Jack Shadbolt helped assemble the sets, jury-rigged from old flats used by the Victoria Civic Opera Company. Tickets were 55 cents, 80 cents, and \$1.05. *The Daily Colonist* raved, calling it the "Crowning Success" of the theatre season.

In 1941, Dorothy Wilson moved to Vancouver for a five-year stint as director of the B.C. School of Dancing on Seymour Street, then moved to Fort St. John where she made a complete career change, taking a crash course from UBC and serving as regional librarian for the next 17 years. She also re-married there, to musician Eugene Forster. Dorothy returned to Victoria in the 1970s, offering classes in fitness, limbering and stretching at her condo building across from Beacon Hill Park until she was well over 90. She died, age 99, in 1992.

Windreich wrote an article called "Canada's First *Coppélia*" for *Dance in Canada Magazine* (Issue No. 40) in 1984. He ends the article this way: "The issue of who has earned the title 'Mother of Canadian Ballet' may never be resolved — there are several good contenders. But that of 'Grandmother' belongs indisputably to Dorothy Wilson who, unknown to most, brought quality ballet to British Columbia a half-century ago." **FN**

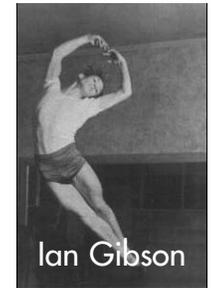
Robin J. Miller is a Victoria-based writer, editor and dance fan. She writes regularly for a variety of performing arts publications, including The Dance Current and Dance International.

(1). Published by Dance Collection Danse in Toronto.

VICTORIANS ON THE WORLD STAGE



Robert Lindgren



Ian Gibson

Two of Dorothy Wilson's male students went on to major ballet careers.

Ian Gibson, who played Franz in Wilson's 1936 production of *Coppélia*, was later acclaimed as "the Canadian Nijinsky" after he joined the Ballet Russe de Monte Carlo in 1939. He moved to New York's newly formed Ballet Theatre (now American Ballet Theatre) in 1941, where luminaries such as Michel Fokine re-staged ballets just for him. In late 1942, however, he joined the Royal Canadian Navy as a submariner and after three years underwater could never quite recapture his earlier love of dance or performance. He did very well as an executive in the business world.

In an interview with Leland Windreich in 1978⁽²⁾, Dorothy Wilson recalls Gibson's early ambivalence about dance: "He came to me one day and told me he had decided to call it quits. One of the boys at school had called him a fruit." Wilson quickly created a solo for him as a Roman warrior – complete with manly helmet, macho sword and shield.

Thirteen-year-old Robert Lindgren, who was in the audience for the famous 1936 *Coppélia*, was impressed enough by Ian Gibson's dancing that he enrolled with Dorothy Wilson immediately, and even followed her four years later to Vancouver.

Like Gibson, Lindgren danced with both Ballet Theatre and Ballet Russe de Monte Carlo; unlike Gibson, he was able to pick up his dance career when he finished his army service. After eight years with Ballet Russe, including three when George Balanchine was resident choreographer, Lindgren spent five years dancing in hit Broadway musicals and television specials. From 1957 to 1959, he danced with Balanchine's New York City Ballet, before retiring to teach in Arizona and North Carolina. In 1987, he was appointed the General Director of the School of American Ballet in New York and became President of the school in 1989. He retired from that position in 1991 over a conflict in vision, and returned to North Carolina where he continues to live today. **FN**

(2). Recalled in Windreich's *Dance Encounters*, Dance Collection Danse, 1998, p. 17.



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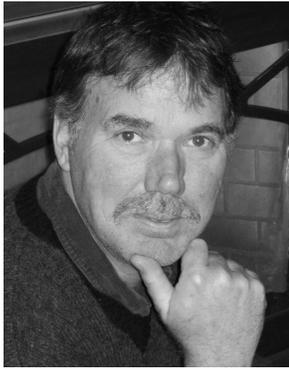
Remembering Dorothy Wilson

Robin Miller would like to hear your memories of Dorothy Wilson (or Dottie as she was known to friends). If you trained with Dorothy when you were young or recall seeing a school recital, we'd like to hear from you.

You can reach us by phone at 595-1829 or by email producer@dancevictoria.com

DANCE SCENE

Stephen White Photo: Stuart Copeland



It's been a very busy time here at Dance Victoria.

Getting a season up and running is always a challenge, but added to it this year was the extra pressure of a new house program that needed to be written and proofed, the opening Gala, and a new approach to designing posters. At any rate, I think it's safe to say that all my worry and anxiety has paid off again — we had a wonderful

opening weekend. I was somewhat overwhelmed by the strong support for the work we've been doing at Dance Victoria and the obvious appetite for dance our community demonstrated throughout the weekend's celebrations.

Next up: I am very excited to have Wen Wei Dance in Victoria. I think *Unbound* is an extraordinary piece of choreography. And the calibre of this company of young dancers is really the best of the west. Their agility, stamina and strength coupled with precise technique and gorgeous, sensual supple movement make them all "stars". And then there is Wen Wei himself, who is in a class of his own. At its core *Unbound* is a meditation on personal choice and freedom, which is such a moving metaphor for Wen Wei's personal life experience.

One of the things I treasured most while Wen Wei Dance was in Victoria for three weeks last January was getting to know the company of dancers. I was impressed, obviously, by their individual talent but I was inspired by the general level of fitness and flexibility each of them maintains. It speaks to a true dedication to the art form, but also to the demands of this extraordinarily layered work that incorporates elements of ballet and street dance, Tai Chi and soft shoe – and everything in between. And while the notion is that a choreography as eclectic as this will end up looking like a messy heap of un-integrated dance steps, remarkably, the opposite is true. Each section has its purpose.

One of the best parts of my job is the chance to see dance as it is evolving. Late in the summer I was invited to spend an hour in a studio to see a new work by Vancouver dance artist Day Helesic at the Dance Centre in Vancouver. Day was here with *The Holy Body Tattoo* 18 months ago. Her new work, *Surge*, later played to solid houses in Vancouver in the week leading up to Labour Day. Day had assembled a strong group of dancers and built a work that has real integrity. The kick for me was to be sitting at the edge of the studio, so aware and involved with the dancer's process. There's nothing like observing a dancer embody an emotion, seeing how it moves through their body.

Just before opening the season, I spent four days in Toronto at our annual CanDance Network meetings. CanDance is our national association with 29 members from across Canada. All of us are dance presenters, bringing dance into our communities from St John's Newfoundland to Victoria and points in-between. We often share companies, supporting a national tour. We also jointly commission work and put together exchanges that feature a mixed bill of dance works from our individual communities that we pack up and send off to three different cities.

We had some lively discussions not only about work that we see, but also about establishing standards for what we pay dance companies and the development of our own "ethic" statements. Believe it or not, I love this stuff — and I especially appreciate the expertise of my colleagues, several of whom have been in the business for many years.

In the month ahead, I am looking forward to the return of ROMP! This edgy festival from Sudden Dance is a crucible of new work on a smaller scale, the kind of dance that would get lost on the Royal Theatre stage but offers the same kind of intimate audience interplay that I mentioned experiencing in that Vancouver studio late last summer.

I look forward to hearing from you about your favourite dance experiences.

Stephen White, *Producer*

Youth Passes

There are still **Youth Pass** memberships available on-line for any student registered in Grades 8 through 12. To get your card that entitles you to purchase rush seats for \$10 to any dance Victoria presentation, register on-line at www.DanceVictoria.com

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THANK YOU!

Nutcracker Kids Program

The first contributions to our **Nutcracker Kids** program are coming in. Each \$50 donation buys two tickets that are distributed by our local Boys and Girls Club.

The Royal and McPherson Theatre Society has recently joined us as a co-sponsor of Nutcracker Kids. And, the following individuals have donated to our program:

- Mrs. R. G. Lawrence
- John Shields
- Dale Shortliffe
- Mrs. Alix C. Sutton

Recent Donors

Dance Victoria acknowledges the support of these recent donors:

- Heather Kohler (President's Circle)
- Erika Kurth (Endowment Fund)
- Mrs. R. G. Lawrence (Member)
- Wendy and Tim Vernon (Member)

Endowment Update

We've already told you that Dance Victoria is establishing a permanent endowment fund with the cooperation of the Victoria Foundation. In the calendar years 2006 and 2007, every dollar an individual contributes to the Dance Victoria Endowment Fund will be matched by a provincial and a federal program, allowing you to virtually triple your contribution. But the clock is ticking...

In order to be eligible for these programs, Dance Victoria must secure a minimum \$10,000 by November 30, 2006. Thus far we have had interest from a number of supporters and commitments from three individuals. If you're curious about the program, please call the office at 595-1829 and we can arrange to meet with you to give you more information.

The endowment fund will be held in perpetuity by Victoria Foundation and each year Dance Victoria will receive the interest earned to support our programs for youth, commissions of new work, bringing dance to the school and developing programs like Tailspin. **FN**

DANCE VICTORIA acknowledges the following generous sponsors and funding partners for our 2006/07 Season

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photos by Greta Parshik

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Alberta Ballet: *Nutcracker*
With the Victoria Symphony
November 24 & 25 @ 7:30 pm
November 25 & 26 @ 2 pm
Royal Theatre

Tchaikovsky's brilliant music is played live by the Victoria Symphony in a lush, traditional *Nutcracker* with over thirty impeccable dancers.

Ailey® II: Mixed Repertoire
February 27 & 28 @ 8 pm
Royal Theatre

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 – NYTimes

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March 13 through 17 @ 8 pm
Belfry, 1291 Gladstone Ave.

A thoughtful, raucous, bawdy and moving evocation of men and their relationships with their fathers from one of Canada's most inventive companies. Warning: Coarse Language. Not suitable for children

Canada's
Royal Winnipeg Ballet: *Dracula*
March 30 & 31 @ 8 pm
March 31 @ 2 pm
Royal Theatre

Complete with flying bats, dancing gargoyles and mysterious transformations, *Dracula* is contemporary ballet at its atmospheric finest.

Decidedly Jazz Danceworks
Magnetic Consequences
With vocalist Jackie Richardson and a
six-piece band
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Royal Theatre

An evening that will celebrate the blues through many of its rockin' to soulful incarnations. DJD has the top jazz dancers in the country.

Who's Who at Wen Wei

Performer **Scott Augustine** was born and raised in Vancouver and has extensive training in jazz, ballet, tap, contemporary and hip-hop. He has trained with companies such as the Royal Winnipeg Ballet, Nashville Ballet, Broadway Dance Centre (NY), and Edge Performing Arts Centre (LA), among others. "Scottie" recently played a lead role in Victoria BMW's photo shoot at the Royal Theatre which you'll see on the inside front cover of our 2006/07 program.

Born in Alberta, performer **Karissa Barry** began her early training at Marr Mac Studio and the Edmonton School of Ballet, where she trained in classical ballet, modern, jazz, tap and contemporary. Barry was also part of Ballet BC's Mentor Program. Recently she studied in Vienna at Impulstanz Dance festival.

Performer **Alison Denham** was born and raised on the Sunshine Coast moving to Vancouver to train at Arts Umbrella and the Ballet BC Mentor Program. From 2001 through 2005 Ali was a company member with Toronto-based Dancemakers.

Although performer **Farley Johansson** was born in BC he studied classical and modern dance at the New Zealand School of Dance as well as at Pacific DanceArts in Vancouver. Thus far, Johansson's career has led to performances in the US, New Zealand, Australia, Brazil, Venezuela and Colombia. Farley is co-artistic director of Science Friction, a Vancouver-based dance company.

Farley's partner, **Shannon Moreno** was born in Vancouver and studied with the Royal Winnipeg Ballet and the Rudra Béjart Ballet in Switzerland. She began her professional career with the Goteberg Ballet in Sweden followed by the Deutsche Oper am Rhein in Germany. Since returning to Canada she has worked with a variety of choreographers.

Composer **Giorgio Magnanensi** is an Italian-Canadian composer of orchestral, chamber and multimedia works that have been performed throughout Europe. He is also an active conductor and live electronics performer. Magnanensi has worked as a guest conductor in Europe, Japan and Canada.



Farley Johansson Photo: Chris Ranelle