In the Archives:
Nesta Toumine – Tutus and Telegrams

Marie Chouinard:
The Very Enfant Terrible

Impulse and Innovation:
The Art of Don Gillies

Building the Fire: Spanish and Flamenco Dance in Vancouver

Vincent Warren:
An Artist of Compassion

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2012 has been brimming with discoveries, new partnerships, celebrations – a year of memorable moments and accomplishments, and also of loss ...

DCD accepted new collections into the archives, and went through the satisfying process of re-housing and cataloguing documents, videotapes and artifacts. We added two new online columns to our website: Artifact of the Month, curated by Amy Bowring and Enter, Dancing: Narratives of Migration by Carol Anderson.

Our latest book, Renegade Bodies: Canadian Dance in the 1970s, co-edited by Allana C. Lindgren and Kaija Pepper, was released at the Canadian Society for Dance Studies conference at Montreal’s Agora de la danse. We also celebrated with a Book Party in co-operation with the Dance Committee of Toronto’s Heliconian Club. At both events, authors read excerpts from their essays and an evocative video compilation of dance works was screened. Again on the 1970s theme and in co-operation with Theatre Museum Canada, we mounted an exhibit in the Macdonald Heaslip Walkway of Theatre History at Hart House Theatre and joined a panel of theatre artists at the Arts and Letters Club where we shared stories about the transformations that defined this dynamic decade. Whew … the 1970s. Raw. Rah.

Magical moments occurred when Amy Bowring’s Ryerson University colleague, production program co-director Sholem Dolgoy, arranged to use the Ryerson Theatre rigging system to fly five of Slava Toumine’s hand-painted backdrops (housed in DCD’s archives) created for Nesta Toumine’s 1940s and 1950s ballets. Many of these drops had not been seen for fifty years! This project will continue until all thirty-five drops are hung and photographed for posterity.

In company with the memory of Lawrence Adams, I received a most fantastic SURPRISE tribute. Led by DCD development co-ordinator Pamela Grundy, our superb DCD crew organized a fundraising event at the Arts and Letters Club and used the occasion of my being appointed to the Order of Canada to recognize the Adamses’s long-time and varied contributions to dance. I remain surprised, overwhelmed and deeply honoured. And I thank everyone who attended and all those who sent letters, emails and videos which became part of the entertainment. The evening was saturated with sensational speakers and performers, food, champagne and lots of good humour.

We happily welcomed new staff and board members to our team; and a Fans of DCD event is being organized for this fall … our goal is to encourage young professionals to join the board, to become volunteers and future DCD supporters.

Regrettably, Canada’s dance community lost three significant players. Dance artist Rachel Browne is familiar to most – but perhaps lesser known are writer Leland Windreich and teacher Jill Officer – both of whom contributed substantially to our dance ecology. Peruse their tributes herein, and also experience the other writings in this issue that will illuminate key personalities from Canada’s collective dance history. 2013 approaches …
Thanks to the Canadian Museum Association, DCD was a recipient of a Young Canada Works grant this summer to hire a student for ten weeks. Rosie Spooner, a graduate student at OCAD University who is continuing on with PhD studies at the University of Glasgow, joined our team to re-house and catalogue the Nesta Toumine Portfolio, which consists of thirteen boxes of business records, house and souvenir programs, news clippings, photographs and correspondence. These papers are in addition to hundreds of costumes and props, and thirty theatrical backdrops that were also deposited by Nesta Toumine. Throughout the fall, we have been re-housing this massive costume and prop collection and will be collaborating with Ryerson Theatre School again in January to digitize and re-house five more of the backdrops. In this issue of DCD Magazine, Rosie shares some of her discoveries.

— Amy Bowring, Director of Collections and Research

Unearthing Histories of Canadian Dance Pioneer Nesta Toumine

The youngest daughter of an English mother and a Canadian father, Nesta Toumine (née Williams) was born in 1912 in Croydon, south London, and spent her childhood in Ottawa. She returned to Britain in the late-1920s and pursued her dance training, studying with Nikolai Legat – his Colet House ballet school boasted London’s largest studio – as well as teachers Serafina Astafieva and Margaret Craske. Toumine’s big break came in 1934 when she joined dancers from the Vic-Wells Ballet, predecessor of today’s Royal Ballet, in Ninette de Valois’s production of The Golden Toy. More work followed, both on stage and screen, and Toumine became a member of the Ballets Russe de Paris two years later. Now part of a cosmopolitan community of dancers, Toumine spent the next ten years moving between companies and touring Europe, the United States and South America. After settling in Ottawa in 1946, Toumine embarked on a new phase of her career,
that of company director, choreographer and ballet mistress, which she pursued for the next forty years.

A photograph from Toumine’s collection that immediately caught my eye was taken in 1940 onboard a ship travelling between New York and Argentina. Out on deck, Toumine observes a woman aiming an air rifle out to sea in anticipation of one of the ship’s crew launching a clay pigeon. More Rosie the Riveter than domestic housewife – interestingly, the photograph pre-dates the emergence of this now iconic female character – the woman at the centre of the frame cuts a striking silhouette. Engaging for this reason alone, the photograph also has a poignant back story. Shortly before it was taken, Toumine had been in Paris dancing with René Blum’s Ballet Russe de Monte Carlo. With engagements suddenly suspended at the outbreak of war, however, she went to Rotterdam and sailed on to New York, joining Léonide Massine and other dancers who had similarly fled Europe. As such, this photograph encapsulates a feeling of tension. The sun-filled scene of leisure that the viewer initially sees is contrasted by the urgency that precipitated this recorded moment and the dramatic world events that lie in the background.

This theme of individual experience nestled within major historical events also surfaces in the numerous pages of correspondence held in the collection. Letters do not have to be beautifully hand-written and covered in centuries of dust to be fascinating. In fact, more routine ones allow you to exercise your detective skills, hunting for exciting snippets. I quickly became absorbed in the communications sent between company directors affiliated with the Northeast Regional Ballet Festival. Toumine’s Classical Ballet Concert Group (CBCG) regularly performed at these large annual events, and for many years was the only Canadian company selected to participate. Throughout the 1960s and 1970s these individuals wrote to each other on a regular basis, finalizing plans for upcoming festivals while also offering personal news. Sent primarily to hammer out logistical issues, such letters contain important tidbits of personal information, which reveal the personalities and friendships that were at each festival’s very centre. A customary letter confirming hotel bookings, for instance, might also be signed off with “… and send my love to Joannie”, asking that affectionate best wishes be passed on to Joanne Ashe, a long-standing principal dancer with the CBCG.

While going through the Nesta Toumine Portfolio, I have been sensitive to the fact that I am approaching these artifacts from a different perspective than someone who has an extensive knowledge of dance history. Although the significance of some items may elude me, waiting to be unearthed by a specialist, my experience working with the collection has been fascinating. This remarkable collection traverses decades and continents, offering the researcher an almost limitless number of paths to pursue. But perhaps its greatest value comes from what it reveals about Canada’s unique dance history. In particular, it sheds light on a time when pioneering figures such as Nesta Toumine were working tirelessly to develop home-grown audiences and secure the funding that would enable their companies to make the jump to professionalism.
MARIE
CHO
THE VERY ENFANT TERRIBLE

BY PHILIP SZPORER
Marie Chouinard’s dance approaches a sacred art attuned to the rhythms of the universe. She imbues the work with a sense of wonder – transforming herself, along with the audience, in the process. At the base of all her endeavours is the need to be an agent of creative action. And when she speaks about the nature of creation, she radiates reverential awe: “Taming that spirit is something. My God, it’s something.”

In her early days, as a resolutely independent, avant-garde choreographer and performer, Chouinard challenged, shocked, defied categorization … and moved us. Her giant canvas secreted a sensuous, delicate, primitive and profound humanity. A press kit from the time describes her as “a phenomenon … with her unpredictable, extra-terrestrial behaviour, body gestures, facial expressions, costumes and sounds.”

Chouinard respects the intelligence of the body. The undulating spine, the “receptacle of the mind of the dancer,” she says, organizes all movement in the body. She prioritizes a moving diaphragm, the breath expanding and traveling throughout the body, creating “luminescence from the inside.” Decisiveness marks the smallest gesture. Many variables present themselves in her approach, but she never takes shortcuts. Accordingly, dancers assimilate vocabulary at a “cellular” level, “in the glands”, she says. They go in, play with it, and seek, or perhaps execute, mastery.

Over the last three decades, Chouinard has minted her status and visibility as one of Canada’s most renowned and versatile dance artists. La Compagnie Marie Chouinard, launched in 1990, tours constantly, in demand the world over. In the summer of 2007, the company triumphed again, moving into a new home, the expansive Espace Marie Chouinard, facing Montreal’s Mont-Royal, funded by $2,000,000 in federal and provincial support.

A few years ago Chouinard popped up on the hugely popular Radio-Canada Sunday television gabfest Tout le monde en parle to promote her 2005 work bODY_rEMIX/gOLDBERG_vARIATIONS. Host Guy A. Lepage called her “flamboyant and wild”. With her wide toothy smile and mane of straight red hair, Chouinard was in fine form and a playful game guest. Lepage tried to bait her with introductory comments about the provocative, risky, uninhibited, frankly sexual, ritualistic and polarizing self-titled “action-performances” of her early career, notably Petite danse sans nom (1980). For this conceptual short piece, she famously appeared on the stage at the Art Gallery of Ontario in a white dress, with a pail in hand, squatted in second position over it, drank water from a glass, then urinated, and walked off with the bucket. None of it was gratuitous, she insisted; the “peepee dance” was just a study of muscle control and release. The performance was banned in Montreal at the time.

When she raised her water glass to salute Lepage, he didn’t quite get the gesture. Referring to orgasmic breaths, grunts and squeals in bODY_rEMIX/gOLDBERG_vARIATIONS, her first work in two acts, Chouinard rhapsodized about an animal’s rush of hormones at the moment of a mating dance. Normally quick-tongued, Lepage and his talk show sidekick looked somewhat agog at the copulating reference. She made them snicker when she passionately dove into the benefits of breath, and how it’s the best drug around (drug use in sports was the topic of another guest). “That’s my drug! Breathing gets me into a second state. It leaves our circuits open. It’s a rush.”

In bODY_rEMIX/gOLDBERG_vARIATIONS, set to composer Louis Dufort’s electronic distortion of Glenn Gould’s performance of J.S. Bach’s music, and Gould’s recorded commentary, Chouinard addresses mobility and appendages, proceeding with her ten male and female dancers in pointe shoes for the first time … often only on one foot. They balance on crutches, harnesses and horizontal bars, are pulled on wheels or suspended with rope;
body prostheses (horns, phalluses) are prominent. The body exudes “the pulse of its cells and energy circuits”, Chouinard explains. The props the “mutated” dancers manipulate symbolize the “energy that shoots out and goes further than us.”

Since the beginning, challenging the unknown has been a powerful, driving dimension of this passionate artist. Over a six-year period in the 1970s, the Quebec City–born Chouinard took simple pleasures in her daily round of classical dance classes with former New York City Ballet dancer Tom Scott at the Studio d’expression corporelle in Montreal. “I never recognized ballet as an art form,” she recalled. “For me, it was something good for your health and the intelligence of your body.” Chouinard wasn’t thinking about a career, much less a life, in dance. The dream was to become an actor, but she wasn’t accepted into the city’s major theatre schools. Chouinard reveals she was “timid and unphysical” in her youth. Dance classes afforded a release. When Scott asked her to dance in a recital of his choreography, she refused. She loved him as a teacher, but saw no point in performing that kind of work. Scott expelled her from his studio.

Devastated and floundering, she nonetheless persisted, found a studio, started training alone, and exploited her situation. In 1977, when seeing the U.S.-based postmodern dancer/choreographer Simone Forti, Chouinard’s focus was altered. Then in her forties, Forti danced barefoot alongside violinists and trombonists and it was her total immersive practice that convinced Chouinard she could continue in dance and be an artist.

One day Chouinard met Dena Davida, newly arrived in Montreal from Minnesota. Davida, with the guidance and encouragement of Quebec dance pioneer Françoise Riopelle, had formed Qui Danse, an early collective for emerging choreographers and dancers. Chouinard told Davida about her work; Davida responded by inviting her to present at Qui Danse as part of the upcoming festival of fledgling Quebec talent. At Véhicule Art Inc., the city’s then prime alternative visual and performing arts venue, Chouinard premiered Cristallisation (1979), to an original score by composer Rober Racine.

Dance artist Linda Rabin’s early memory of Chouinard is far removed from the provocative “enfant terrible”, as she was labelled shortly thereafter. A performance in 1979 of Dimanche matin, mai 1955, at the Bézébodé studio on Park Avenue and Laurier (run by, among others, Quebec dancer/choreographer/teacher Françoise Graham), was significant, says Rabin. Chouinard was “dancing a solo [to] the sound of bells ringing, like church bells.” Repetitive movement, jumping up and down and swinging both her long pigtail and body, anchored the
rinning bells. “That’s all that she did, but she invested such an internal scenario and richness, from the beginning to the end. What I appreciated ... was the total integrity, depth, authenticity and originality.”

Trips abroad to New York, Berlin and Asia, enlarged Chouinard’s perspective of dance and the possible vocabulary of the body. She studied Buddhism in Tibet and dance in Burma and Bali, where, under the tutelage of master Pak Tutur, she notably immersed herself in the Baris warrior dance in which the solo dancer concurrently conveys changing moods, feminine grace and an energetic warlike martial spirit. In Kathmandu she spent two months in a monastery, meditating.

Chouinard’s compelling incorporation of voice, sound and a sensual eroticism set her apart from the rest of Montreal’s creative, but more gymnastic, theatrical dance community. In her personal solo works, dancing seemed a minor part of her performances. She took chances and pushed boundaries with her openness and transparency. In works such as Minas, lune de saturne (1980), Plaisirs de tous les sens dans tous les sens (1981) and Marie chien noir (1982), Chouinard would scream, howl, froth at the mouth, soak her hair in a tub of water, paint her nude body, and masturbate, “awakening the soul, the mind, and the spirit”, as she said. For Danseuse-performeuse cherche amoureux ou amoureuse pour la nuit du 1er juin (1981), Chouinard auctioned herself off to the first bidder.

In the 1986 futuristic-looking work STAB (Space, Time and Beyond) she is electric in clanking metal shoes, a leather aviator-cap, her G-stringed body painted crimson red and spraying a long tail-like antenna. Her gestures are accompanied by amplified breathing and guttural sounds (gurgles, howls and screeches); she murmurs, “I shall meet the monster.”

STAB seemed a precursor for her rereading of Vaslav Nijinsky’s Après-midi d’une faune (1987), with the Faun, an androgynous creature, standing tall with goat horns on her head, and needles jutting from her shoulder, breast and padded thigh. Her contemporary allusions to sexuality and AIDS left Nijinsky’s work, apart from some of the two-dimensionality of the movements in profile, as a fleeting reference (she had used the photos of Baron Adolf de Meyer as a guide). In one dramatic, precise act, she breaks off a horn, places it over her groin and sheathes it with a red condom. Chouinard created the score as she danced, with synthesizer controls connected to various points of her body.

As Montreal’s burgeoning contemporary dance scene gained prominence during the 1980s, so too did Chouinard’s recognition. Synergies were such that when she pulled back from performing onstage, she focussed on developing group pieces for her new troupe (at one time members included Andrew de Lotbinière-Harwood, José Navas and Dominique Porte). Her reputation spun from underground, experimental cult fandom to a kind of rousing rock star pre-eminence. The inaugural company creation, Les trous du ciel (1991), inspired by Inuit culture, saw dancers riff with vocal sounds in an invented language, providing the rhythmic motor of the performance.

Every couple of years she’d be conflicted, she says, questioning what she was doing with her life, even as she was delving deeply into her work. Nothing onstage quite measured up to the joy that occurred in studio. That is until she created Le Sacre du printemps (1993) her second work for her company, set to Igor Stravinsky’s score. Her eruptive Sacre was a breakthrough. She’d never linked dance with music, saying, “Movement can bring you directly to the core of things. The beat is inside you.” Although here she was actively using the driving score, not merely building movements and sounds generated by a body, and she was removing the sacrificial virgin story. Instead, beneath rays of light, a series of vital dance solos, duets and ensemble work pulsed with a charged, evolving animal-human energy and aura. This was ably supported by Zaven Paré’s costumes with horns and claws sprouting from the head, groin, arms, legs and hands, and with Jacques Lee Pelletier’s distinctive makeup, underlining the dancers’ eyes and chins. Finally, and significantly, she expressed, “I created without anguish.”

Longtime company member Carol Prieur, a fierce and passionate

Marie Chouinard in her work Marie Chien Noir (1982)
Photo: Eliane Laubscher
The almond is more like the vulva,” she commented. The onstage male-female connection was a first for Chouinard – she had not yet included any erotic duet in her work. The publicity blitz peaked with a nearly nude shot of dancers Louis Gervais and Mathilde Monnard entangled in an erotic embrace. Lit in startling fashion by Axel Morgenenthaler, ten strong, able performers hatch in spasmodic bursts and refract in almost molecular fashion. A male dancer grasps his female counterpart from behind by her breasts, and men and women carry each other in crotch-lifts.

Intelligence marks her trajectory. Ten of her dynamic solos resurfaced in Les Solos 1978-1998, resuscitating her classic dance and performance art pieces, including L’Après-midi d’un faune and Earthquake in the Heart Chakra. She marvelled at “the pleasure of rediscovering the energy of these creations.” What audiences discovered (or re-discovered) was the astonishing complexity and the essential, primeval nature of Chouinard’s inventive power and some of her early revolt.

Questions about communion and community cohere in two striking works, the dense Le Cri du monde (2000) and the irreverent 24 Préludes de Chopin (1999). The former is a polyphonic movement study and an anguished, raw, apocalyptic howl at the cosmos with a driving, deafening score by Louis Dufort. The latter echoes the spirit and the structure of the short piano refrains with dancers sporting black spiked Mohawks and lycra shorts, strategic strips of black tape placed across their chests and crotches – the performers captured in moments of unity and moments of conflict.

Another standout in the Chouinard continuum is her award-winning experimental multi-media creations, specifically her three-part Cantique series. The first (2003),

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Marie Chouinard in her work S.T.A.B. (Space, Time and Beyond)(1986)
Photo: Louise Oligny
Andrew Harwood, Dominique Porte and Benoît Lachambre in Marie Chouinard's Les Trous du ciel (1991) Photo: Cylla von Tiedemann
which used computer software to tease sound and image, is an intense, intimate film with the faces of Prieur and Benoît Lachambre filling the entire screen. From those images she constructed a multiscreen film (2003); and finally an interactive installation (2004) where two “players” accessing two touch screens mix a vast bank of sounds and images transforming a character’s voice and actions viewed on a large screen.

Her raw re-telling of the ancient Greek myth Orpheus and Eurydice (2008) negotiating themes of “creation, transgression, [and] derision-veneration,” brings the orgiastic underworld to life. Chouinard was reading Profanations, a meditation on memory and oblivion by Italian political philosopher Giorgio Agamben – she laces sentences from the book into the performance, deepening the broad theatricality in a manifestation of inexplicable madness.

Text and vocal work is at the core of the luminous, visually striking The Golden Mean (Live) (2010). The title refers to the “divine proportion” used by artists and architects in the Renaissance to discern beauty and harmony in various works. Prieur reveals that in this production there’s “an incredible conversation between the dancers and Marie. In the past she’s given us freedom within each dance to go with the moment, but here she’s taken it a step further”. And that potential drives the piece.

Chouinard remains a choreographer tracking the malleability of the body and the renewal of the spirit. She summons the dancers to go beyond their capacities, divining something primordial and universal. “Each time the curtain goes up, you go into a complete universe,” Prieur says. In her performative space, Chouinard persuasively unearths primal mystery, “a forceful fire”, as she calls it, charging her creativity. “I want them to go over a precipice,” she said. “I do it with respect, but I want to push and challenge them, [to the point] where they lose their references, and find a new way of existing.” The outcome is unknown. “It’s like love,” she adds, “that place of abandon.”

Three years ago, Chouinard revived her solo artistry in morning glories, presented to small, select audiences in her studio. Prieur said
Carol Prieur and Lucie Mongrain in Marie Chouinard's The Golden Mean (LIVE) (2010)
Photo: Sylvie-Ann Paré
the choreographer’s return to performance shifts the balance. “[She’s] living the process herself, finding – or re-finding – what’s it’s like to be a dancer herself. She’s tripping out, questioning how we communicate.” This summer another solo, IN MUSEUM, a three-hour performance, premiered at the 30th International Contemporary Arts Symposium in Baie-Saint-Paul, Québec. Chouinard sits opposite visitors, they engage verbally, share a gaze, or simply listen to their senses, after which she spontaneously dances.

Chouinard, the accomplished dancer; choreographer; costume, sound and lighting designer; media artist and published author – her first book of poetry, Chantier des extases (2008), met with great acclaim – is in command of her various talents and ever-engaged in the act of creation. She exults in the intense life as an artist. The smallest thing that doesn’t resonate with the rest is all that she will see, and she’ll work on it. “I’m more enamoured than a perfectionist,” she says. “I’m passionate about details, because each detail is revealing of everything. I can’t let things go by. Because each thing has resonance for the rest.”

Philip Szporer, writer, lecturer and film-maker, teaches at Concordia University and is a Scholar-in-Residence at the Jacob’s Pillow Dance Festival. His dance writings have appeared in Hour, The Dance Current and Tanz, among others. He is co-founder, with Marlene Millar, of the arts film company Mouvement Perpétuel. Together they have co-directed and produced award-winning documentaries and short films.
Dance Collection Danse’s late co-founder, Lawrence Adams, talked about the process of historical research as a kind of archaeology, peeling back the layers of time until the story is revealed. My process in researching dancer-choreographer Don Gillies has been very much the same. During my twenty years of researching Canadian dance history, Don Gillies was a name that I saw numerous times in house programs, particularly those related to Boris Volkoff. A kind of mythology surrounded the name—he had ventured to England and danced with the Sadler’s Wells Theatre Ballet … he had choreographed for Johnny Wayne and Frank Shuster’s television show … he had spent his later years in Nova Scotia … But there was always a veil over his story—facts and details on the cusp of being discovered but never wholly present. And then fate intervened.

BY AMY BOWRING
story was scattered like a myriad of archaeological dig sites separated by geography. Then fateful event number two came into play. An innocent email from the late artist’s niece, Cindy Harris – would I like to visit and view the materials her family has looked after since their uncle’s passing? A visit was arranged and the digging began … it continued at DCD in the collections of Boris Volkoff and Janet Baldwin, the brittle scrapbooks of Natalia Butko, the treasures kept by Jim Bolsby (aka Stewart James), Bernadette Carpenter’s Spotlight Newsletter, and phone calls to old friends and family of Gillies. The layers began to be revealed and his story emerged.

There are definitely still dig sites to be found and searched but now DCD can provide a good start on the story of Don Gillies: dancer, choreographer, teacher, designer, artist – innovator.

Donald Garfield Gillies was born to George Garfield Gillies and Helena Gillies on November 20, 1926 – a little brother to older sister Florence (Flo). George made his living as a printer for the Warwick Bros. and Rutter printing company and the Gillies raised their family in Toronto’s west end where Don eventually attended Western Tech.

The two Gillies children were tight siblings and they shared a love of symphonic music. They often took the streetcar downtown to attend symphony performances at Massey Hall. Don had a gift for visual art and was always painting, drawing and sculpting. In fact, it was through the study of ballet images for a school project that Don became intrigued by the idea of dancing, especially when he saw a photo of dancer Igor Youskevitch, who had also been an athlete. Gillies himself demonstrated an aptitude for running and had a lithe physique that was well suited to dance – these traits complemented his talent for visual art and combined to produce a well-rounded artist who, throughout his career, could choreograph, perform and design his own dances.

In 1942, sixteen-year-old Don Gillies visited the Toronto studio of Boris Volkoff and never looked back.

Florence Gillies says their parents weren’t overly supportive of their son taking dance lessons but didn’t prevent him either. His interest was certainly anomalous within the family; his Aunt Ella, on his father’s side, had demonstrated an interest in the arts, but only as an audience member. Don usually walked to his twice weekly classes at Volkoff’s Bloor and Yonge studio from his west end home – a distance of roughly ten kilometres.

DCD Co-founder/Director Miriam Adams and I were invited to view historic dance television footage at CBC to select excerpts for DCD research purposes. While we sat in the basement of the CBC with Laurie Nemetz, a former CBC archivist and current DCD board member, the silver flickering light before us began to reveal Don Gillies’s story. We saw five or six of his works for The Wayne and Shuster Hour and I was personally taken aback by his unique choreography, his clever ideas, his humour and his variously silky-smooth, ultra-athletic, cleverly comic performances. I was compelled to learn more, to write about this person’s life in dance. But the story was scattered like a myriad of archaeological dig sites separated by geography. Then fateful event number two came into play. An innocent email from the late artist’s niece, Cindy Harris – would I like to visit and view the materials her family has looked after since their uncle’s passing? A visit was arranged and the digging began … it continued at DCD in the collections of Boris Volkoff and Janet Baldwin, the brittle scrapbooks of Natalia Butko, the treasures kept by Jim Bolsby (aka Stewart James), Bernadette Carpenter’s Spotlight Newsletter, and phone calls to old friends and family of Gillies. The layers began to be revealed and his story emerged.
While Gillies no doubt appeared in Volkoff's school recitals when he began his ballet studies, the first evidence of a performance with the Volkoff Canadian Ballet appears in a house program for a show on April 20, 1945 at Eaton Auditorium. Gillies danced in Volkoff's On a Russian Theme set to music by Kabalevsky. He performed this work many times as the friend of the “Mischief Maker” played by Sydney Vousden, a long-time Volkoff company member. Vousden and Gillies were frequently paired as clowns in Volkoff’s work The Big Top, one of the pieces performed at Massey Hall in an historic joint concert with pianist Sylvia Kamin and Nova Scotia-born contralto Portia White.

A review by the Evening Telegram’s Rose MacDonald from July 1946 describes Gillies’s abilities: “Janet Baldwin and Donald Gillies literally stopped the show with their comedic item, The Bronze Horse [by Boris Volkoff], in which with delicious satire they described a ballerina and premier danseur competing for the spotlight. The dancing was clever indeed, the pantomime equally so.” Gillies’s hard work was rewarded with a scholarship to Volkoff’s school in 1947 and again the following season. By the Christmas season of 1947, Gillies was dancing in most of Volkoff’s repertoire and was praised by Globe and Mail reviewer Colin Sabiston who listed the company’s best dancers: “For added good measure near the top of the list must be added Donald Gillies, who got into the news recently by winning a scholarship for an additional year’s study from an anonymous admirer of his work.”

A perfectionist, Gillies’s quest to improve as a dancer was part of his motivation to travel to London, England, in March 1949 just after the very successful Canadian Ballet Festival at Toronto’s Royal Alexandra Theatre, in which he participated. The limited professional opportunities for dancers in Canada in the 1930s and ’40s was probably another motivator – attrition to the United States, Europe and England had become common.

Shortly after he began his studies in England, Gillies was offered positions with the International Ballet and the Markova-Dolin Ballet, but he chose to continue his classes instead. Eventually, he did take on work in shows such as the musical High Button Shoes and a Cochran Revue. Charles Cochran was a well-known theatrical manager in London, born in 1872, who produced numerous revues and musicals as well as many of Noel Coward’s works. He died tragically in 1951 when he was trapped in a bath of scalding water.
Gillies was a chorus member in the original West End production of the Rodgers and Hammerstein musical *Carousel*, choreographed by Agnes De Mille, which opened June 7, 1950. He performed in *Carousel* for seven months before moving on to a spot with the Sadler’s Wells Theatre Ballet (SWTB), the junior company associated with the Sadler’s Wells Ballet, in January 1951.

The ballet fever that had hit Toronto around the time of Gillies’s departure for England, was in part due to the successful 1949 tour of the Sadler’s Wells Theatre Ballet (later known as the Royal Ballet), which included a stop in Toronto and a reception at the Volkoff studio. In fact, the Sadler’s Wells connection would remain important to the development of ballet in Toronto as former company member Celia Franca would move to Toronto in February 1951 to take on the artistic directorship of the newly formed National Ballet of Canada. Prior to this, she had choreographed for the Sadler’s Wells Theatre Ballet, among other companies, and had met Gillies before her move to Canada. Other Canadians had also danced in the SWTB including Winnipeg’s David Adams who would become a charter member of The National Ballet of Canada. Gillies’s time with SWTB coincided with another Winnipeg dancer, Carlu Carter; their careers would continue to intersect over the coming decades. Joanne Nisbet, a dancer who later became a ballet mistress at the National Ballet, was also in the SWTB at the same time as Gillies.

During his eighteen months with the company, Gillies was part of a six-month North American tour that included a run at Toronto’s Royal Alexandra Theatre from October 15 to 20, 1951. In the Toronto shows, he danced in the corps de ballet for *Coppélia* and as The Crusader doll in that ballet’s second act, while Carlu Carter danced the title role.

On December 24, 1949, Gillies had mailed a series of Christmas cards from London, including, on a lark, one to famed Hollywood dancer-choreographer Gene Kelly expressing his interest in working with him. Just after the North American Sadler’s Wells tour, Gillies finally got his chance to audition for Kelly who was planning to shoot a film in London called *Invitation to the Dance*. Gillies spent six months in 1952 shooting Kelly’s movie; however, the release of the film was delayed until 1956 because the MGM studio was worried about its commercial viability. They were right to worry – the film was a box office failure; however, it is also hailed as a landmark for being among the first all-dance feature films with no speaking parts. The film tells three separate stories and Gillies appears in the first, titled “Circus” – the tragic story of a love triangle. Kelly made a significant impression on Gillies who was also thrilled to work with one of his role models, Igor Youskevitch, another star of the film. This gig was followed up by a series of appearances on BBC television, preparing Gillies for the role he would soon play in Canada. In the spring of 1953, before heading back to Toronto, Gillies premiered his work *The Golden Pear* for Ballet Workshop at the Mercury Theatre. He danced with Constance Garfield and also designed the décor.
and costumes for this psychological work about young relationships.

Gillies returned to Toronto in 1953 and was welcomed back in Bernadette Carpenter’s Spotlight Newsletter: “Hello Don Gillies! And welcome home! … It is nice to see good Canadian dancers coming back to us.” Gillies returned to a very different scene than the one he had left. In the time he was gone, ballet had professionalized in Canada. The Winnipeg Ballet had become the Royal Winnipeg Ballet and was paying its dancers. The National Ballet of Canada had formed in 1951 and provided paid work. CBC television had started in 1952 and offered numerous lucrative jobs to dancers and choreographers on its popular variety shows.

Gillies jumped right into the fray and immediately found work choreographing and performing on CBC and began working again with some of his Volkoff colleagues such as Ruth Carse and Gladys Forrester. By January, he had signed a twenty-six-week contract with a variety show called General Electric Hour. He also fed his creative soul by setting new work on the Janet Baldwin Ballet for the 1954 Canadian Ballet Festival. Inspired by William Blake’s drawing I Want! I Want!, he created a work about man’s insatiable desire for more. According to his dance colleague and friend Barbara Cook, Gillies would have preferred to pursue works of greater depth, such as I Want! I Want!, even though he enjoyed working for television. Incorporating Gillies’s costume and set designs, I Want! I Want! was one of the most popular ballets at that year’s festival.

Television work continued to occupy a significant portion of Gillies’s time. He formed the Don Gillies Trio with dancers Babs Christie and Connie Campbell for a gig on Showtime and from there they became regulars on The Wayne and Shuster Hour. Gillies became a mainstay of the show for the next decade but, by the mid-1960s, was feeling the frustrations of working in television. Commissioned each week to choreograph a short segment, Gillies would find himself re-choreographing his material as minutes were clipped from his air time and added to Wayne and Shuster’s comedy sketches. He felt the integrity of his work was constantly in jeopardy as he repeatedly pared down his dances. Looking back on CBC footage from this period, however, I was completely taken by his innovative ideas and clever constructions, sometimes narrative, sometimes abstract. In 1964’s Dancing with My Dali, Gillies portrays a dancing likeness to the moustachioed painter exploiting abstract costumes, bicycles and a piano prop out of which Gillies emerges and later retreats, ending by punching an extended arm through
a hole in the piano’s lid. *In the Gym* (c. 1962) interprets a jazzed-up version of Tchaikovsky’s *Piano Concerto #1 in B Flat Minor* in which Gillies dances a solo using typical gymnasium equipment such as rings, parallel bars and a horse. His clean lines and smooth lyricism playfully complement the music while other movements demonstrate strength and control. Gillies used two cameras for *Lines and Patterns* (1962) to create an image on one screen where vertical, horizontal, circular, wavy and zigzagged lines appear and disappear from the screen as Gillies interprets the lines through his choreography to jazz music. A 1962 Montreal *Gazette* article states that the show’s producer, Don Hudson, considered Gillies the most creative and inventive dance artist on Canadian television.

In addition to television work, Gillies continued to teach and occasionally perform with or create work for the Janet Baldwin Ballet. He maintained working relationships with many of his former Volkoff Ballet colleagues such as Barbara Cook, Natalia Butko, Connie Campbell and Cliff Collier. He also choreographed for a couple of shows at the Crest Theatre including John Gray and Louis Applebaum’s *This Is Our First Affair* in 1959. In the early 1960s he choreographed *The Remarkable Rocket* for The National Ballet of Canada and *Ballet Three* and *The Golden Phoenix* for the Royal Winnipeg Ballet. The *Winnipeg Tribune’s* S. Roy Maley called Gillies “one of Canada’s most original creators of contemporary ballet” and noted that he was known for his “daring and modernity.” On October 6, 1964,

A CBC television production featuring Don Gillies. The “books” open to become their own mini-set pieces where dances related to the different book topics are performed. Gillies’s space travel companion is Connie Campbell.

Photos: Dale Barnes, CBC
Gillies performed at the opening of the Confederation Centre for the Arts in Charlottetown, a royal command performance that included Carlu Carter, Anna Russell, Les Feux-Follets, Don Messer, Dave Broadfoot and Portia White, with Lorne Greene as Master of Ceremonies.

With credits like these behind him, it’s no wonder that the Cape Breton Post showed such enthusiasm when it announced in April 1965 that Gillies would be coming to Sydney, Nova Scotia, as a performer and choreographer for the Rotary production of The Music Man. He directed and choreographed these shows for many years mentoring hundreds of aspiring performers. As with previous productions throughout his career, Gillies often designed and painted scenery. Long-time Rotary performer Susan Gallop described a curtain he had created out of translucent plastic cups for the 1973 production of Anything Goes. With encouragement from Gillies to travel and train wherever she could, Gallop continued her work in dance eventually opening the Cape Breton School of the Arts, which she has run for over forty years; she spoke at length about Gillies’s ability to inspire others to be creative. Andrea Leigh-Smith, another Nova Scotia–based dancer, was so inspired by Gillies’s life and work that she collaborated with him to create a retrospective show in 1998 that used movement phrases from his past choreographic works.

Gillies eventually settled in Sydney. In the 1990s, he often worked with Dianne Milligan and Dance Nova Scotia teaching in their summer training sessions. Milligan remembers his “very quirky” classes and his amazing conceptual choreography. By the 2000s, Gillies’s ill health was slowing him down though he did continue to work a bit with senior students at Dance Nova Scotia’s summer programs. He passed away on June 13, 2007.

By the late 1970s, Gillies had broken off most of the ties he once had in the Toronto dance community; consequently, when he passed away, the news of his death did not spread much beyond Cape Breton’s local papers. Like others of his generation – the generation of dancers who ushered forth the professionalization of dance in Canada – he is not known to subsequent generations proving that the archaeology of dance is essential to our collective memory of this art form. Revealing the layers of history will continue ... for Don ... and many others.

Watch for DCD’s virtual exhibition on Don Gillies in December 2012 to celebrate CBC Television’s 60th anniversary – www.dcd.ca.

Amy Bowring walked into DCD in January 1993 and kept coming back until founders Lawrence and Miriam Adams let her stay permanently. She is DCD’s Director of Collections and Research. She also copy edits The Dance Current, lectures at Ryerson Theatre School and founded the Society for Canadian Dance Studies in 2000.
The first European to view the site of the future city of Vancouver was a Spaniard: José María Narváez, in 1791, who was charting the area from his ship. A year later, when Spanish captains Dionisio Alcalá Galiano and Cayento Valdéz continued the work, they met up with the British George Vancouver, also busy mapping; the beach where the three men talked was named Spanish Banks after the occasion. Spain eventually lost interest in the northwest coast, having reluctantly agreed with Britain not to pursue exclusive sovereignty. When the city was incorporated in 1886 it was named after the Englishman, but early visits from Spain are remembered in the names of a few streets, including Cordova and Cardero downtown, and Narvaez Drive, Galiano Drive and Valdez Road on the west side.

Despite this early historical connection, proudly multicultural Vancouver has been slow to develop a Spanish presence. In terms of dance, it wasn’t until the 1940s that a local woman – British Columbia–born Kay Armstrong, of British heritage – established a Spanish identity on Vancouver stages, although she is mostly remembered today as a ballet choreographer, the first Canadian to have her work in the repertoire of The National Ballet of Canada. Spanish folk and classical dancer Angel Monzón had the cachet of actually being from Spain when he settled here in 1959, briefly partnering Armstrong. Then, in the 1980s, a small group of dancers with mixed nationalities – from Canada, the United States and Mexico – banded together to develop the Spanish dance scene, with its emphasis on flamenco, that exists today.

In the 1930s and 1940s, a wide variety of touring companies, mostly ballet, came to Vancouver. Spanish dance was presented by several women, including New York–born Carola Goya (the stage name of Carola Weller), known for her sophisticated use of castanets, who gave two recitals in 1934. In 1936, Tonia de Aragon appeared twice: the second time, *The Jewish Western Bulletin* described her as “a vivacious Spanish dancer...
Armstrong mixed Spanish dance with ballet for La Maliciosa, dancing up a storm in pointe shoes and red velvet dress as the jealous title character. After the 1952 premiere, Province critic Van Perry wrote: “Full of the biting fire of Spain, [La Maliciosa] kept the audience applauding for nearly five minutes after the final curtain...” And then there was her dashing farruca, a flamenco dance usually performed by a man. She took it on the road in 1954 with the newly launched Kay Armstrong Dance Theatre, wearing the Castilian men’s costume of high-waisted pants, white frilled shirt and scarlet-lined black cape.

When Mariemma brought her classic Spanish style to the Georgia Auditorium in 1950, Armstrong was in the audience, as she was when José Greco and his Company of Spanish Dancers performed there in 1954. Armstrong was a big fan of Italian-born Greco, who was of Spanish-Italian parentage and grew up from age ten in Brooklyn. That evening in Vancouver, Greco danced a dramatic farruca, Danza del Contrabandista (Dance of the Smuggler), though it was the company’s lively folk dances Armstrong most enjoyed.

Greco would make ten visits to Vancouver, the last in 1980, and Armstrong hosted more than one post-show party for the troupe at her studio. She hit it off with dancer Luis Olivares, taking private lessons with him in New York. Armstrong had already studied there with Helen Veola, a Welsh-born teacher she highly respected (and who had taught Greco). Though today cultural immersion in Spain is considered de rigueur for Spanish dancers working outside the “mother country”, these trips to the United States for intensive study were adventure enough for Armstrong (her one European trip was to Britain). Armstrong also always acknowledged her first Spanish dance teacher, Joan Crewe Straight, a Vancouver woman of British heritage.

In 1959, a few years before retiring from the stage, Armstrong had a new partner when Angel Monzón – born in 1916 in Spain, and recently arrived in the city – climbed the stairs to her studio to introduce himself. She quickly added a first act, A Través de España (Across Spain) to an upcoming Orpheum Theatre show. Monzón’s sense of humour when they danced a jota together delighted her: he convinced Armstrong to sew a big felt heart on the back of her bloomers, which he revealed to the audience by lifting her skirt every time she turned around.

Their partnership didn’t last long: Monzón was busy setting up a teaching and performing network that included Victoria on Vancouver Island and Seattle, Washington. He also presented at least one show in the BC Interior: flamenco guitarist Victor Kolstee, in a blog about his early years as a performer recalls travelling on
a Greyhound bus to Osoyoos with Monzón, two Victoria women with limited dance training and singer José Luis Lara (a Spaniard who emigrated to Canada in 1967). The group had prepared a twenty-minute set. “I thought that we would be entertainment at a banquet or some other function,” Kolstee writes, “but when we pulled up outside the town theatre … the marquee read: “TONIGHT 8PM: ANGEL MONZÓN and his SPANISH DANCERS”.

The women were likely students of Monzón. In the 1970s, three of his Vancouver students – Huguette Lacourse, Joyce North and Arlet (surname unknown) – formed their own group called Las Chicas. Lacourse – whose stage name was Carmela – recalls being in great demand for several years doing restaurant shows.

Monzón, who developed a reputation throughout the Pacific Northwest, was profiled in 1979 in a San Francisco newsletter, *Jaleo*. Writer Mary Robertson describes Monzón’s early training in ballet in Argentina, where he grew up, and his dedication to Spanish dance after seeing Carmen Amaya (this would have been before Armstrong saw Amaya in Vancouver, when she was equally impressed). Monzón joined Amaya’s troupe, and then later toured with José Greco to South America, London and Paris, having responded to a telegram: “Urgently needed – two flamenco dancers – must be good – no time for rehearsal.”

One of Monzón’s students in Vancouver was Jocelyn Chouinard, born in 1953 in Saskatchewan. Chouinard moved to Vancouver to study theatre at the University of British Columbia, which is when she discovered dance, first with the city’s two major modern dance choreographers during the seventies, Paula Ross and Anna Wyman. Then, at the YWCA, Chouinard tried belly dance, performing almost right away in clubs and restaurants under the stage name Hadia. In 1979, Chouinard saw Monzón perform classical Spanish dance at La Bodega restaurant, which made such an impression that she began taking classes with him.

Chouinard performed as part of Monzón’s student group, primarily at Spanish restaurants, under the stage name Joselina, which she still uses. Once Joselina decided to concentrate on flamenco, she crossed the border to study with Teo Morca, a highly regarded flamenco teacher in Bellingham, Washington, and soon headed out to Spain.

On her return to Vancouver, Joselina was thrilled to hook up with a small group of fellow flamencos. Victor Kolstee and his Mexican wife, dancer Rosario Añer,
were visiting Kolstee’s family; also in town was Mexican-American dancer Oscar Nieto. Singer José Luis Lara was an established resident. In 1984, Joselina produced a show at the Arts Club Theatre featuring herself and Nieto as dancers (Ancer was pregnant with her second child), along with La Romera, an American who drove up from Seattle. Kolstee played guitar; Lara sang. The show was a catalyst for a series of local performances over the next two years, on television and in theatres and restaurants. Joselina and Nieto even danced as part of a promotional campaign by the Spanish Consulate at Eaton’s department store. The informal group came to an end when Joselina left Vancouver in 1986 for more lucrative work as a belly dancer in Belgium. She currently lives and works in Nova Scotia.

Ancer and Nieto have become beloved leaders in Vancouver’s flamenco scene. Both are of Hispanic heritage: Ancer was born in a small Mexican town in 1950, while Nieto, born in Texas in 1947, has Mexican roots. Both speak Spanish as their first language (though Nieto grew up in the United States, Spanish was in common use in the Mexican barrios in Texas and, later, California, where the family lived).

Nieto started Mexican folk dance at age fourteen in classes at a Los Angeles neighbourhood park, and then signed up for Spanish dance and flamenco. He branched out into modern dance in 1967, including lessons with Valentina Oumansky, a disciple of Ruth St. Denis. His professional career was launched in 1969 in El Amor Brujo, a Chicago Lyric Opera House production choreographed by the great Antonio Gades (Don José in Carlos Saura’s film of Carmen). Nieto, too, has a connection to José Greco, with whom he toured from 1972 to 1974.

In 1983, Nieto arrived in Vancouver to join a jazz-fusion band that featured flamenco and Latin rhythms. The group became known as Flamenco Heresy; he was the sole dancer, alongside musicians on a mix of instruments that included percussion, electric bass and flamenco guitar. When Flamenco Heresy was at the Hot Jazz club in June 1988, part of the evening featured Nieto’s dance company, Mozaico Flamenco (founded in Los Angeles in 1972 as Mosacio de Danzas). Ellie O’Day’s review in the Georgia Straight newspaper raved over the “breathtaking half-hour showcase” of dance, and also over “Nieto’s boots [which] tapped out a rapid tattoo, then burst into machine-gun kicks, ready to ignite real sparks on the wooden dance floor.”
Rosario Ancer moved permanently to Vancouver in 1989. Like Nieto, Mexican folk dance was part of her early life: from the age of five, Ancer danced at school events and local celebrations. She recalls being captivated by Lola Flores singing and dancing flamenco in a 1963 movie, De Color Moreno, but it was only a few years later, when the family moved to Monterrey, that Ancer found a flamenco dance teacher. She moved to Madrid to begin the cultural immersion experience, making her professional debut with Antonio del Castillo and his Spanish Ballet in 1980.

While performing at Madrid’s Tablao Flamenco Arco de Cuchilleros, Aner met and then married Victor Kolstee, also in Spain for cultural immersion, who she described as “a long-haired, bearded, blue-eyed guy carrying a guitar” in a memoir published in the Vancouver Dance Centre’s newsletter (October 1995). In Majorca, the couple joined Paco Mundo y María Velásquez Ballet Español, and have worked together ever since, co-founding Flamenco Rosario soon after settling in Vancouver.

The company’s annual Flamenco Festival debuted in 1990 at the Vancouver East Cultural Centre. Featured artists Ancer, Nieto and Sabas Santos, brought up from Mexico, danced together in the finale, Fiesta por bulerías. When Louise Whitney reviewed the 1993 festival in the Courier newspaper, it had moved to the mid-size, downtown Playhouse, which “sold out to an exultant audience.” Ancer, she wrote, “embodies the hot-blooded, quick-tempered, fiery elements of flamenco dance.”

Though she had closed her school, Kay Armstrong was still a keen dancegoer and when one of her students took her to that first Flamenco Festival, they went backstage afterward to offer congratulations. Later, Ancer visited Armstrong at her home. “Kay showed me her photo albums,” Ancer recalled, “and I could see the beauty and strength of her aesthetic.” In Ancer and Kolstee’s west side studio, Centro Flamenco, hangs a photo of Kay Armstrong and Angel Monzón … a link to Vancouver’s past.

Centro Flamenco, founded in 1989, is one of the city’s two major Spanish dance schools. The other is Al Mozaico Flamenco, founded in 2002, run by Nieto and dancer Kasandra, a Vancouverite of Chinese descent.
whose first teachers were Nieto and Aner. In 2009, one of Aner’s former students, Karen Pitkethly – another Vancouverite, of Scottish and Ukrainian descent – opened Karen Flamenco. Each studio has a flamenco company attached and presents shows at major venues. The tiny Kino Café on Cambie Street has, since the mid-nineties, become a more informal flamenco hotspot.

Vancouver dance today has a strong Spanish presence, partly through a fairly steady stream of touring companies from Spain, but more substantially from local practitioners who boast an array of cultural origins. As García Lorca wrote, there is the possibility of uncovering duende – the spirit of authentic passion associated with flamenco – in “every art and every country”. Lorca tells the story of an old Gypsy dancer who heard “a fragment of Bach, and exclaimed: ‘Olé! That has duende!’”

Kaija Pepper is a writer and editor who has recently been published in the Globe and Mail, Queen’s Quarterly and The Walrus. Her fourth book – Renegade Bodies: Canadian Dance in the 1970s, co-edited with Allana Lindgren – was published in spring 2012 by Dance Collection Danse Press/Presse. Kaija discovered Kay Armstrong’s love of Spanish dance when she researched The Dance Teacher: A Biography of Kay Armstrong (published by DCD in 2001).
Vincent Warren
An Artist of Compassion

BY VICTOR SWOBODA

At the top of the wide stairs leading to Théâtre Maisonneuve of Montreal’s Place des Arts hangs a wall-sized tapestry showing a row of male dancers from Les Grands Ballets Canadiens. The scene from Fernand Nault’s 1972 work Ceremony recalls the Last Supper, and at its centre stands Vincent Warren, a figure in sculpted repose, handsome head slightly inclined, arms gently raised in a gesture of conciliation.

The pose – so suggestive of an inner life and its relation to the lives of others – typifies this dancer. For Vincent Warren, dance was never about virtuoso tricks. In a twenty-three-year performing career that began in 1950s New York and continued to acclaim in Montreal where he helped to establish Les Grands Ballets Canadiens as a major company, Warren’s goal was to give meaning to movement.

Vincent de Paul Warren was born August 31, 1938, in Jacksonville, Florida. Fraternal twins Vincent and Denis were the youngest of his parents’ twelve children. Among Warren’s childhood memories is the image of his mother faithfully listening to opera broadcasts on the radio. Only years later would he learn that she had been a fine pianist. Unlike his football-mad brothers, Warren was receptive to what he calls, “a fantasy life of beauty.” Michael Powell’s ballet movie The Red Shoes inspired him at age ten to start a scrapbook about ballet, a fateful move for one destined to create Canada’s largest dance library. At eleven, Warren began ballet classes. His parents approved, but his elementary school peers were less generous. Anonymous telephone calls mocked him as “twinkle toes”. However, unlike his peers, young Vincent knew what he wanted to do in life.

Vincent Warren, c. 1968
Photo: Jack Mitchell
His main inspiration was movies featuring Cyd Charisse, Gene Kelly and Fred Astaire. He was enraptured when Les Ballets Russes came to perform *The Nutcracker*.

Warren’s first ballet teacher was Betty Hyatt Ogilvie, a former Balanchine dancer. She taught in a makeshift studio in her dining room. Warren recalls nothing of Ogilvie’s teaching, only that she, like other teachers of that era, rarely gave corrections. Ogilvie’s school concerts drew loosely on Balanchine works. Performing at sixteen as Bluebeard, Warren quickly learned the techniques of stage improvisation: he lost his knife, so instead of stabbing his wife, he strangled her.

Warren was twelve when his father died. The following year, Denis left home to join the Catholic clergy. The older brothers had already left to join the marines. Upon graduating from high school in 1956, eighteen-year-old Warren headed for New York with an introduction to Igor Schwezoff, a teacher at the School of American Ballet. The school gave Warren a scholarship, but to earn money he worked as a delivery boy for a fashion photographer, carrying prints and dresses to Seventh Avenue fashion houses. Simultaneously, he received a scholarship to the Metropolitan Opera ballet school where Antony Tudor was teaching. Among others taking Tudor’s class was Paul Taylor. Warren soon auditioned for the Metropolitan Opera Ballet corps … and was hired, largely on the strength of his stage presence. He later regretted quitting his training so early, but a job at the fabled Met was irresistible. The Met became his theatre school where he learned about makeup, wigs and costumes. Moreover, he witnessed great artistry through observing singers such as Maria Callas and Renata Tebaldi. This experience afforded a view of human failings, too. One time Callas missed a high note, producing what to Warren was “the ugliest sound I ever heard.”

The Metropolitan Opera regularly toured American cities, and one 1958 tour took Warren, for the first time, to Canada. He thought Toronto boring, but Gallic Montreal had glamour. They rehearsed in Les Grands’ tiny studios on Stanley Street and performed the big ballet scenes in *Aida* and *Faust* at the old Montreal Forum. In New York, the Met corps performed only occasionally, so dancers had time to dance elsewhere. Warren began dancing for choreographer James Waring, whose aesthetic was worlds away from ballet. Waring and other underground artists such as Yvonne Rainer, Steve Paxton and Lucinda Childs were overturning dance conventions with performances in Judson Church off Washington Square, the heart of Greenwich Village. It fit well with Greenwich Village’s beat poets, unconventional artists and the drug culture.

Warren’s good looks and dancer status gave him entry into the social life of New York’s art scene. Here he met the well-known poet, Frank O’Hara. O’Hara had many lovers, but his romantic attachment to Warren was particularly passionate. From 1959 to 1961, the two were a couple and O’Hara published poems about the dancer. Today Warren recalls O’Hara as the love of his life. He became part of O’Hara’s circle within New York’s Abstract Expressionist art movement. With the dance critic, Edwin Denby, Warren regularly attended New York City Ballet performances featuring the work of George Balanchine. Once, Warren stopped Balanchine on the street to compliment him. Balanchine nodded graciously, but when Warren confessed his desire to dance for him, Balanchine turned coldly formal.

To earn money during the off season, Warren danced in summer stock musicals such as *Oklahoma!* in Cohasset, Massachusetts. There he met Peter Boneham who would later become a founding member of Le Groupe de la Place Royale in Montreal. Alternate summers took Warren to the Santa Fe Opera, where a former Metropolitan Opera dancer, Thomas Andrew, choreographed for Stravinsky operas conducted by the great composer himself. During a rehearsal of Stravinsky’s *Renard*, Warren played a rooster swaying its hips with its back to the audience.

Arlene Ancona, Peter Boneham, unknown and Vincent Warren, summer stock, Cohasset, Massachusetts, c. 1960
Vincent Warren and Jeanne Renaud, 1963

Warren could not see the conductor’s beat, so Stravinsky suddenly shouted, “I follow your hips!”

In 1960, Les Grands performed on Long Island in Eric Hyrst’s Labyrinth. Warren was delighted by the small company’s clean lines and was impressed by company founder Ludmilla Chiriaeff. Later that year, Chiriaeff returned to New York in search of male dancers. She observed Warren in Tudor’s class. The two chatted before Warren raced to another class uptown. Chiriaeff followed. This time, the two bonded. Warren agreed to come to Montreal, partly because he liked the company, partly to establish his own artistic credentials outside New York, where he felt overshadowed by O’Hara’s artist friends.

Warren arrived in Montreal in 1961 on a two-month contract. He danced a minor role in Coppélia (Swanilda was danced by Eva von Gency, later co-founder of Les Ballets Jazz de Montréal), and Tybalt in Eric Hyrst’s Labyrinth based on Romeo and Juliet. The sixteen-member company performed at Her Majesty’s Theatre, a European-style theatre that was demolished in 1963 following the opening of Place des Arts. He joined the company’s fall tour of the Maritimes and returned for the 1962 season.

Les Grands Ballets increased in size to thirty dancers in 1963, and Chiriaeff lobbied for her troupe to become the first dance company at Place des Arts. He joined the company and for the 1962 season.

Les Grands Ballets increased in size to thirty dancers in 1963, and Chiriaeff lobbied for her troupe to become the first dance company to perform at Place des Arts. Warren was listed as soloist when the company inaugurated the new stage. Two years later, celebrated Canadian filmmaker Norman McLaren started work on a special project with Warren and dancer Margaret Mercier. Using an experimental multiple exposure technique, McLaren shot the pair dancing Chiriaeff’s choreography without music in a black-box set where the dancers were back-lit. His haunting masterpiece, Pas de Deux, was nominated for an Academy Award, and has ensured its performers’ immortality.

In 1964, during a three-month company tour, by bus, Warren’s family had a rare chance to see him perform in Florida. He was partnered with Christa Mertins, a German-born dancer who had initially immigrated to South America where she later boosted ballet in Guatemala. Sharing the same musicality, their partnership felt right. The duo had healthy competition from David and Anna-Maria Holmes. Both couples were determined to show their best, especially in The Nutcracker, which Fernand Nault introduced to the company in 1964. In a flamboyant version of Waltz of the Flowers, Warren launched Mertins into the air. The Holmes pair then followed, performing an eye-catching duet to equal applause.

Nault’s return to Montreal after many years as ballet master at American Ballet Theatre added a world-class dance mind to Les Grands. He could stage classical works such as Fokine’s Les Sylphides as well as choreograph new works with great popular appeal such as Carmina Burana and the rock ballet Tommy. Nault considered Warren’s classical technique weak and favoured Richard Beaty, a former American Ballet Theatre dancer. Warren, though, was exceptionally strong and attentive in his partnering.

In Giselle, Mertins appeared to be floating in Warren’s arms. Mertins missed the 1964 season because of injury and quit the next year just as Warren was named principal dancer.

As he had in New York, Warren explored Montreal’s experimental dance scene. In the beginnings of what would become the seminal company Le Groupe de la Place Royale, he performed in works of Jeanne Renaud such as Blanc sur-blanc (1964) and Phases et Reseaux (1965). But deprived of his favourite
Vincent Warren in John Butler’s Catulli Carmina (1964)
partner and passed over for major classical roles with Les Grands, in 1966 Warren reconsidered his future. He decided to return to New York and reconnect with O'Hara.

Then came tragic news: O'Hara had been killed in a vehicle accident. Warren remained in Montreal and poured his grief into Nault’s new work, *Gehenne*, an experience, he maintains, that made him a stronger artist. On a 1969 European tour, he danced Balanchine’s *Theme and Variations* with a new partner, Ghislaine Thesmar, later a Paris Opera Ballet star. At London’s Sadler’s Wells, critic Richard Buckle praised his interpretation of Catullus in John Butler’s *Catulli Carmina*: “Warren’s interpretation … alone justifies bringing a full ballet company and chorus across the Atlantic.” On that tour he also partnered the Canadian-born guest star Melissa Hayden in *Allegro Brillante*. Her initial testiness toward him eventually turned into friendship.

But Warren had lost faith in the company. After the tour’s final performance in Italy, he abruptly announced his departure. He joined Théâtre français de la danse, a new company in Paris organized by choreographer Joseph Lazzini. Warren was named “étoile”. But despite two successful roles (in *Ecce Homo*, where he was Christ, and *La Valse*, where he was a drug-induced mad person), he was unhappy. The company offered no support, choreographers skipped rehearsals and shows were staged too quickly.

Paris had two saving graces. Classes with Tatiana Grantseva put him in dancing trim for summertime performances in St. Malo with Thesmar. His other saviour was Anne Beranger, a TV producer with whom he fell in love. Beranger had filmed Maurice Béjart’s famous *Sacre du Printemps*. For a year, he virtually lived in Beranger’s apartment. During this time, he accepted an invitation from Peter Appel of Cologne Ballet to dance in *Giselle* with Mexican dancer Ana Cardus. But Warren pined for the well-structured rehearsals and the balanced repertoire available at Les Grands. To Beranger’s dismay, he returned to Montreal, arranging to work part of the year in Cologne. Unfortunately, on his way to Cologne in 1970, he contracted hepatitis and lay in a Cologne hospital for three months. Cortisone treatments made him gain weight, and he returned to Montreal bloated. Weight gain was a challenge throughout his career.

Meanwhile, Les Grands staged Nault’s rock-and-drugs ballet *Tommy* to the music of The Who and starring dancer Sasha Belinsky. *Tommy* was a hit. Once recovered from illness, Warren became *Tommy’s* poster boy on the North American tour for more than two years. He also performed in Nault’s jazzy accompanying piece, *Hip and Straight*, part of the 1970s ballet-jazz trend (one critic wrote that it “looked like a hairdressers’ convention in a gay bar”). Warren returned one summer to Cologne, where he performed the Don Quixote duet with Angelica Bornhausen. But Peter Appel’s dismissal as director of the Cologne Ballet closed Cologne’s door to Warren.

Encouraged by *Tommy*, Nault staged *Ceremony*, a rock mass. It
was not a hit, but the photo of its Last Supper scene remains iconic. Choreographer Brian Macdonald became Les Grands’ director in 1974. He contributed works such as Diabelli Variations, in which Warren as Diabelli partnered Annette av Paul (replaced by Michelle Morin in the television version), and Bawdy Variations about a boy’s first sexual experience in a bordello. Dancer Brydon Paige wore a fat suit as the bordello madam. When Paige left the company, Warren inherited the role and the suit (with his sizeable girth today, he jokes that now he wouldn’t need it). After a double bill where Warren first danced the madam and then the prince in Swan Lake, a critic wrote, “This fellow displayed the versatility of the century!”

Macdonald stepped down as director in 1977, but continued to choreograph works such as Double Quartet for Warren, av Paul, Lorne Toumine and Dwight Shelton. Among Warren’s roles in the 1970s were Bejart’s Oiseau de feu, Nault’s Cantique des cantiques, Macdonald’s Tam-ti-delam, Paul Taylor’s Aureole and Chiriaeff’s last solo choreographed especially for him, Artere. His partners included Veronique Landory, Sonia Taverner and Sonia Vartanian. When Warren retired from the stage in 1979, Macdonald choreographed a special duet, Adieu Robert Schumann, about Robert Schumann (Warren) and his wife Clara (av Paul), with contralto Maureen Forrester singing Clara’s reminiscences. His retirement performance at Place des Arts on April 8, 1979, included Adieu Robert Schumann, Concerto Barocco and Carmina Burana. Eight female members of his family attended.

Subsequently, Warren began teaching teenagers at Les Grands’ adjoining school, École supérieure de danse du Québec. He knew how to give a class, but still had to learn how to develop dancers. Nevertheless, his partnering technique was sure, and his pas de deux class became popular. In the Dance Collection Danse book Coleman Lemieux & Compagnie Reconstructing/La Reprise de Fifteen Heterosexual Duets by/ de James Kudelka (2006), the distinguished dancer-choreographer Laurence Lemieux described how she benefitted from Warren’s instruc-
When Luc Amyot became École’s director in 1992, he dismissed Warren along with some other ballet teachers. Warren volunteered to continue to run the school’s small dance library, thus beginning his third career. He installed floor-to-ceiling shelves and allowed books to circulate. He bought books and videos and eventually donated his own large collection, including valuable historic prints. Today the dance library, with some 25,000 items, is Canada’s largest. In 2010, it was renamed Bibliothèque de la danse Vincent-Warren. Now retired as librarian, Warren nevertheless continues to donate to the library’s holdings. In 2012, he contributed ninety-three valuable Nikolai Legat caricatures.

Donations are only one sign of Warren’s generous spirit. He traveled the country at his own expense to serve on behalf of dance. He has been a board member of Dance in Canada Association, president of le Regroupement québécois de la danse, and a member of the Arts Council of the Montreal Urban Community.

Dancers of Warren’s generation earned little. Some television commercials and guest artist appearances added to his earnings, but ultimately he has no pension plan. He maintains his large Montreal apartment by selling valuable artwork received years ago from New York artists. But there’s no lack of official recognition. His awards include the Queen’s Jubilee Medal (1976) and a lifetime achievement award, the Prix Denise Pelletier (1992), from the Quebec government. He was made a Member of the Order of Canada in 2004.

“He’s the living memory of our dance world,” recently declared Anik Bissonnette, former star of Les Grands Ballets Canadiens and a major force in Quebec dance. She has known Warren as a dancer, coach and historian, and she was among those in the audience at his retirement gala. “He’s really a great counsellor. I still go to him for advice. He’s someone who really listens to people, an extremely generous person in all ways. Choreographers preparing a work seek him out. José Navas, for example, was eager to talk to him about a contemporary version of Giselle. Vincent is happy to help and never demands anything in return.”

Still active in a Quebec dance community that offers him its respect and affection, at age seventy-four Warren remains that boy in Jacksonville who was so determined to find a “fantasy life of beauty.”

Victor Swoboda, chief dance writer for The Gazette in Montreal and a regular contributor to Dance International magazine, has followed dance since seeing his first Swan Lake in 1968 with Erik Bruhn and Carla Fracci at American Ballet Theatre in New York.
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SOUND VENTURE

Ray was her given name. “Rachel” was an invention when she got an Equity card in New York City and there was already a Ray Browne. She travelled through radical phases in her life. There was a play of forces inside as Rachel continuously balanced light and dark. A woman of unflagging determination, once she had decided on achieving something she never ever relinquished her goal.

Rachel left us peacefully, after travelling to Ottawa to see students of the School of Contemporary Dancers perform in a massive Canada Dance Festival production of Jean-Pierre Perreault’s Joe et Rudolphe that brought together students from Canada’s professional contemporary dance training schools.

It seems certain that Rachel attended Joe in spirit. As a mentor, teacher and choreographer who worked with many generations of dancers, she was focussed, entirely attentive, a proud but critical observer, attuned to every nuance and detail of a dancer’s work. Odette-Heyn Penner, one of the co-founders and co-directors of The School of Contemporary Dancers, noted that Rachel found, with each new process, a simpler, more supportive way to work with dancers, moving into a deepening identity as an artist and humanitarian through her work.

Early dances by Rachel were often created in response to her profound love of folk songs, classical music and poetry. There was a deep vein of socio-political activism in her. These elements had been part of her upbringing; she studied music as a child, and her father was a Russian political exile. Drawing from her formative influences, her early dances also seemed symbols of her struggle to move beyond the forms of the modernist ideals she admired, and the ideals of classical form that she absorbed deeply from her ballet training and performing career in New York and with the Royal Winnipeg Ballet. Despite the enormous and relentless demands of her role as artistic director of Contemporary Dancers – choreographing, teaching, dancing, directing, hiring dancers and choreographers – she was determined to stay creatively vital. Her great desire was to develop as a choreographer. She held to pursuing this artistic goal, she once told me, “because it’s so hard.”

Though Rachel did not much like the word “pioneer” as a descriptor, she is a founder of Canadian modern dance. Hired by her teacher and mentor Benjamin Harkarvy, in 1957 she came to Canada from New York to dance with the Royal Winnipeg Ballet during Harkarvy’s brief tenure.
as artistic director. After four years she left to raise her young family. But dance called her – she began to teach at the downtown Winnipeg studio of Nenad and Jill Lhotka and she soon began to choreograph. Her first piece, Odetta’s Songs and Dances, emerged – she described this in her biography, Dancing Toward the Light: “When this first dance came out of my body, it certainly was not balletic … the movement looked, felt, contemporary. It was just from inside, from my gut someplace …”

Rachel started Canada’s oldest existing modern dance company, Contemporary Dancers (now Winnipeg’s Contemporary Dancers), in 1964. At first a small touring ensemble, the company quickly grew. In its first years, there was no support from the Canada Council for the Arts, though Rachel received individual encouragement as a performer and frequently studied in New York. She invited noted choreographers to work with the company, including Sophie Maslow, Dan Wagoner and James Waring. The company built a strong following in Winnipeg, for years running a very successful subscription series and touring extensively in Canada and the U.S. In the early years, Rachel did everything, from typing programs to making dances, from hiring and training dancers to dancing herself.

After nearly twenty years, in the context of the huge metamorphosis in Canadian dance, the rise of one-choreographer companies, the ascendance of Quebec dance, and conflicting artistic imperatives that affected the Contemporary Dancers board and dancers, the company went through a convulsive crisis. Rachel finally tendered her resignation. Over time, she re-established and sustained a cordial relationship with the company, becoming an important fundraiser and advocate of its activity. And her choreography was consistently presented.

Stepping down as Contemporary Dancers’ artistic director against her will marked a traumatic and seismic change in Rachel’s world. However, free of the responsibilities of organizing and running Contemporary Dancers, she began to devote her energies to her choreography, finding solace, and new direction, in creation. She cultivated her connection with the school, a decades-long commitment that never faltered throughout the company’s troubles, and remained a key player – teaching, mentoring, choreographing.

She was valued as a guide and wise mentor by Odette Heyn-Penner and Faye Thomson, co-directors and co-founders of the school that Rachel effectively handed to them while both were still in their twenties.

Concentrating on her choreographic aims from the early 1980s forward, she created a long series of challenging, episodic works including Mouvement, Six Messages, Edgelit, Toward Light and many others. While often her voice was spare, searching, dark, she also created light-hearted pieces. Her last professional work was Radiant, created for the company’s Kristin Haight. Rachel’s final piece, Momentum, a trio for the school’s graduating students, was performed in May 2012.

Rachel continued to dance selectively. Lyrical as a young dancer, then slowed by age and physical impairment, she was always expressive and, in later years, hauntingly so. Dance artist/archivist Stephanie Ballard, a close and longtime artistic friend, is considering whether she can restage Home Again, created in 2010, an intergenerational work that featured Rachel in a powerful concluding solo.

Rachel will be remembered for her courage and integrity. She will be remembered for the way she wrestled with every side of every possible question to find the way to act that would be most morally acceptable. Her choreographies reflected this, with their social commentary and feminism, and their clarity. Honesty made her a cherished mentor.

Rachel became a Member of the Order of Canada in 1997 in recognition of her leadership in establishing and nurturing dance in Winnipeg and her significance in establishing and developing modern dance across Canada. She received many...
other honorifics, but her driving desire was always to be in the studio, creating and refining her work.

The School of Contemporary Dancers celebrates its fortieth year in 2012/13. In 2014, Winnipeg’s Contemporary Dancers will turn fifty. For her remarkable, gutsy startup spirit, and her indomitable will, Rachel will be remembered with love and tributes through the entities that she started for the love of dance.

In later years, Rachel cherished time with her grandchildren and three daughters, Ruth, Miriam and Annette. She had said good-bye to two husbands, Don Browne and Ben Sokolow, and spent her last years living her feminist ideals. Her works, from the 1990s onward, were created for and danced by women. She worked with some of Canada’s greatest women contemporary dancers – among them Stephanie Ballard, Odette Heyn-Penner, Faye Thomson, Pat Fraser, Karen Kuzak, Susan Macpherson, Davida Monk, Julia Sasso. In Rachel’s searching, minutely nuanced explorations, inner space was created, theatrical, acoustic spaces resonant with deep listening. Journeying the textured, sometimes bleak terrain of women’s work, Rachel’s dances brought to light inchoate voices of profound solitude, and expressions of indelible joy with the voice of her soul, questing.

Rachel Browne (centre) in Tedd Robinson’s Nothing Past the Swans, 1986
Photo: Robert Tinker
Born in Birmingham, England, on November 21, 1931, Jill (Hatwell) Officer immigrated to Canada in 1956. Her early dance training included Revived Greek Dance, fancy dancing, tap and ballet. As a certified teacher of the then Royal Academy of Dancing, Jill accepted a teaching job in London, Ontario, and eventually developed her own successful dance studio in Kitchener. Jill spent summers performing as a Canadette in the Canadian National Exhibition (CNE) Grandstand Show and it was there that Ruth Priddle and Jill first met. While versatile in many dance styles, it was her projection of sheer joy in movement that has remained so memorable.

When the fledgling dance program was expanding within the University of Waterloo’s (UW) Kinesiology Department, Jill was the perfect choice to teach ballet technique; in 1970 she began a twenty-two-year career in dance at UW. Her courses expanded to include Ballet History, Ballet Choreography and a pioneering course in Canadian Dance History, based on her Canadian Dance Dictionary research project. In the 1990s, Jill developed an innovative correspondence course in Ballet History, using the technology of cassette-recorded lectures. This proved an ideal platform for her delightful sense of humour and conversational style. Students remarked that they felt they were sitting in a drawing room, listening to anecdotes that brought people and events to life.
Jill was a wonderful storyteller and this, combined with her passion for dance history and her ability to blend academic knowledge with the dance studio experience, were the hallmark of a brilliant teaching career. Rhonda Ryman recalls performing in Jill’s Renaissance Dance Group: “We danced in courtyards and theatres, in beautiful costumes borrowed from the Stratford Festival, accompanied by members of UW’s Early Music Group playing period instruments. Jill’s expertise, energy and sparkle gave us all a deeper appreciation of the roots of western theatre dance.”

Perhaps her most treasured accomplishment was the UW Distinguished Teaching Award (1979), a testament not only to her dedication and discipline but also to her commitment to students.

Unforgettable are Jill’s spirited anecdotes about one summer in the early 1970s when she took a small group of students to study with famed dancer-choreographer Léonide Massine on Capri, his island retreat in the Mediterranean. Ever the showman, Massine was eager to share his choreographic theories and also his system of dance notation. The experience formed the basis of Jill’s pioneering CHOREO research project (1977) – one of the first to use a dance notation system as input to generate a computer-animated dancer.

Jill served as chair of the UW Dance Department for seven years, (1982-1985, 1988-1992), during which time we spearheaded a joint degree with the Teacher Training Program of Canada’s National Ballet School. Jill was a member of the CAHPER Dance Committee (Canadian Association of Health, Physical Education and Recreation) and was on the board of directors of the Dance in Canada Association where she was actively engaged in promoting dance in Canada.

Over a three-year period in the late 1970s, Jill compiled a complete record (up to 1980) of the repertoires of five of Canada’s major dance companies: The Royal Winnipeg Ballet (1939); The National Ballet of Canada (1951); Les Grands Ballets Canadiens (beginning as Les Ballets Chiraeff, 1955); Anna Wyman Dance Theatre (1973); and Toronto Dance Theatre (1968). In all, 384 works are listed. Jill’s most significant legacy is the Canadian Dance Dictionary, which became the basis for the Encyclopedia of Theatre Dance in Canada/Encyclopédie de la danse théâtrale au Canada, published by Dance Collection Danse in 2000. This legacy is our legacy.

We salute the outstanding contribution to dance in Canada, we honour the brilliant teaching career and, most importantly, we thank Jill Officer for being a wonderful colleague and special friend.
A Man of Memory and Wit
Leland Windreich, 1926-2012

BY KAIJA PEPPER

Until Leland Windreich started digging, some of British Columbia's most fascinating dance past had never been fully uncovered or celebrated – in particular the story of the province's many talented dancers who joined the famed Ballets Russes companies. Lee's persistence in tracking down this history had, perhaps, a personal dimension: the first full evening of dance he attended was by the glamorous Ballet Russe de Monte Carlo in his hometown of San Francisco in 1941. Fourteen-year-old Lee and his mother went as a break from their usual movie musicals (Lee was a big fan of Ruby Keeler and Eleanor Powell). The Ballet Russe sparked a passionate cultural journey into dance – and into the music, visual art and literature associated with it – that lasted more than seven decades, until his death in Vancouver on July 28, 2012.

Lee began writing about dance in student publications while at the University of California, Berkeley. Following graduation, he wrote several book reviews for the San Francisco Chronicle. He often spoke fondly of the encouragement given him by American choreographer Agnes de Mille; the two became pen-pals after Lee wrote to de Mille in response to her magazine article on Alicia Markova (who had danced in Les Sylphides at the first Ballet Russe performance he attended).

It was in Canada, where he immigrated in 1961, that Lee became a serious writer and an important BC historian. Lee was working as a librarian at the University of Victoria when he heard about Ian Gibson – “acclaimed as the Canadian Nijinsky”, as he wrote later in the Encyclopedia of Theatre Dance in Canada. Gibson, with the help of teacher June Roper, had successfully auditioned for the Ballet Russe de Monte Carlo on the company’s 1939 visit to Vancouver. Lee subse-
quenty discovered seven other BC students of Roper who joined either Colonel de Basil’s Ballet Russe or the Monte Carlo company, or the fledgling American Ballet Theatre.

After early retirement in 1985 from Vancouver’s Langara College library, he dedicated himself to writing. Countless reviews, articles and Letters to the Editor were published internationally in magazines such as Dance in Canada, Ballet Review, Dance International, Dancing Times, The World and I and, more recently on the web, Ballet-Dance Magazine.


When I met Lee in 1991, he was an editor at Dance International, where his historical knowledge was a valuable resource, ensuring a level of accuracy and insight the magazine could be proud of during his years of service there. He had an enviable memory for dates, and was a strict grammarian, disapproving of my argument that split infinitives should sometimes be allowed on stylistic grounds.

A generous colleague, Lee was always keen to share research and books. When we attended ballet together (he lost his appetite for other kinds of dance in later years), Lee would always have a passionate personal response and often a wealth of background about the work.

Leland Windreich was DCD’s Dance Historian of the Month in March 2010. Lee was honoured at this recognition, and his interview is full of lively memories told with his typical grace and wit.

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