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# DANCE AUSTRALIA



ISSUE 230 JANUARY / FEBRUARY / MARCH '21

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## DAVID HALLBERG

Taking the lead at the Australian Ballet

## BLACK LIVES MATTER

meets the pointe shoe

## EASY DOES IT

Returning to the studio post-lockdown

## TAKE A BOW

Celebrating teachers and their ingenuity during Covid

## PLUS

Back to life! Dance returns to the stage

Bangarra's Lillian Banks on being Cathy Freeman

SDC's Dmitri Kleioris

Cadi MacCarthy on youth dance

Rising talent Lewis Major

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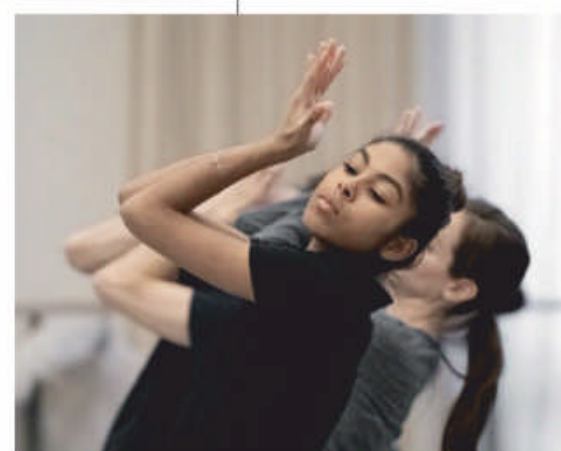
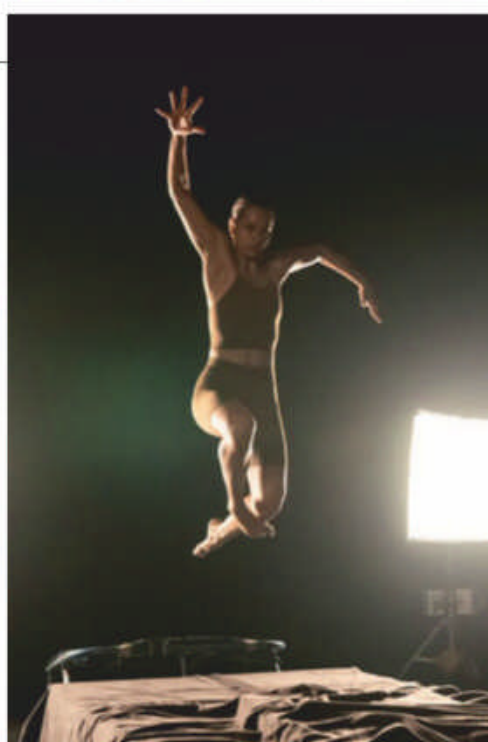
**20** **DAVID HALLBERG STEPS IN**  
Karen van Ulzen  
talks to the Australian Ballet's new  
artistic director about his plans.



**29** **CONNECTING WITH CATHY**  
Bangarra dancer  
Lillian Banks  
stepped into the very fast shoes  
of the great Cathy Freeman.

**25** **SHOES OF COLOUR**  
How the  
Black Lives Matter movement  
has reached the  
predominantly pink world of  
pointe shoes.

**34** **PROPELLING YOUNG LIVES**  
Youth dance is about more  
than just learning moves,  
Cadi McCarthy tells Geraldine Higginson.



**44** **WHY I DANCE**  
Sydney Dance  
Company's Dmitiri  
Kleioris couldn't stop  
dancing from the day he was born.



**50** **TEACHERS' SPOTLIGHT**  
Celebrating the  
inspiration and  
ingenuity of our dance educators.

COVER: Sydney Dance  
Company's (front to back)  
Jesse Scales, Rhys  
Kosakowski and Luke Hayward  
in a scene from  
'Impermanence'. (See p.10.)  
PHOTO: PEDRO GREIG

## Regulars

06 IN STEP

10 BACK TO LIFE!  
Fingers crossed – live dance will  
return to the stage in 2021.

39 CLASS  
**The power of belonging**  
How syllabus organisations rose to  
the Covid challenge.

46 HOW A DANCE BECOMES A FILM  
Behind a professional production.

60 NUTRITION  
**Food and body back on track**  
Be kind to yourself as you return to  
the studio, advises Fiona Sutherland.

66 LIMELIGHT  
Rising choreographer Lewis Major.



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PHOTO: TENE WARD, PHOTOGRAPHED KAROLINA KURAS, COURTESY OF THE NATIONAL BALLET OF CANADA.

# Brown shoes matter

WHEN dancer Tene Ward was filmed on Instagram trying on her first pair of “skin-toned” pointe shoes last year, the incident became a *cause celebre* for the Black Lives Matter movement. All her career the only shoes available to her had been pink – now she had a pair that were better matched to her brown skin. Most dancewear brands have a range of products in various skin tones where needed – such as ballet flats and tights – but pointe shoes have remained stubbornly in shades of pink. Now, however, manufacturers are responding to the calls for change.

Tene is a dancer with the National Ballet of Canada; however, she is a graduate of the Australian Ballet School: she talks to writer Taylor Ventor in this issue.

The Black Lives Matter protests erupted and swept the world last year, uniting BIPOCs (Black, Indigenous and People Of Colour) in all countries in a common fight for equality and justice.

Personally, I am not keen on the acronym BIPOC in the Australian context. I feel the term is inadequate and unhelpfully reductive – it lumps all races that aren’t white and privileged under one acronym that identifies them solely in terms of colour. This seems to me to be a very simplistic view of the diversity of people who feel marginalised because of their race. It is an American expression – born out of a country with a vastly different history and racial demographic than our own and not well suited to our own multicultural, migrant mix.

We must advocate, however, for diversity. It is patently the case that in Australia the splendid variety of our population has not been reflected in our arts. As for our First Nations people . . . Bruce Pascoe’s book *Dark Emu* (turned into a dance work by Bangarra) has been contested, but after reading it I was left with the sense that Australia has been living in a type of Dark Age. Europeans came, destroyed, and consequently missed out on a potential new Enlightenment – in agriculture, food, medicine and more – instead remaining ignorant of the knowledge around them. We are only just waking up to this knowledge now. It is astounding and tragic to think what we might have learnt if our first encounters had been about a meeting of cultures rather than a clash. ~



KAREN VAN ULZEN – EDITOR



# Queensland Ballet

ARTISTIC DIRECTOR LI CUNXIN AO

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# Dance at Adelaide Festival

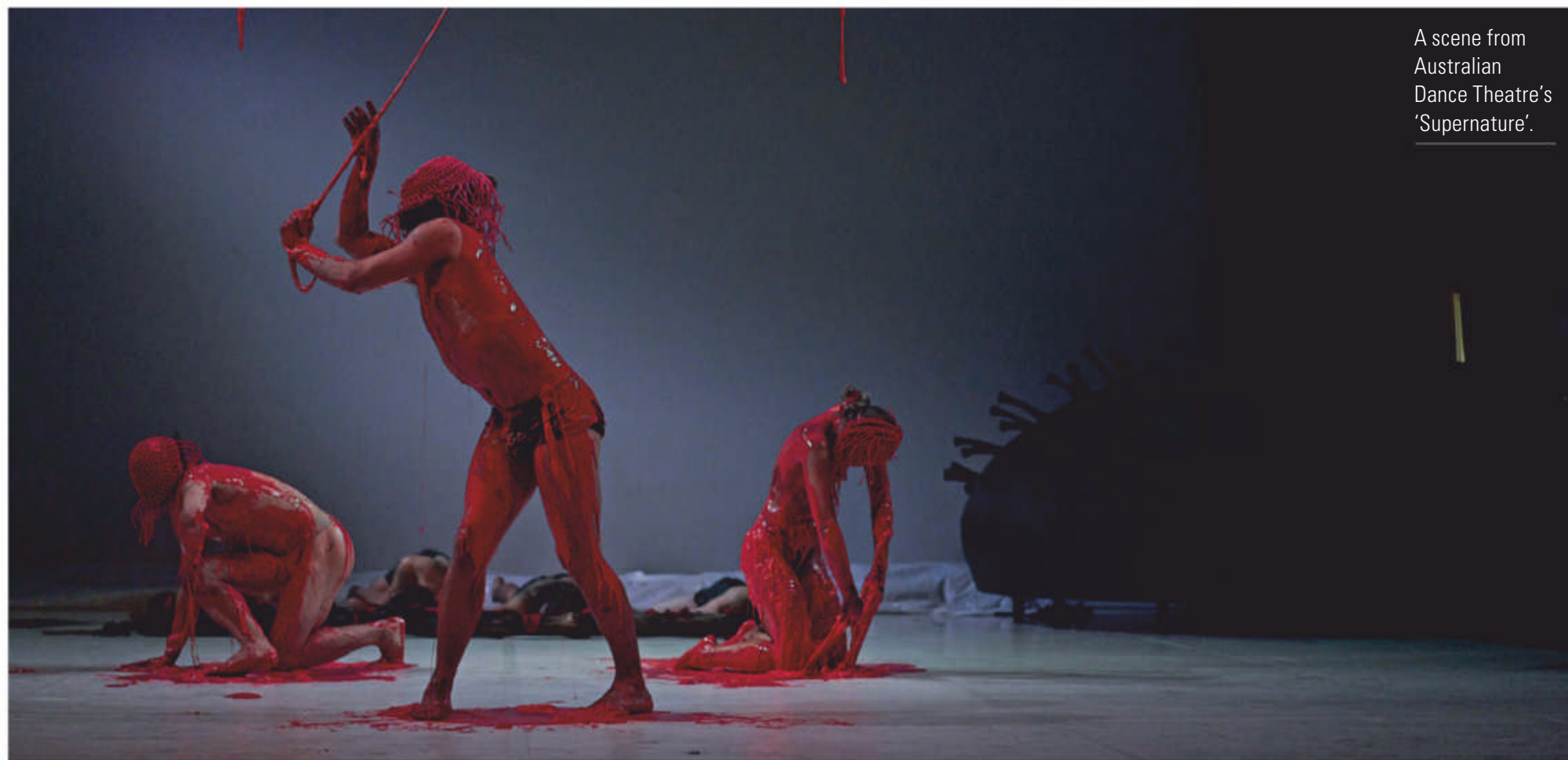
PLANNING an international festival during a pandemic is not easy, but Adelaide Festival directors Neil Armfield and Rachel Healy have come up with some innovative ideas. One is their Live from Europe program, which will enable audiences to attend live international performances, happening in real time on the other side of the world, at Her Majesty's Theatre in Adelaide, channeled via high resolution cameras and the latest in streaming technology.

On the program is *BLKDOG*, from one of "the most thrilling new voices in contemporary choreography", Botis Seva; commissioned and presented by Far From The Norm and London's Sadler's Wells. "Colleagues in London have said to us that not since Hofesh Shechter has there been such a buzz about a choreographer," Healy says, describing him as "utterly exhilarating" – "he seems to have created a new choreographic language". The performance will also be livestreamed at Middleback Arts Centre,

Whyalla – part of a new program bringing festival shows to regional centres.

Other dance on the festival includes Sydney Dance Company with *Impermanence*, Australian Dance Theatre with *Supernature*, Restless Dance Theatre with *Guttered* and rising local star Lewis Major with a double bill: *S/WORDS* and *Unfolding* (see Limelight, p.66).

*The Adelaide Festival runs from February 26 to March 14.*



A scene from Australian Dance Theatre's 'Supernature'.

PHOTO: SAM ROBERTS PHOTOGRAPHY

## Perth Festival highlights

THREE dance experiences will enliven the Perth Festival this year, leading with a trio of works by West Australian Ballet (WAB) including two world premieres, as the company returns to the Quarry Amphitheatre. (See "Back to Life" feature for details).

The organisers have commissioned an evening of dance at The Rechabite, with three bite-sized new works to sample across three locations. Dancers will guide the audience through the heart of Northbridge – from the basement of The Rechabite to the State Theatre Centre garden and upstairs at The Blue Room Theatre. This experience, *MoveMoveMove*, which is curated by choreographer and dancer Tyrone Earl Lraé Robinson, presents a hand-picked selection of

what's new in contemporary dance.

Also on the program is *Structural Dependency* (pictured), in which the audience is invited to be more than just spectators. The walls, surrounding structures, even the chairs they are sitting on become involved in the work, closing the gap between viewer and performer. *Structural Dependency* is set to a driving industrial soundtrack and shows off the highly physical choreographic style of Brooke Leeder and dancers.

Perth contemporary company Co3 is performing *Archives of Humanity*, conceived and directed by Raewyn Hill with dramaturgy by Gavin Webber. Both the above shows are



PHOTO: MATSU

already sold out before Christmas. On screen, dance will be represented by *Feminism Has No Borders*, a series of short films that see local and international dance artists partner in virtual choreographic collaborations.

*Perth Festival runs from February 5.*



## Joel Bray resides at Chunky

MELBOURNE company Chunky Move has announced that Joel Bray is to become its inaugural choreographer in residence. Beginning this year, Bray will undertake an \$80,000 two-year residency, an initiative in partnership with the Tanja Liedtke Foundation.

The residency is designed to provide Australian choreographic artists with extensive support to develop and present new

work, further their artistic practice, gain organisational knowledge, extend their professional networks and build a meaningful ongoing connection with Chunky Move.

The new position comes as Chunky Move celebrates its 25th anniversary. A celebratory digital media archive can be found at [cmarchive.net](http://cmarchive.net), where a wealth of fascinating images, video and other material can be accessed.



PHOTO: DANIEL BOUD

## Mentorships at SA Dance Hub

EIGHT talented aspiring choreographers were awarded a special two-week mentorship program at Adelaide's Dance Hub in December, thanks to its Young Artist Program (YAP).

The participants were drawn from an open call for applicants. They are **Andrew Barnes, Cayleigh Davies, Sam Hall, Jazz Hriskin, Jacinta Jeffries, Chloe Moir, Petra Szabo Heath and Mimi Yoshii.**

They were mentored by South Australian choreographer Alison Currie in a program of practice-led composition, performance tasks, sharing and independent studio sessions to develop a short choreographic investigation. At the end of the fortnight they presented the outcome at Dance Hub SA's studio at the Lion Arts Centre.

Their choreography can be further developed through career pathways offered by Dance Hub SA, such as its flagship Artist in Residence program or presentations at arts festivals.



PHOTO: STEPHEN A'COURT

## New ADT residencies

AUSTRALIAN Dance Theatre has announced two new artists-in-residence. Artistic Director Garry Stewart chose two "exceptional" recipients whose multi-disciplinary approach to dance made them stand out in a field of high calibre candidates. They are **Tanya Voges**, an Adelaide-based choreographer with a background in painting and visual arts, and **Dianne Reid**, also from Adelaide, a teacher and filmmaker who begins at the Centre in early 2021. Each residency is supported by a stipend of \$6000.



# Moves at Qld Ballet and WA Ballet

QLD Ballet has said farewell to two beloved artists of the company. Principal Artist Laura Hidalgo will retire from the stage following an international career that saw her grace Queensland's stages when she joined QB in 2015. Hidalgo has danced all the major roles in classical and contemporary repertoire to critical acclaim. She will be remembered most for the title roles of Mertuil in *Dangerous Liaisons*, which was created for her, and *The Firebird*, both choreographed by Liam Scarlett.

Company Artist Tonia Looker has also retired from the stage after her career in Royal New Zealand Ballet and QB. She will take up

a new role in QB's Foundation team.

Joining QB in 2021 as First Company Artist is former Australian Ballet and National Ballet of Canada dancer Joe Chapman.

Four West Australian Ballet dancers have been promoted: Nikki Blain, Jesse Homes and Mayume Noguromi have each been promoted to the rank of Demi-Soloist while Julio Blanes has been promoted to Soloist.

Blanes, originally from Cuba, joined the company in mid-2018. Both Homes and Blain joined WAB as Young Artists in 2015 and 2016 respectively. Noguromi joined the company's corps de ballet in 2019.



Julio Blanes

## MUSICALS come from away

FOLLOWING a complete shutdown of all musical theatre last year, throwing thousands out of work, a number of shows have announced they will return to the stage this year.

*Come from Away*, which took Melbourne by storm in 2019, is scheduled to open at QPAC's Lyric Theatre in Brisbane from March 28, for a strictly limited season. It will be the first major musical to open in Queensland since the Covid-enforced shutdown.

The music was the most successful musical ever staged at Melbourne's Comedy Theatre, breaking all box office records.

Beating Brisbane to stage a live show is a

Sydney Opera House presentation of *Rent*, which opened on December 27 and closes January 31, and stars Tim Omaji (Timomatic), Callum Francis (Kinky Boots) and Seann Miley Moore. Omaji, who plays the charming Benny, rose to fame as a contestant on *So You Think You Can Dance Australia* and *Australia's Got Talent*.

Sydney's Lyric Theatre will host the long-awaited *Hamilton* from March 17. Melbourne dancer and WAAPA graduate Jason Arrow will play the lead role.

In July, the Sydney Coliseum will host the annual panto, *Snow White and the*

*Seven Dwarfs*, directed and produced by Bonny Lythgoe.

In Melbourne, *Harry Potter and the Cursed Child* will resume performances on February 25, after a hiatus of 49 weeks. The landmark production suspended a record-breaking run at Melbourne's Princess Theatre because of COVID 19.

*Shrek the Musical*, starring Ben Mingay, Lucy Durack and Todd McKenney, is continuing its run in Sydney (Lyric Theatre, from January 1), Melbourne (His Majesty's, from February 16) and Brisbane (Lyric, from May 9).



The Australian cast of 'Harry Potter and the Cursed Child'.

PHOTO: MATT MURPHY



# Bangarra's story told on film

"YOU can't tell the story of Aboriginal Australia without featuring Bangarra." That story has, at last, been told in a documentary film called *Firestarter*. The film, which celebrates the 30-year evolution of Bangarra, recounts the lives of the three Aboriginal brothers at the core – Stephen, David and Russell Page, who turned the newly born dance group into one of Australia's leading performing arts companies – and mourns the tragic deaths of two of them.

*Firestarter – The Story of Bangarra* is expected to screen from Feb 18, with a broadcast during NAIDOC week on the ABC.

The film acknowledges Bangarra's original founders through its in-depth interviews with Carole Y. Johnson, Cheryl Stone and Monica Stevens. It explores the loss and reclamation of culture, the burden of intergenerational trauma, and the power of art as a messenger for social change and healing.

– CANDIDE MCDONALD



The Bangarra company (from left): Rikki Mason, Gusta Mara, Courtney Radford, Bradley Smith, Beau Dean Riley Smith, Lillian Banks, Stephen Page (seated), Baden Hitchcock, Kassidy Waters, Djakapurra Munyarryun (seated), Tyrel Dulvarie, Nicola Sabatino, Jacob Nash (seated), Tara Gower, Kallum Goolagong, Kiarn Doyle, Glory Tuohy-Daniell, Frances Rings (seated), Rika Hamaguchi, Ryan Pearson, Elma Kris (seated).

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Photo: Genée International Ballet Competition Finalists 2019 by Michael Slobodian



# BACK TO LIFE IN 2021!

Things are finally returning to normal this year, with dancers returning to the stage and audiences to theatres. *Geraldine Higginson* outlines some of the highlights.





F

OR many of us involved in the performing arts 2020 was a tough year. As one of the industries hit hardest by COVID-19 restrictions entire seasons were cancelled, with premieres postponed, rehearsals in the studio not possible and dancers (both students and professional) taking their classes at home.

Happily, 2021 is shaping up to be a much brighter year with dance companies returning to live performances right across Australia. Here are some of *Dance Australia's* highlights and favourite picks of dance performances coming to a theatre near you. If you can, do support your favourite companies by purchasing tickets to their performances. And if you want to hear about upcoming shows and events throughout the year that are yet to be announced, hop online and subscribe to our FREE weekly newsletter! <https://www.danceaustralia.com.au/>

*Disclaimer: All information was supplied by the companies mentioned and correct at time of publication. Please check individual company websites for the latest up-to date performance details.*

## Australian Ballet

### Summertime at the Ballet

The Australian Ballet returns to the stage with an outdoor gala at a new, unusual venue for the company – the Margaret Court Arena at the Australian Tennis Centre. There will be opportunities galore for the dancers to shine in excerpts from Marius Petipa's *La Bayadère*, Tim Harbour's *Filigree and Shadow*, Steven Baynes's *Molto Vivace*, George Balanchine's *Tchaikovsky Pas de deux* and *Theme and Variations*, Rudolf Nureyev's *Don Quixote*, Ronald Hynd's *The Merry Widow* and Lucas Jervies' *Spartacus*. February 25-28.

### New York Dialects

This triple-bill features two iconic yet stylistically different ballets by the American master, George Balanchine. *Serenade* is a lyrical favourite, the first ballet Balanchine choreographed in America on the newly formed School of American Ballet in 1934. Made 12 years later in 1946, *The Four Temperaments* is stark and astringent with the dancers dressed as if for class in the simplest of attire. In addition, a newly commissioned work by American choreographer Pam Tanowitz focussed on the Australian Ballet's male dancers rounds out the program. April 6-24, Sydney Opera House; June 3-12, Arts Centre Melbourne

### Counterpointe

Only Sydney will see this double-bill of William Forsythe's *Artifact Suite* paired with incoming artistic director David Hallberg's staging of *Raymonda* (Act III). The original full-length *Raymonda* was choreographed by Marius Petipa and first presented at the Mariinsky Theatre in St Petersburg in 1898. May 27-April 15, Sydney Opera House.

### Harlequinade

Alexei Ratmansky's staging of Marius Petipa's *Harlequinade* is that rare beast, a comical ballet. Leading characters Harlequin and Columbine are young lovers who are determined to be together despite the efforts of Columbine's greedy father. Robert Perdziola's costume

Brett Chynoweth in The Australian Ballet's premiere of the comical ballet, 'Harlequinade', revived by Alex Ratmansky.





and set design for this work are exquisite and based on the original 1900 designs which are now preserved in a St Petersburg museum. A co-production of American Ballet Theatre and the Australian Ballet, this is its Australian premiere. *September 10-18, Arts Centre Melbourne; November 30-December 18, Sydney Opera House.*

### Anna Karenina

*Anna Karenina* will be performed in Melbourne and Adelaide. Based on the novel by Leo Tolstoy and choreographed by Yuri Possokhov, this tragic story gives its leading dancers roles with the kind of dramatic and expressive potential that so many dancers long to perform. A co-production of the Australian Ballet and Joffrey Ballet, this is its Australian premiere. *June 18-29 Arts Centre Melbourne; July 9-15; Adelaide Festival Centre.*

### Romeo and Juliet

Let Sergei Prokofiev's musical score for *Romeo and Juliet* sweep you up in the romance and the tragedy of Shakespeare's star-crossed lovers. Choreographed by John Cranko for the Stuttgart Ballet in 1962, Jurgen Rose's set and costume designs will make you feel as if you have stepped back in time to medieval Verona. *August 27-September 4, Arts Centre Melbourne; November 5-24, Sydney Opera House.*

“Both the Australian Ballet and the Queensland Ballet will be holding gala performances.”

### Queensland Ballet

What better way to start the year than with the fun and excitement of a gala! Although now, technically, in its 61st year, Queensland Ballet's 60th Anniversary Gala will have crowd favourites and excerpts from ballets that were crucial in its development to the thriving state ballet company it is today. Prepare to be wowed by Queensland Ballet's current crop of dancers in excerpts from *Etudes* (Harald Lander), *Carmina Burana* (Jacqui Carroll), *Cloudland* and *The Little Mermaid* (Francois Klaus); *The Lady of the Camellias* (Harold Collins) and Chopin Pas de Deux as choreographed by founding artistic director Charles Lisner. *March 5-20, QPAC, Brisbane.*

### Tutus on Tour

Queensland is a big state and those living outside of Brisbane will be glad to hear that as part of its 60th Anniversary celebrations Queensland Ballet is touring across regional Queensland with excerpts from traditional classical ballets and works by contemporary Australian choreographers. *July 24-August 25.*

---

The Queensland Ballet's Kohei Iwamoto.





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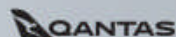
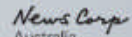
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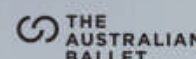
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“Australasian Dance Collective will perform a Hofesh Shechter Australian premiere.”



### The classic and the modern

Two of the most iconic and best loved ballets in history are both coming to the Lyric Theatre's vast stage in 2021. Choreographed, after Petipa, by Queensland Ballet's Chief Ballet Master Greg Horsman with gorgeous costumes and sets designed by Gary Harris, *The Sleeping Beauty* offers its leading ballerina, in the role of Aurora, one of the most challenging roles in the entire repertoire of classical ballet. *June 4-19, QPAC.*

Additionally, in the final weeks leading up to Christmas, Ben Stevenson's *The Nutcracker* brings a traditional white Christmas to life with young Clara, her Nutcracker Doll and the fantastical events that unfold after midnight. *December 16-23, QPAC.*

Before then, however, the company will perform "Bespoke", featuring five brand new works choreographed by Natalie Weir, Jack Lister, Paul Boyd, Rani Luther and Daniel Riley. See Queensland Ballet's dancers explore more contemporary movement and themes in their very own purpose built theatre at the Thomas Dixon Centre. *October 8-23.*

### Dracula

This co-production with West Australian Ballet makes its Queensland debut in 2021.

Choreographed by Krzysztof Pastor and set in the 1800s, the story follows Count Dracula's fascination with his lawyer's fiancée, Mina, after losing his beloved wife, Elizabeth. This darkly beautiful work features intricately detailed and sophisticated sets and costumes co-designed by Phil R. Daniels and Charles Cusick Smith. *November 26-December 4, QPAC.*

### Australasian Dance Collective Aftermath

*Aftermath* is a new full-length work co-created by Amy Hollingsworth and Jack Lister. A collaboration between ADC and Danny Harley (aka The Kite String Tangle – a prolific two-time Aria Music Award-nominated producer, singer-songwriter, multi-instrumentalist and label owner hailing from Brisbane). Part gig and part dance performance, *Aftermath* features an exciting new score by Harley which will be performed live on the night. *Aftermath* is ADC's first season at Brisbane Powerhouse and is supported by major partner Brisbane City Council. *February 12-14.*

### Three

This is a triple bill of two brand new works by Australian choreographers Jack Lister (*Still Life*) and Melanie Lane (*Alterum*), alongside the Australian premiere of Hofesh Shechter's *Cult*. It will be the first time that world-renowned Shechter's choreography will be performed live in Queensland. *May 26-29, QPAC.*

THIS PAGE:  
Australasian  
Dance Collective's  
Josephine Weise.

OPPOSITE PAGE:  
Bangarra Dance  
Theatre.



## Bangarra Dance Theatre

### Spirit: a retrospective 2021

Bangarra Dance Theatre is making its return to the stage on a brand-new, pop-up outdoor stage at Barangaroo Reserve in January as part of the Sydney Festival. Imagine the harbour as a backdrop, with the Sydney Harbour Bridge just off to the right as Bangarra's dancers take to the stage in a collection of dance stories – excerpts of selected works from the company's unique repertoire. *January 21-24, The Headland at Barangaroo Reserve, Sydney*

## Australian Dance Theatre

### Supernature

ADT's first live show for 2021 will be presented as part of the Adelaide Festival. Choreographed by ADT's artistic director Garry Stewart, *Supernature* examines potential futures for our species. It is the culmination of an ambitious trilogy of works that have explored humanity's relationship to the natural world, starting with *The Beginning of Nature* and *South*. *March 12-14, Her Majesty's Theatre.*

## Sydney Dance Company

### Impermanence

This exciting world premiere was just days away from opening night in March, 2020, when it became apparent the show would not be able to go on. Now scheduled to premiere in February, 2021, choreographer Rafael Bonachela has made use of the shutdown to extend *Impermanence* into a full-length work. Bonachela's newest creation has a brand-new score by contemporary composer Bryce Dessner which was initially inspired by the destructive tragedy of the Australian bushfires and the Notre-Dame fire in Paris. The score will be played live onstage by the Australian String Quartet.



PHOTO: LISA THOMASETTI

# Impermanence

World Premiere by Rafael Bonachela  
★★★★★ "Dazzling technical display  
of flexibility" *The Sydney Morning Herald*

Sydney: 16–27 February  
National Tour: 12 May–14 August

Music by Bryce Dessner  
performed by Australian String Quartet.

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Following its premiere in Sydney, SDC will take *Impermanence* on a national tour of 16 towns and cities across six states and territories between May and August. Locations include Alice Springs, Orange, Bathurst, Bendigo and Mildura with a full list of performance venues and dates to be announced in early 2021. Check SDC's website for more details. February 16-27, Roslyn Packer Theatre, Walsh Bay, Sydney; May- July, assorted regional venues TBA. <https://www.sydneydancecompany.com/>

#### ab (intra)

Following a sell-out European tour in 2019, *ab (intra)* will return to Sydney for a brief season in September. Meaning "from within" in Latin, this work is "an exploration of our primal instincts, our impulses and our visceral responses", says Rafael Bonachela, choreographer of *ab (intra)* and Artistic Director of SDC. September 7-11 Ros Packer Theatre, Walsh Bay.

#### New Breed

Sydney Dance Company, Carriageworks and The Balnaves Foundation continue to showcase new works by emerging choreographers in what will be the eighth edition of "New Breed". Expect a diverse range of short works brought to life by SDC's fine dancers. November 22-December 11; Carriageworks, Sydney.

#### West Australian Ballet

##### As One: Ballet at the Quarry

This triple-bill features Natalie Weir's *4Seasons*, a choreographic reimagining of Vivaldi's Four Seasons set to a re-composition of Vivaldi's work by Max Richter. It will be shown alongside *Moment of Joy*, a new work for 11 dancers choreographed by WAB Dayana Hardy Acuna and soloist Juan Carlos Osma, and *Heartache*, a

THIS PAGE:  
Sydney Dance  
Company's Emily  
Seymour.

OPPOSITE PAGE:  
Australian Dance  
Theatre in  
'Supernature'.



PHOTO: RAFAEL BONACHELA

# THREE

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new collaborative piece led by Aurelien Scannella and Sandy Delasalle that follows one man's reflections on his life.

February 5-27, Quarry Ampitheatre, City Beach, Perth.

### Story ballets

The West Australian Ballet is performing three full-length story ballets at His Majesty's Theatre in Perth. The productions of *Giselle* and *Coppelia* are already popular additions to WAB's repertoire. Watch out for Javier Torres's version of *The Sleeping Beauty*, which is making its Australian premiere in November. *Giselle*: May 13-22; *Coppelia*: September 16-25; *The Sleeping Beauty*: November 18-December 12.

### State

"State" features new works from Melanie Lane and company dancer Adam Alzaim. Melanie Lane will be collaborating with musical artist CLARK while Alzaim's work *Gainsbourg* takes its name from the late French singer Serge Gainsbourg and will include some of his songs. A 45-minute excerpt of Graeme Murphy's *Air and Other Invisible Forces* rounds out what should be a very interesting triple-bill.

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### But wait! There's more!

#### SHAUN PARKER AND COMPANY

In a departure from the traditional school excursion, Shaun Parker & Company is taking *The Yard* to schools across Sydney. More than just entertainment, *The Yard* is an award-winning work that deals with themes like social exclusion, peer pressure, bullying and emotional resilience in a way that empowers students to think about their own behaviour.

*March 15-23, Sydney school incursions.*

#### SYDNEY DANCE COMPANY

##### **I Want To Dance With Somebody**

Developed in conjunction with the NSW Government's Festival of Place and Sydney Festival, *I Want To Dance With Somebody* is a virtual community dance party. Anybody can take part, wherever they are. Registration is free on-line. Participants learn a short and snappy dance routine across a series of free on-line classes in January. Then on January 23 all dancer can take

their best moves to the Zoom Party for an on-line dance-off! With live music on the day from Haiku Hands ("Australia's most electrifying pop prospect," *NME*). *11am (AEST) January 23; Your local park/Zoom*

#### STEPHANIE LAKE COMPANY

This Melbourne company will be premiering an exciting co-production with Malthouse Theatre in late 2021. The show is a dance-theatre collaboration co-directed by theatre director Matthew Lutton and Lake and written by playwright Emme Hoy and featuring three dancers and one actor. SLC will also be embarking on the first international tour of *Colossus* to Theatre Chaillot, Paris, and Teatros del Canal, Madrid, working with 50 dancers in each city. *May-June.*

Through 2021 SLC will rehearse and develop a major work titled *Manifesto: A Tattoo to Optimism* that will premiere in January, 2022, and tour Australia and to NZ. The work is for nine

The West Australian Ballet will perform 'Coppelia'. Pictured is Carina Roberts.





PHOTO: LISA THOMASETTI.

## Tracks Dance Company

Tracks in Darwin will be holding its usual active program of community activities, events and residencies, such as its 10-week Choreographic Program (an opportunity for emerging movement artists and dance-makers). Its major performance productions for the year are *Seasons of Skin and Bark*, held at the Darwin Botanical Gardens from August 8-15, and *Milpirri-Yinapaka*, an event which brings together the Warlpiri Indigenous community of Lajamanu in the remote Tanami Desert with Tracks for a performance involving up to 200 performers at the Milpirri Festival on September 25.

## Catapult Company

### Acquist

As part of Newcastle's 'New Annual' Festival, Catapult Company will premiere a new site-specific contemporary dance work in and around Newcastle's iconic Civic Park Fountain. Directed by Cadi McCarthy and choreographed in conjunction with the dancers/collaborators, this outdoor performance promises to be an intriguing exploration of dance and place. (See our interview with Cadi McCarthy on p.33.) Feb 12-21, exact dates TBA, Civic Park Fountain, Newcastle.

Bangarra Dance Theatre will tour 'Spirit' (pictured above).

dancers and nine drummers on nine drumkits. The company will also be developing two new collaborations – one titled *JAGAD* with musician Monica Lim and Indonesian choreographer/dancer Rianto, and another with Delta Projects, Australia's first deaf-led dance company (Artistic Director Anna Seymour).

### CHUNKY MOVE

Two new major works from the Artistic Director Antony Hamilton are in the offing: *Yung Lung* and *Rewards for The Tribe*. The company also has a series of initiatives to support independent artists including: the inaugural Choreographer In Residence; four new works premiering for "Activators", supporting the creation of new works by independent artists; the return of the Victorian Regional Artist Residency; the return of CHOREOLAB, CM's professional development workshop program for dancers; and the return of its public classes program AM:PM

and its studio residency programs, Maximised and Minimax.

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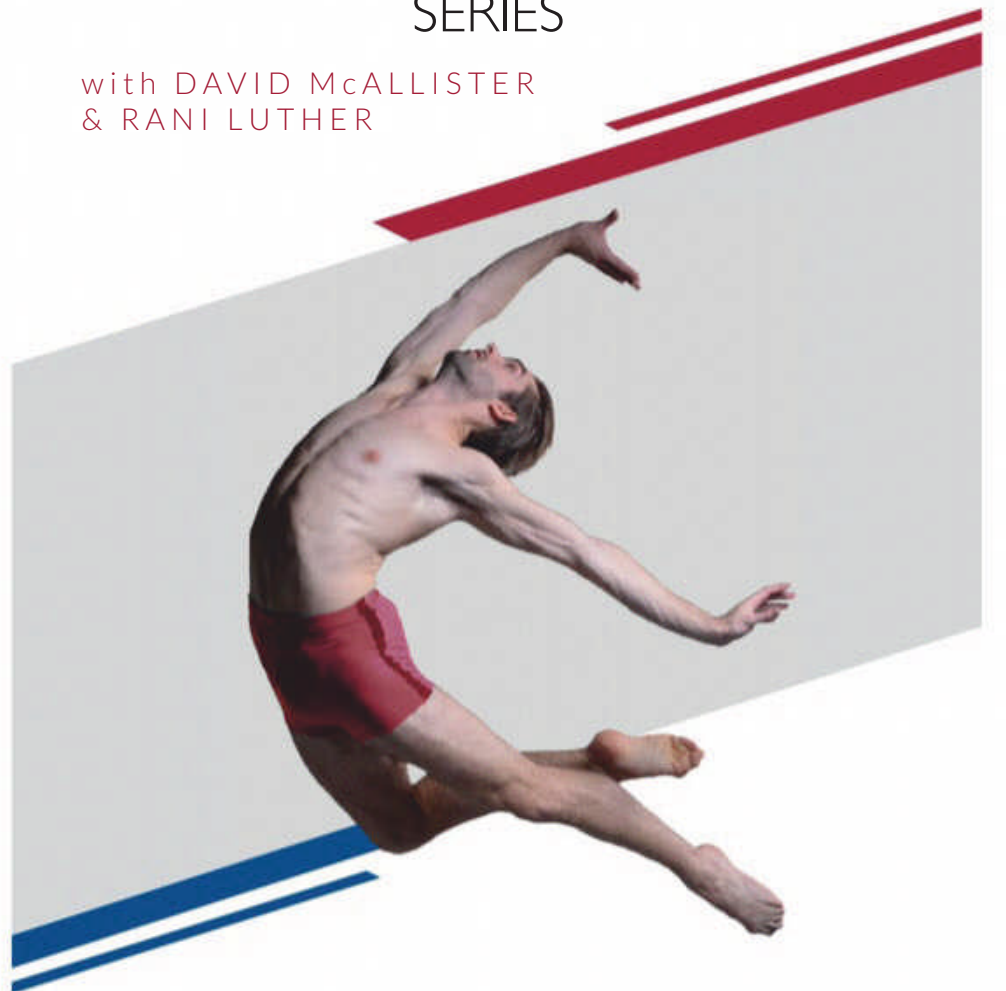
This program will feature several new classical and contemporary works and will be performed at the Darebin Arts Centre in Preston, Victoria. Dancebourne Arts is also in the process of rescheduling its *Pointe, Line and Surface* program for a tour in regional Victoria around the middle of the year. May/June 2021 TBA.

### VICTORIAN STATE BALLET

Directed by Martin and Michelle Cassar de Sierra, this company has a huge touring season planned, travelling to NSW, Qld, Tasmania, the NT, as well as many venues in its home state. Ballets on the repertoire are *Anastasia*, *Don Quixote*, *Beauty and the Beast*, *The Nutcracker*, *The Little Mermaid* and *Alice in Wonderland*, as well as two gala performances on Oct 2 at the Karalyka Theatre in Ringwood.

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The international star is stepping into a new kind of spotlight when he takes the reins at the Australian Ballet, writes Karen van Ulzen.

# DAVID HALLBERG STEPS IN



PHOTO: PIERRE TOUSSAINT.





OR David Hallberg, 2020 should have been a globetrotting year of farewell performances. As one of the world's most celebrated classical dancers, he could have expected some emotional, memorable last bows on stage, some final moments to treasure. He was to perform at the Bolshoi, the Royal Opera House in London and in New York, all stages where he has spent much of his glittering career. Alas, it was not to be – not with a pandemic

shutting theatres and stopping travel. But, he says, sad as that was, there was a “beautiful silver lining” – he could concentrate solely on his new role as the incoming artistic director of the Australian Ballet. “It’s given me time to plan and prepare and observe that I wouldn’t have had if Covid had not happened,” he says.

Even so, it must have been tricky. He endured two hotel quarantine sessions in Australia as well as isolation at home in America. On the plus side, he has a good familiarity with the Australian Ballet (AB), which has been something of a second home for him, thanks to the role the company played in nursing him back from a near-career-ending injury. He is deeply grateful to the Australian Ballet. He loves the company’s “inclusivity” and friendliness. “I can’t tell you how nice it is to come into an organisation that has positivity embedded in it. It is a trait I admire in Australia itself. I lived in Moscow for years; there isn’t much positivity roaming around Moscow – or the Bolshoi Theatre for that matter. I mean [the Bolshoi] is a fabulous, world-class company to which I am very grateful for the experience, but the AB has this can-do belief in doing the best they possibly can do.”

His first program as director starts as he plans to continue: he wants to reach a wider audience than those regulars who attend the home venues such as the Sydney Opera House. The first major outing for the AB post-Covid lockdown will be at Margaret Court Arena at the Australian Tennis Centre in February, a first for the company. With theatre venues still in doubt when the 2021 season was being planned, most likely the pandemic also played a part in choosing an open-air venue. The program will be a gala of divertissement called “Summertime at the Ballet”. “I really feel that we’re going to tap into another demographic by going to Margaret Court, being in a venue that isn’t so ‘high art’, in a way, and choosing repertoire that is very friendly to a more general public.”

On the bill will be “a good balance of repertoires and styles” including excerpts from ballets both old and new, such as showstoppers from *La Bayadere*, *Don Quixote* and Balanchine’s *Tchaikovsky Pas de Deux*, as well as excerpts from Tim Harbour’s *Filigree and Shadow*, Steven Baynes’s *Molto Vivace*, Ronald Hynd’s *The Merry Widow* and Lucas Jervies’ *Spartacus*. It is designed to showcase the versatility of the dancers and the broad spectrum of classical ballet – and who doesn’t like a good gala? “Gala programs – I’ve done enough to know how they attract,” he smiles.

“There’s an audience that are not regular ballet-goers, they don’t come and see a new creation by, for example, a Lucas Jervies, so that’s the audience that I think will be attracted to a program like this. My challenge was to choose a program that was artistically vibrant, that really entertains and attracts audiences of all ages; people who love the ballet and people who don’t always go to the ballet.”

The company will return to the more regular stage with Hallberg’s first own commission: a new work by US choreographer, Pam Tanowitz, a choreographer unknown to most Australian ballet audiences. Hallberg describes her as “one of the most in-demand creators in the dance scene”. “I say dance, instead of ballet,” he explains, “because she has done a lot of work on contemporary companies, but also commissions for New York City Ballet, Royal Ballet, American Ballet Theatre.” Hallberg is familiar with Tanowitz from when he commissioned her 10 years ago for the annual choreographic workshop he ran for American Ballet Theatre. “Her work is important: it’s informed, it’s interesting and it’s not work that I think Australia is used to seeing. This is part of my responsibility, I think, to bring [choreographers] in who people haven’t seen yet. She’s doesn’t give you the circus fouettes and big jumps – she gives you work that is visually stunning; unison work that is



Hallberg with  
Australian Ballet  
principal artists.

“I can’t tell you how nice it is to come into an organisation that has positivity embedded in it.”

not star oriented.” Tanowitz will feature on a triple bill called “New York Dialects” which will include the Balanchine classics, *Serenade* and *The Four Temperaments*. “New York Dialects” will be performed in Sydney in April and Melbourne in June.

Also in April, but in Sydney only, is a double bill called “Counterpointe”, consisting of Act 3 of Petipa’s *Raymonda* and US choreographer William Forsythe’s *Artifact Suite*, a juxtaposition of old and new ballet formality that he hopes will demonstrate the evolution of classical ballet.

Although American choreographers feature in these earlier programs, Hallberg is keen to reassure audiences that he is not about to reorient the company toward the US. “I’ve heard there’s some trepidation about an American coming in as the new artistic director. I’ll say, yes, I’m not an Australian, but I’m not going to erase the history of the AB, or make it American or any country, I’m going to dive in and look around this rich creative landscape that is Australia and promote and develop creative talent in this country. Australians are very proud of their dance history, more so than Americans. There’s a long and proud lineage here.” He adds: “As a Yankee coming in, I’m very mindful and respectful of adding on to that lineage, not erasing it, not forgetting about it.”

The program for the second half of the year includes a new production of *Anna Karenina*, a co-production with the Joffrey Ballet in the US choreographed by Yuri Possokhov. The Australian Ballet’s previous *Anna Karenina* was a huge audience favourite, as is its *Romeo and Juliet*,

choreographed by John Cranko, which will be revived for Melbourne and Sydney. Rounding out the year is *Harlequinade*, which will finally make the stage after its postponement last year. This ballet, choreographed by Petipa in 1900, disappeared from the stage after the Russian Revolution, but has been “reconstructed and revitalised” by Alexei Ratmansk, the Russian choreographer who has made something of a speciality of digging out and reviving lost Russian gems.

As an international star who has travelled all over the world and experienced many dance company cultures, what does Hallberg think about the AB’s geographical distance from the centres of the classical ballet world? Is it an advantage or disadvantage?

“Well, it’s both,” he replies. “You’re not an hour’s flight from seeing a new Neumeier work, for example. I plan on bridging that gap, and making international artists and guests much more regular.

“But what is to the advantage is that, with the dancers – there’s this mentality of getting on with their work. There’s a lack of comparison. So many of the European companies look like each other. But the Australian Ballet looks like the Australian Ballet. Not like the Danish, or Stuttgart or Royal. I think that’s an advantage.”

Audiences can look forward to seeing what Hallberg adds to the unique mix that is the Australian Ballet. ~

See more season details in our ‘Back to Life’ feature.



PHOTO: PIERRE TOUSSAINT



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Demand for pointe shoes in a wider range of skin tones is growing. **Taylor Venter** explores the issue and its relation to diversity in ballet.

# SHOES OF COLOUR

F

OR Tene Ward, Australian corps de ballet member of the National Ballet of Canada (NBC), trying on her first pair of pointe shoes matched to her skin tone was a “momentous occasion”. This moment, late last year, was filmed by fellow NBC company members and shared on

Ward’s Instagram account (@Ward\_ward), receiving an outpouring of support she never expected.

Ward, who was born in Sydney, identifies as Sri Lankan and African-American. Before joining the NBC in 2018, she trained at Canberra Festival Ballet School, the Australian Ballet School and the Dutch National Ballet Trainee Program; she describes her experience as a BIPOC (Black, Indigenous and People of Colour) ballet student as “generally, tough”. “No one looked like me,” she reflects, “It was hard to have any form of inspiration to draw from, or anyone to look up to.”

Ward’s video of her putting on the shoes is both joyous and poignant, highlighting the need for increased diversity in the ballet world, and improved support for BIPOC dancers. “Even though the pointe shoes seem like a small thing for people that maybe aren’t inside the ballet world, it’s a huge thing for me,” Ward explains. “It’s a level of acceptance I’ve never felt before.”

Stephanie Hutchison, Pointe Shoe Manager of the NBC, felt grateful to have witnessed the meaningful moment. “It was just this rush of emotion when I realised how much it meant to her that she was going to have her own shoes. She was like, ‘Oh, I finally have my own shoes! I finally belong!’” she recalls, “That’s heavy, when you’re looking at professionals who are accomplished ballet dancers.”

Ward’s video was reposted by Misty Copeland, Principal Dancer of the American Ballet Theatre, and Lauren Anderson, former Principal Dancer of the Houston Ballet, two significant influences throughout her training and

career. “If people could understand how BIPOC dancers feel when they actually see themselves and they’re actually included, then maybe we would have a better chance of enacting change faster,” Ward says, describing the support of her idols as “incredible”.

Pointe shoes matched to darker skin tones first became available in 2017, when Gaynor Minden released two new shades of satin named “Cappuccino” and “Espresso”. Globally, dance brands are following their lead; in 2018, long-standing shoemaker Freed released two new shades of pointe shoes with matching ribbons and tights, named “Ballet Bronze” and “Ballet Brown”. They were created in collaboration with Ballet Black, a London-based ballet company celebrating dancers of black and Asian descent, and were lauded as a historic moment in British ballet history. Ward hopes that dance brands will continue to expand the range of shades available in shoes and tights: “People are more than just two or three tones. How many shades of makeup do we have?”

The iconic pale pink shade of pointe shoe satin harkens to the invention of pointe shoes in the early 1800s, the Romantic era of ballet centred around stories of willis and sylphs. “We haven’t been in the 1800s for a long time,” Hutchison laughs. She hopes that the standardisation of pointe shoes and tights matched to dancers’ skin tones will help to bring classical ballet into our modern times. “They offer uniformity potentially in classical productions. Just like the upper bodies are different shades, the legs can be different shades.” “How beautiful would it be if in, say *Giselle* or *Swan Lake*, to have everyone in their own skin tone of tights and pointe shoes,” Ward adds. “I think that would be a beautiful expression of our community.”

While deeper shades of satin have only become available in recent years, dancers have been creating their own version of skin toned shoes for over 40 years through a process known as “pancaking”. “I don’t have to dye my

RIGHT: Tene Ward: ‘It’s a level of acceptance I’ve never felt before.’





“The image of a ballerina for so long has been a thin, white woman, and that image in general has to change.”



shoes anymore!” Ward exclaims in her video; the dying of pointe shoes with paint or makeup to match the dancers’ skin tone is a laborious trial and error task, especially for BIPOC dancers with darker skin tones. “For me to pancake shoes, it takes probably three hours,” Ward explains. “I have to do a layer, let it dry, do another layer, make sure it matches ... With all those layers, the paint dries and it hardens the shoe, then it shrinks the shoe and it isn’t the same shape.” Hutchison agrees that pancaking is a challenging task which can distort the look and feel of pointe shoes. “If you pancake shoes just before you wear them, they’re going to get really soft really fast, and sometimes the shoe just doesn’t feel the same.”

Pancaked pointe shoes were first worn in the 1970s by company members of the Dance Theatre of Harlem, and have become an established convention of contemporary dance performed without tights. “It was really accessible and people loved it, and you’ll see it all across the dance world with anything being done that’s contemporary,” Hutchison says. “But it still feels like, when you’re a little girl and you get your first pair of shoes, something is missing, or was missing, for a large group of people.”

Ward and Hutchison point to the momentum of the Black Lives Matter movement in the US as a catalyst for change across the ballet world. “Sadly, sometimes it takes this awful moment in history to make people go, ‘OK, we’re going to do it,’” Hutchison says. “We’re being called out, and we’re being called to change and action.” While skin-toned pointe shoes and tights are a striking visual representation of inclusion, ballet’s diversity problem runs much deeper. “As much as we like to

uphold traditions in ballet, we shouldn’t be upholding racism as a tradition,” Ward states. “The image of a ballerina for so long has been a thin, white woman, and that image in general has to change.”

Hutchison reiterates a need for more diverse narratives in ballet. “We don’t have to stop doing classical ballet,” she says. “Create new stories. Revisit old stories.” While ballet companies such as the NBC work to dismantle racial inequality through education and outreach programs, Hutchison and Ward emphasise that improved diversity in ballet starts in training. “It starts in our schools, because we’re not something that can be trained in two to three years,” Ward explains. “You don’t start ballet when you’re 18.”

Hutchison agrees. “It needs to happen in training. Little children going into professional programs; being able to do that despite race, religion, creed, money.” “I think that the ballet world needs to very quickly move forward or it’s going to be left behind,” Ward warns. “People aren’t going to be able to appreciate it if they can’t also have a connection with it.”

Ward hopes that her video can inspire younger BIPOC dancers, and push dance brands toward expanding the availability of products matched to a range of skin tones. “Maybe younger dancers will see it [the video] and realise there is actually an opportunity for them to be in this industry and in this art form, and not to shy away from it because of what it used to be.” The sense of belonging the pointe shoes have given her is unmistakable, “I feel like this is actually a space I’m included in. It’s not like I’m fighting to be in this space.”



### Other shades

In Australia, the demand for pointe shoes in colours other than pink is quite small, making it difficult for retailers to stock them. However, most pointe shoe manufacturers are responding to global demand and shoes can be obtained through special order.

Capezio’s CEO and President Michael Terlizzi (whose US head office received a petition of 300,000 signatures demanding greater range of colours) told ABC News (US) that the company is embracing the issue as an opportunity to contribute to change for the better. “The conversation we had internally was ‘how did we miss this?’ We have to find out how we can meet their needs and help them feel included and not neglected.” Like many dancewear manufacturers, Capezio does have a range of products, such as tights and ballet flats, to match different skin tones, but until now its pointe shoes have only been available in pink. The company is presently working on different shoe colours, one called “Maple”.

Grishko has for some years had shoes in colours “Latte” and “Espresso”. Bloch has plans to continue expanding its range both in terms of colour options, and in particular pointe shoes. “The expansion of darker colour selections in the pointe shoe range has now commenced production and we hope to launch this in the first quarter of 2021,” the company says.



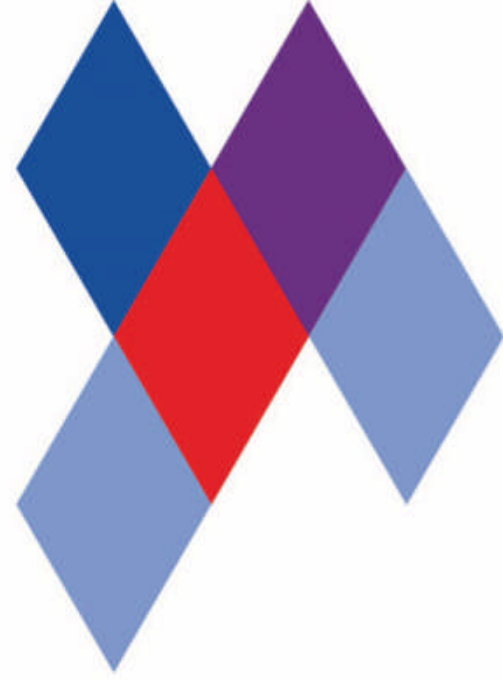
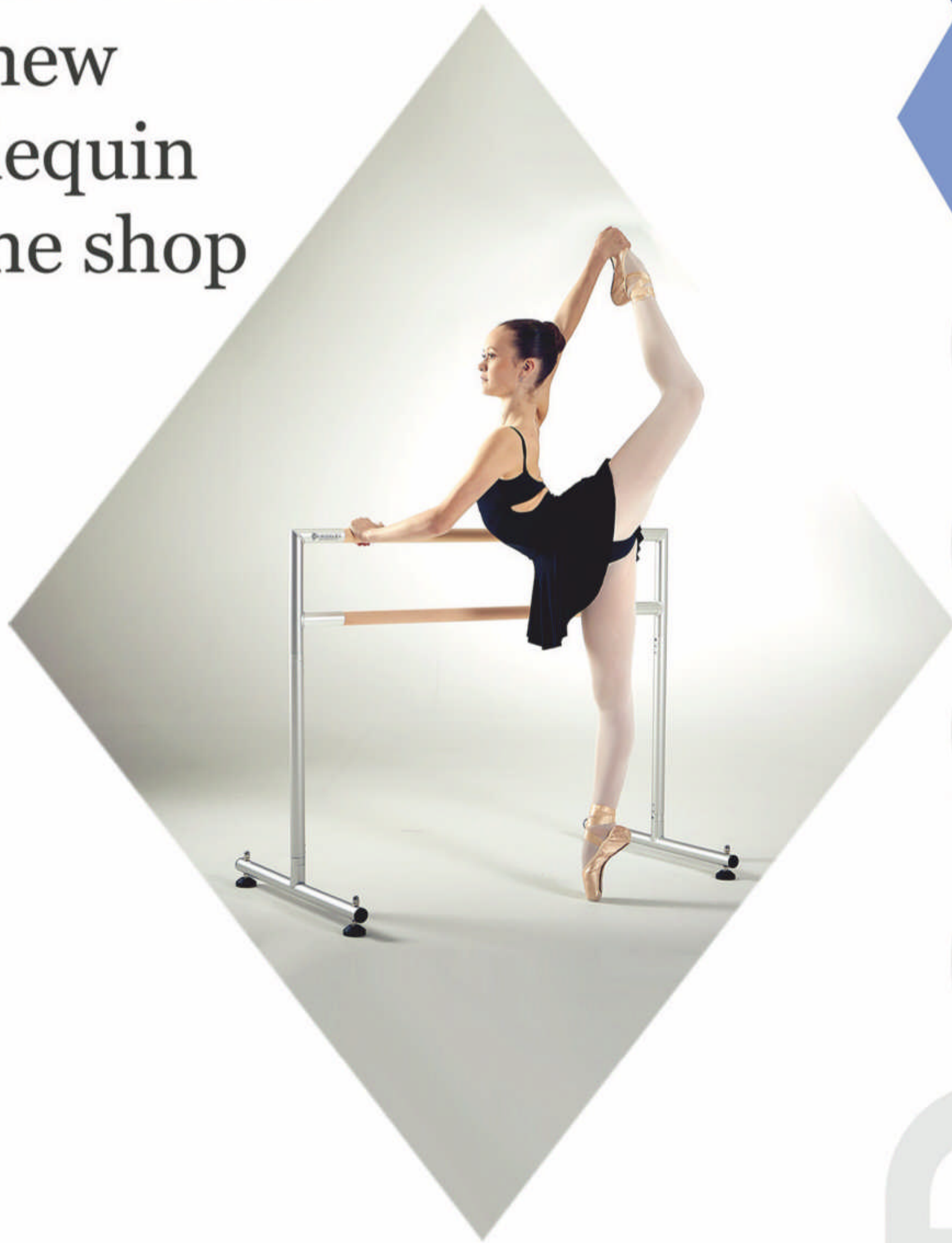
Ward in rehearsals for ‘Angels’ Atlas’.

ABOVE: Grishko’s new “dark nude” pointe shoe colour.



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# CONNECTING WITH CATHY



PHOTO: DANIEL BOUD

“T

Who is the dancer who performed as Cathy Freeman, Australia's beloved Olympic hero, for the ABC documentary? **Candide McDonald** found out.

O me dance is everything. What I love about dance is that you're able to escape from reality, you become a different person, your spirit comes out and takes over." When dance is everything there are no unsurmountable obstacles and fear only makes you try harder. Lillian Banks is still at the beginning of her story, but that beginning is already infused with triumphs.

Confidence has been Lillian Banks's ally from the start. "My sisters and I would always perform in front of the family, singing songs and creating dance routines," she recalls. "I would be leading them, telling them what to do, while they would be following behind me. I was always in the centre-front."

In primary school, the young Lillian was part of the Dream Time Dancers, a community dance group for young people in Broome in WA where she grew up. Its dance style was a blend of contemporary and Indigenous. "We learned dances and how to paint-up, learned about our culture and building self-confidence," she notes.

It wasn't until high school at St Marys College Broome that Lillian began doing dance technique as a subject. "Our teacher, Vicki Thompson, really opened my eyes to all the different styles that dance has to offer. At this point, it wasn't anything serious because I was really into sports and athletics and I was focused more on competing."

That changed in 2013, her last year of high school. She won National VET Student of the Year. "This really opened my eyes – knowing I could become a dancer or learn more about it. However, I couldn't do it in Broome, because there weren't many options."

Vicki Thompson provided those options. She took Lillian and a few students from Broome to Gosford on the central coast of NSW to see what NAISDA (National Aboriginal Islander Skills Development Association) had to offer.

Later that year, Lillian returned to NAISDA, this time to audition. "I didn't think I was going to get in, but I knew it would be good to experience," she remembers.

"We learned different genres of dance that I have never done before, which was such a big eye-opener for me. Being in a new place was very intimidating. Not only did we do ballet, contemporary and jazz but we also did cultural from the Torres Strait Islands, which is so amazing."

After a long wait, NAISDA phoned her to tell her she had been accepted. "I was super shocked but so excited, so I sorted everything out and next thing you know I'm living on the central coast of NSW training in dance. It took

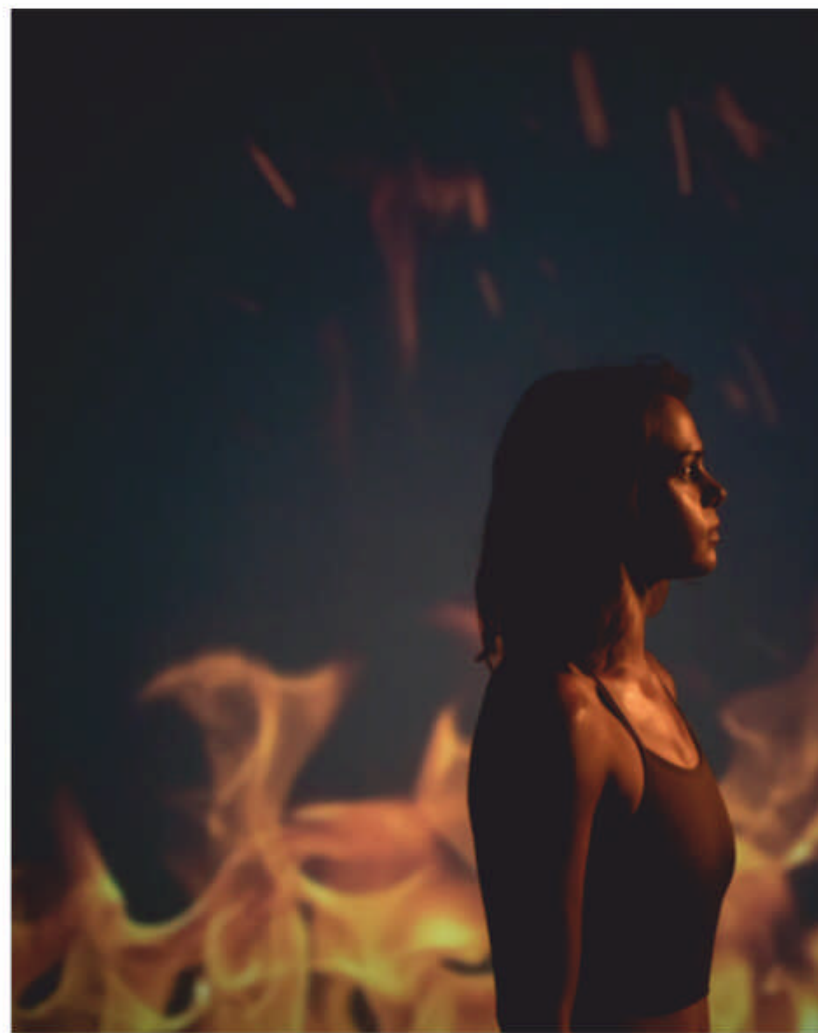
Lillian Banks with Cathy Freeman: 'they just smiled a lot at each other'.



“My family was reminding me that this was an amazing opportunity and to ‘just keep smashing it’.”



PHOTO: JAMES GREEN



me a while to get used to the place and to figure out if this was what I wanted.

“I found it really hard being away from family living on the other side of Australia. I often thought about going back and leaving NAISDA,” she admits. “If it wasn’t for the amazing teachers constantly pushing me and making me think about what I was doing, helping me make goals, reminding me of how far I’ve come . . . I thought, ‘I’ve made it this far, just keep going’. My family was supporting me, reminding me that this was such an amazing opportunity and to ‘just keep smashing it – Broome will always be here’.”

After many ups and downs, a lot of tears and ample amounts of compensating laughter at NAISDA, Banks graduated with a Diploma in Dance in 2017.

“Getting close to ending the year, everyone had to start figuring out what the next step would be. I had no idea what I wanted to do but Bangarra was one of the companies that stood out for me. It was a dream job,” she says. “Frances Rings, formerly at NAISDA, now associate artistic director at Bangarra, pushed me and encouraged me to fill out my application. Next thing you know I was shortlisted to do the audition. I was so scared because it was a one-day audition. We did class with the company, met everyone and learned some repertoire from the senior dancers. We learnt “Responding” from *Benmelong* and “White” from *Ochres*. I was shaking, thinking, ‘Is this really happening right now?’”

Then artistic director Stephen Page walked in to watch at the end of the day. “I remember standing in the front not





PHOTO: DANIEL BOUD



ABOVE: being filmed for the documentary, 'Freeman'.

knowing what I was doing. Stephen just sat there watching us," she remembers.

"As I was walking out of the audition, I wasn't happy with how I did and gave up on thinking that I would ever be in Bangarra. I kept reliving the day thinking, 'I should have done this or this,' but it was too late, I couldn't go back."

A week later, Banks received the call that told her she had been chosen to be one of the Russell Page Graduates for next year. "It took me so long to process and to realise I was going to be part of a company that I have looked up to for years," she recalls.

Banks has clearly thrived at Bangarra. That reached a peak when she danced in the ABC documentary, *Freeman*, commemorating Freeman's winning race, which screened on TV last year at the time the Tokyo Olympics would have been staged. Banks embodied the great Olympic runner in her athletic prime in stylised sequences illustrating her sleek muscularity and powerful grace.

In his interview with *Sydney Morning Herald* journalist, Ben Pobjie, Stephen Page recalled Lillian's meeting with Cathy Freeman. "When Cathy saw what Lillian was doing – moving her body and representing this eternal spirit and energy – Cathy got it straight away. So Cathy just kept smiling...Cathy was sharing these stories with Lillian, and here Lillian was with this role model in front of her. They didn't say a lot, but they just smiled a lot at each other. It was just a wonderful connection."

Behind Banks's rise as a dancer is a long list of supporters, she says. "To this day I am so grateful for that and to still have them by my

side. If it wasn't for Vicky Thompson pushing me, being patient and taking the time to show me what more is out there, I would not have become a dancer at all." Her family, she adds, always supported her decisions and constantly told her how proud they were of her. "This still motivates me to keep pushing for what I love." Then there is everyone at NAISDA, "because that's where the dream really started to become a dancer and they never gave up on me. And finally, her family at Bangarra. "Being here for three years now, everything about this company and the people constantly reminds me of why I am here and why I am doing what I am doing."

Bangarra is a large part of why dance is "everything" to Banks. "With Bangarra productions we're always playing different characters, telling our stories and we get so lost in the story, movement and music – it's the best feeling. Now, I really do appreciate dance more. I don't know what I would do without it, it's my medicine. When I'm feeling all sorts of emotions it's always there for me and I know I can always count on it to keep me grounded and bring me back to where I need to be.

"It has definitely shaped me as a dancer and who I am as a person," she adds. "I understand my body a lot more and just being able to move and imitate things is so amazing to see what dance can bring.

"I am so grateful to be where I am today. I am always challenged and there is so much more for me to learn. I'm super excited to explore more with Bangarra and to see what more is out there."

*'Freeman' is still available on ABC Iview.*



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## FINAL CHANCE TO AUDITION!



Youth dance is about far more than learning how to move, it can change lives. **Geraldine Higginson** writes.

# PROPELLING YOUNG LIVES

**C**ADI McCarthy is a company dancer, independent artist, choreographer, artistic director and educator. Since 1996 she has traversed Australia, performing all these roles across a range of dance companies and organisations. But a move to Newcastle from Perth in 2014, where she had spent four years as artistic director of the youth company, Buzz Dance Theatre, led her to found a new organisation – Catapult Dance Choreographic Hub. Coming from Perth's vibrant contemporary dance sector, she could see that Newcastle seemed to have many highly regarded dance schools and training institutions but little in the way of professional dance or professional choreographic opportunities.

Looking back, McCarthy says: "At first I was very unsure what to do, how to keep my own practice as an artist going, and how I would go about building a professional contemporary dance community in Newcastle."

"My aim was to bring Australian and International contemporary dance choreographers to work and collaborate with Newcastle multi-disciplinary artists and young people. I wanted to create a meeting place for contemporary dance in regional NSW and specifically the Hunter region."

"I hoped that Catapult could be a place where contemporary dance practitioners, established Hunter-based artists and regional emerging artists are provided opportunities to collaborate, create, professionally develop and be propelled in new artistic directions."

Currently Catapult Dance Choreographic Hub is a not-for-profit arts organisation, annually funded by Create NSW, and relying on funding and philanthropic support as well as a number of for-profit programs. In just five years it has grown enough to include, besides the Catapult dance company, international/regional exchanges, choreographic commissions and residencies;

Members of Catapult Dance performing 'Trip for Biscuits'.





“Some of my most incredible journeys professionally and artistically have occurred through working in the community sector.”  
– Cadi McCarthy



the Propel Choreographic Residency Program; The Flipside Project: Catapult's Youth Dance Initiative; and Catapult Community: a community, schools and outreach program. The Catapult company has a professional structure: where Australian and international artists are commissioned to make new works, with scores by Hunter-based composers, and dancers paid at award rates.

McCarthy is a passionate advocate of youth dance and believes that it needs to be done in tandem with traditional methods of learning dance, so students can develop a fully rounded approach to their artform. The Flipside Project is not a dance school; it comprises four dance ensembles: junior (8-12), senior (13-18), Aboriginal Youth Ensemble (12-18) and emerging artists (18-26). All create original works which are presented to audiences across local, national and international performances and festivals.

McCarthy says that youth dance has a different focus to traditional dance:

“It challenges preconceptions of what dance is, and offers new possibilities of what dance can be,” she says. “It is about individual young voices, choreographic development, originality and improvisation. It is about brainstorming ideas, rigorous conversations, movement development and innovative responses to questions about the world. It is about developing the next generations of artists, and creating work that empowers young people, through discussions on political, social and global issues.”

Youth dance is not just about learning phrases and choreography, she explains, but “engaging in choreographic literacy, and simulating skills necessary in professional contemporary dance companies, through task-based and improvisational structures”.

“It empowers young people to make decisions and develop their artistic voices. It is non-competitive and inclusive and offers opportunities for young people and emerging artists to collaborate with professional contemporary and independent choreographers; inspiring and mentoring them through a long-term collaborative, creative processes.”

I asked if she ever feels there is a divide between community/youth dance and professional dance? Is it fair to set them apart as distinctly different categories? In reply, McCarthy noted that over the past 20 years there have definitely been major shifts in how the relationship between professional and community/youth dance has been perceived. “I am one of the lucky artists that has always worked across professional dance and choreography, youth dance and community dance in tandem. All aspects of my career,







from an emerging artist to now, have had equal layers of professional, youth and community dance.

“Some of my most incredible journeys professionally and artistically have occurred through working in the community sector. I still remember one of my first community youth projects in Perth, working with a group of disadvantaged girls from Rockingham High. The girls had been removed from the ‘normal’ school environment due to behavioural and attendance issues.

“Through Buzz Dance Theatre, I had six weeks to create a dance in collaboration with them, to be performed at the Awesome Festival. I needed to gain their trust, rapport, get them to open up truthfully, and then create a work together. As a young 20-something it was one of the most empowering and challenging projects. They were a tough bunch of girls.

“But those girls achieved, and together we travelled to Perth city to perform the work we created together. It was not perfect, it was not tightly in unison, but it made a difference. One of the girls had to quickly race off to go to Juvenile Court after the

performance, she was carrying her shoes in one hand, and looked back at me and said, ‘I now have the confidence to stand up in court and tell my story – tell the truth’. Fifteen odd years later, I still remember her name and that day with such clarity.”

One of the biggest challenges McCarthy has faced at Catapult Dance Choreographic Hub so far is one shared by many small to medium arts organisations and artists across Australia – securing sustainable funding. Despite this, her list of highlights and achievements there are extensive, with the biggest being that they are still going! Cadi warmly acknowledges all the people that make Catapult what it is: the artists, young people and the broader community that surround and support them.

In February, 2021, Catapult will present two live shows, *Awkward* and *Acquist*. The year is shaping up to be a busy one, with many projects including international digital collaborations ahead. ~

See <http://www.catapultdance.com.au/> for more details.

LEFT and ABOVE: Two scenes from ‘Human Remains’.

BELOW: McCarthy when artistic director of Buzz in Perth.





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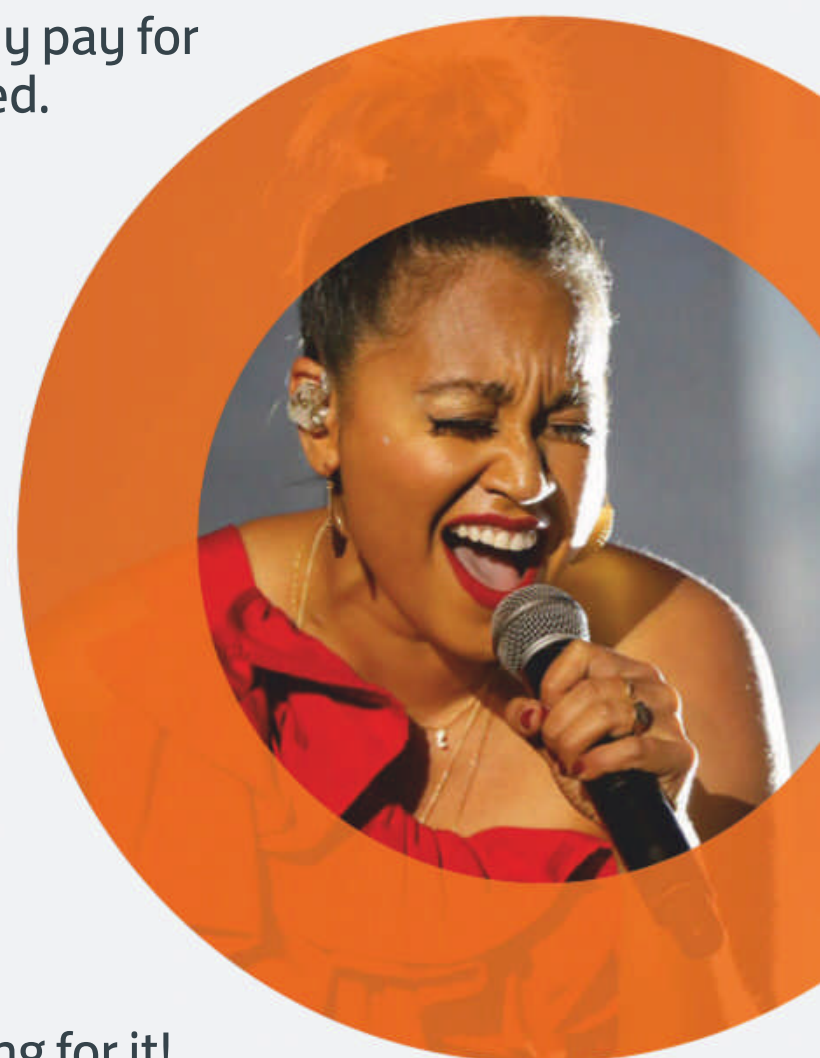
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# Know your obligations

Your questions about music copyright answered.

**D**ANCERS are artists, so we understand the importance of creative and intellectual copyright. However, as says Catherine Guiliano, the director of the music licensing agency OneMusic, music is probably the most complicated of all copyright licensing. With so many modes of delivery and broadcast, knowing your responsibilities and who owns the copyright to what can be confusing.

We asked our readers to send in their questions which we then passed on to OneMusic. Here is a brief extract in print. Make sure you watch our longer conversation with Guiliano on our website.

**One of our readers asked about master copyright on live-stream: "Does this cover the master copyright as well as the composition/song copyright?"**

Yes! If there is a live-stream dance class in place from OneMusic after January 31, 2021, (not confirmed at the time of going to press) this will cover all rights.

**Let's talk about Facebook. One of our readers wrote in to say: "We pay our copyright fees. Why can't we post music on-line when it is used for a dance routine in a private student group on Facebook?"**

Making a video to a song and putting that on-line brings up a unique form of copyright. OneMusic "copyright fees" don't cover this.

This music use is called synchronisation or sync/synch for short. Seeing moving pictures and hearing music at the same time is such a powerful thing; it is impossible to separate the music from the message of the video. Think of a lovely Australian folk song as backing to an online video of a Neo-Nazi rally. The songwriter – through their publisher and record label – needed to have given the OK on that use and the Neo-Nazi group needed to have asked all parties beforehand (and obtained proper permission).

While a video recording of kids doing a hip-hop routine to a Hilltop Hoods song in a suburban Adelaide dance studio is nowhere near as contentious as that example, the same process applies, here and everywhere around the world, for every dance school, circus, bar, festival... large and small. Where most dance schools in Australia are familiar with needing a OneMusic Australia licence for their

day-to-day music use, this is one type of music use OneMusic just can't license for you. It is a separate process, a separate product.

A dance school would need to get a sync licence from the publishers and record labels of each song to be shown in their video. It is not impossible, but it does take time to get the okay (we call this "clearance") and sometimes a bigger budget. Fees are set by the publishers and record labels on behalf of the songwriter and recording artist. To get started with this you can email APRA AMCOS [mechlic@apra.com.au](mailto:mechlic@apra.com.au) (publishers) and ARIA business. [affairs@aria.com.au](mailto:affairs@aria.com.au) (record labels).

**"What are correct tagging/acknowledgement guidelines when dance videos (my own content) are used on social media?"**

There isn't specific "correct tagging" to cover copyright when a video is uploaded to social media. If you simply attribute or tag, that does not mean you have fulfilled your copyright obligations.

As a social media user you should always check the usage guidelines and Terms & Conditions of your service.

If you're on Facebook you may need to click on your Account area and scroll to Terms. For YouTube, Terms are generally down the bottom on the left side of the page, but all this depends on your settings. At the time of writing, YouTube states "... the Content you submit must not include third-party intellectual property (such as copyrighted material) unless you have permission from that party or are otherwise legally entitled to do so."

Depending on the music you use and how you use it, your video may also be subject to takedown if usage rules are not followed or if your social media service has not obtained licences from relevant music copyright owners.

**"If I am creating a dance film with my students to place in a dance film festival, and I make no income from the film, do I need to get music rights, and if so, what is the best way for me to do that?"**

Primary and secondary students at Australian schools are covered for a range of activities at school, however that does not extend to your dance school.

Even though you will not be making income from the dance film you will still need to clear the music you use in the film (the music rights) with the relevant copyright owner.

Where you are using music in a film you need permission from the owner of the sound recording (usually a record label) and the musical work (the songwriter or music publisher).

APRA AMCOS can assist with information about who the writer and publisher of a song might be.

Licensing music can take time so don't leave this to the last minute. ☺

*Want to know more? Watch Karen van Ulzen in conversation with Catherine Guiliano, coming soon on our website.*



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# The Power of Belonging

Michelle Dursun spoke to three syllabus organisations about how they supported their members through the pandemic.

ATOD student performing onstage (pre-Covid-19).

ALBERT Einstein once said, “In the middle of difficulty lies opportunity”. This is a mantra that syllabus organisation and dance societies in Australia embraced during the year of uncharted waters. Never have the benefits of belonging for dance studios, teachers and students been more keenly felt than in 2020. Mental health and wellness support; business and technical assistance; Covid-safe templates for studios; syllabi resources and online competitions as well as opportunities to connect and support each other are just some of the initiatives syllabus and dance teaching organisations have put in place to support their members.

As the growing enormity of the health crisis started becoming apparent and people were reeling from the disorientation of lockdowns and life-interrupted, dance societies such as ATOD, Cecchetti and COMDANCE became beacons of hope, providing a navigation aid for teachers and dancers alike. Dance societies very quickly had to adapt to the new way of life while at the same time support their members who were seeking information and advice about how to proceed. “It was crucial that we disseminated information from reputable sources to our teachers and their dance schools,” says Vivien Borg, the secretary of Cecchetti Ballet Australia, “including resources from Ausdance, the International Association for Dance Medicine and Science as well as from the Australian Government.” (She says that these resources were made available through direct mail campaigns and social media.)

Similarly, COMDANCE President Diane Gepp says it was important to quickly mobilise to support the global COMDANCE community through the turbulence and unpredictability. “Our mission is to encourage the art of dance by offering a window of opportunity to experience and enjoy dance, so we committed ourselves to building opportunities through Zoom and online forums.”

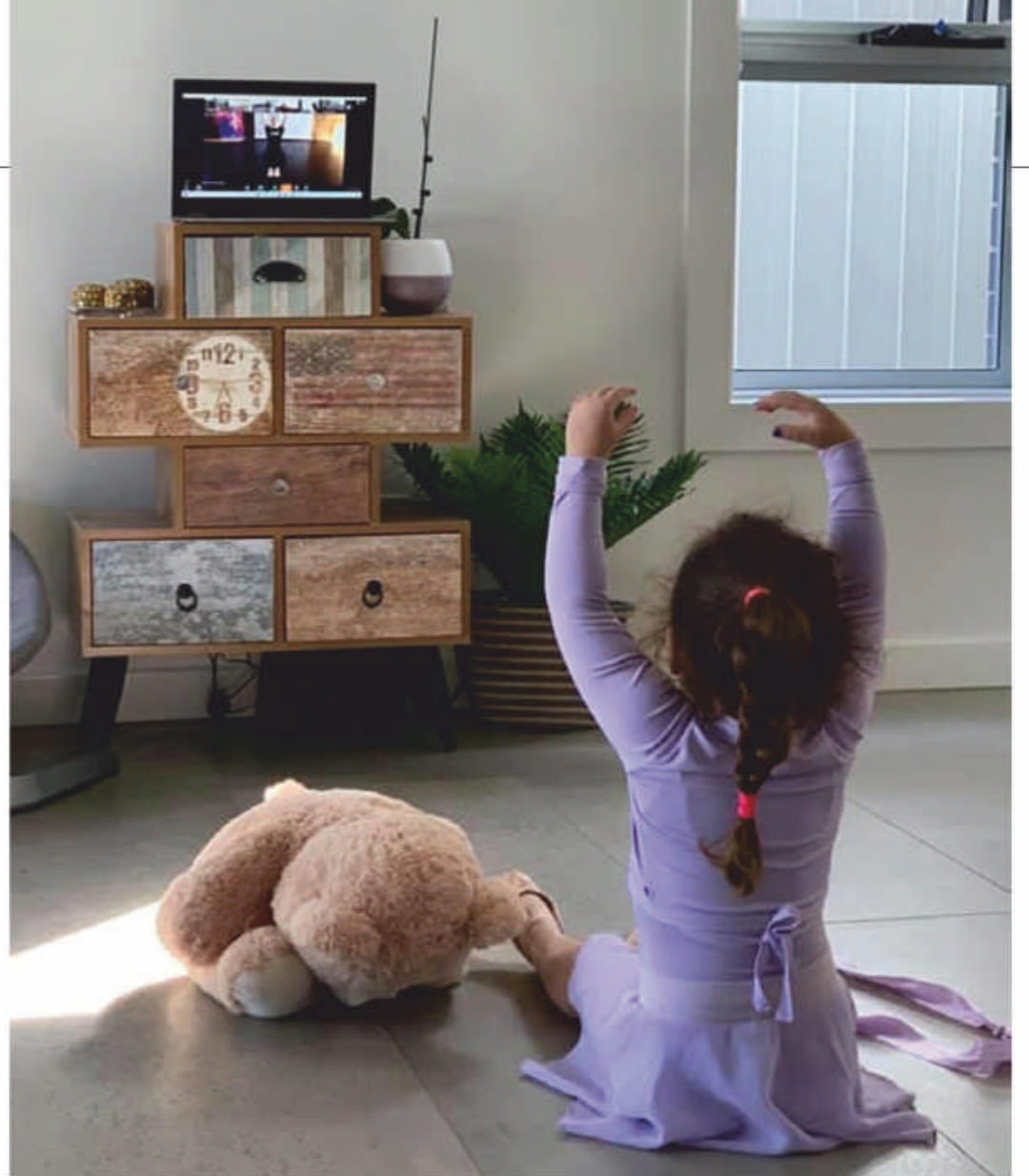
And for ATOD, weekly Zoom check-ins and specialist online sessions with experts in revenue building, advertising, business recovery and assistance were just some of the extra services on offer for members. “We also conducted a social media campaign and provided support through via our closed member’s Facebook group,” says ATOD President, Leah Belford.

## Connection and community

The central importance of connection and community was recognised by all three dance societies interviewed. Belford says ATOD provided “a caring ear for any teachers who needed to chat”, with Victorian members personally contacted by

PHOTO: BWP STUDIOS





phone during their prolonged lockdown. Similarly, Cecchetti established a pre-class wellbeing check for students where on-line dance teachers were introduced to siblings, pets and parents. Borg says: “In one instance Casey, a pupil of Toodyay Ballet School in WA, introduced the class to her new baby lamb!” Gepp says COMDANCE introduced a community members’ site, for all to share their successes and ask questions to help overcome the day-to-day challenges of conducting classes on-line, maintaining student numbers and preparing for exams. She says, “This was a fantastic experience which helped to connect our Australian and international members as well as isolated members with those in large cities”.

“The central importance of connection and community was recognised by all three dance societies interviewed.”

FROM LEFT: COMDANCE’s First Teaching Certificate Candidate, Mavis Hue, assessed via Livestream with West Malaysia Organiser, Lovell Chia, examiner Jayson Smart and teacher Fion Too.

A tiny pupil from Alegria Dance Studios performs her port de bras with her virtual teacher.

Cecchetti Ballet Australia’s ‘Wildfire’ Project.

ATOD students performing onstage (pre-Covid-19).

### Examinations

Lockdowns also resulted in changes to examinations. Cecchetti made the decision early in 2020 not to hold any examinations until after June 30. “In our innocence, we never envisaged how the pandemic would develop and how long it would last.” Further changes were made to the examination roster to deal with border closures and travel restrictions, including the provision of videoed examinations in states and countries which did not have a resident examiner. Cecchetti even developed a new type of examination certificate allowing teachers the opportunity to select steps from the Grade 1 to Grade 6 syllabi to enable students to

perform in class groups of 8 to 10 students (where permitted). These students received a Participation Certificate for the level they performed. “This allowed students the opportunity to complete a class and receive an acknowledgement of their efforts and their commitment to training,” Borg explains.

At ATOD, examinations continued as normal in the states where travel was permitted. For students overseas and in Australian states where travel was restricted, on-line or pre-recorded examinations were offered. Similarly, COMDANCE offered live-streaming options for exams in overseas centres, developing a set of protocols to enable the process to feel as close to the traditional exam experience as possible.

### Opportunities for engagement

The transition to on-line learning, though rushed at the start, did provide new opportunities for dancers and teachers. COMDANCE adopted the philosophy of self-help guru Napoleon Hill: “Every adversity carries with it the seed of equal or greater benefit”. Having an online community enabled the organisation to release a series of jazz, tap, classical and contemporary workshops. Gepp says these workshops attracted huge attendance numbers: “One day even had 700 online participants!” COMDANCE also made the decision to allow teachers to share their syllabus videos with students, so they could continue to prepare for exams from home.

Cecchetti also seized the opportunity to expand its digital catalogue of syllabi video downloads and video-on-demand home-streaming service. In addition, Cecchetti students in Victoria were extremely excited in September to have former Australian Ballet





principal Madeleine Eastoe take their first Scholar's Class since the lockdown commenced in March. Though it was a Zoom class, students were delighted to work with Eastoe and take part in a class. Borg says: "Wherever possible we have also reduced prices to ease the financial burden on teachers and parents." Cecchetti has reduced membership fees for 2021.

### Competitions and awards

One of the biggest disappointments for students this year was the loss of performance and competition opportunities. Covid-19 resulted in the postponement of the Cecchetti International Competition which had been scheduled to take place in July. This event was initially postponed to July 2021, before being again postponed to July 2022. The Cecchetti Medal Awards in each state were cancelled as were the Lucie Saranova National Awards.

At ATOD, the inability to hold any of their usual events such as the Come Together Dance Convention, State Scholarships and the ATOD Australasian Energetiks Scholarship has given birth to a new national and international virtual dance extravaganza to be held on February 7 this year, called Dance, Learn, Connect. Belford says: "We will be running three streams on-line for dance teachers around the world."

COMDANCE devised the Global Dance Challenge, a series of on-line competitions which it held in May. Gepp says the opportunity to challenge dancers from all around the world was "met with huge excitement from our students" though of course nothing can replace the thrill of competing and performing on stage". Entries were submitted on-line and then parents, teachers and students could all watch

the live presentations, via Zoom. This gave all involved the opportunity to connect as one community and embrace the "we're all in this together mantra".

### Unexpected outcomes

The Covid-19 pandemic resulted in a number of unexpected opportunities and new skills for all three dance societies, including, for ATOD, the chance to build a new interactive website. For COMDANCE, the success of its on-line workshops could see this model replace face-to-face workshops, where expenses are high.

On World Ballet Day (October 29) Cecchetti released *Wildfire*, a video project and morale builder, featuring dancers from Australia, Malaysia, New Zealand and the Philippines. Using editing techniques, dancers were able to break down the boundaries of lockdown and dance right into each other's rooms. "Inspired by 'look and catch' choreography performed by the younger students, the inclusion of animated golden fireflies became a motif in this project," explains Borg. "The fireflies act as a visual reminder to actively search for the magic and beauty in the world around us, even when times are tough."

Times have been very tough for dancers, parents and their teachers, but dance societies and syllabus organisation have led the way to keep hope alive and connections strong.

*For information on the ATOD's Dance, Learn, Connect Event on February 7 go to [www.atod.net.au/event/2021-dance-learn-connect-teaching-days](http://www.atod.net.au/event/2021-dance-learn-connect-teaching-days)*

*To watch the Cecchetti Project – Wildfire, go to: <https://youtu.be/MVdOCTok2Po>.*

### Privileged position

"As I sat watching a group of Grade 4 Tap students in the exam room, I suddenly realised that at that moment, I was extremely privileged to be their only audience. I realised that due to the crazy world we'd found ourselves in, these students had not had any opportunities to perform to anyone other than their teachers. Usually by this time of year, the majority of students would have performed at eisteddfods, fetes, local events, school assemblies, etc. So for them, I was their appreciative audience and all the hard work and preparations they had put into their exam was to be enjoyed by only me. What a special and extremely humbling experience!"

*COMDANCE examiner,  
Diahann Maude*



ATOD pupils on stage pre-Covid.

PHOTO: BWP STUDIOS



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# Two into one?

A tertiary dance degree in Queensland has closed, writes Karen van Ulzen.



PHOTO: FIONA CULLEN

A scene from QUT Dance's 2019 graduation performance.

**Q**UEENSLAND University of Technology has suspended its Bachelor of Fine Arts (Dance Performance) degree from this year. The University is, however, maintaining its BFA (Dance) degree.

According to Damian Candusso, Head of School, School of Creative Practice, the decision to drop the BFA Dance Performance was made in recognition that it had many units in common with the BFA Dance degree. Suspending the Dance Performance degree will streamline the two courses into one while offering a greater number of directions for students to take their training. "Being one degree allows us to offer more options for students with a diverse range of career outcomes. These do include being a dancer but open up other options in terms of being a choreographer, teacher, artistic direction, physio, and others."

The overall number of places offered to dance students will not be reduced by the change – in fact Candusso says they could increase, as student numbers for the BFA Dance are not capped (whereas Dance Performance was capped at sixteen).

The Dance Performance degree offered core technique classes in ballet and contemporary as well as two performances a year. Technique

classes in the Dance degree, in comparison, focus on physical and conceptual approaches and cover a range of genres, according to the website, "for example, contemporary dance, ballet, hip hop, Latin dance." However, Candusso says the BFA Dance will "allow us to expand where students can go in their degree" through its links to other university disciplines such as health and education, and by exploring digital technology, an increasing emphasis of QUT. "Some of the opportunities will involve the integration of technology, creating new opportunities for students to translate artistic concepts, embodied learning and kinaesthetic understanding, and to demonstrate this through the production and distribution of creative content."

Graduate numbers have been small. In Denise Richardson's review of the QUT Dance graduation performance in 2019 for *Dance Australia*, she noted: "... as in most previous years, it was a small cohort of only five graduating dancers, with, disappointingly, only two male students across the entire program."

The university will maintain its connection with the local dance profession, such as the Queensland Ballet, Australasian Dance Collective and the Royal Academy of Dance.

*Look out for a further article on this issue on our website.*

## YAGP Asia Pacific

The Youth America Grand Prix has been forging ahead despite the pandemic. The YAGP 2021 Season Asia Pacific Virtual semi-finals were held in December, 2020, and featured more than 400 students, aged nine to 20, of which 202 were from Australia. All performed in studios and in their homes while 16 directors and representatives of the world's most prestigious dance schools and companies – from seven countries and many different time zones – tuned in to watch the performances and teach master classes virtually, via zoom.

As a result, more than \$150,000 in scholarships were awarded to 113 talented young dancers to attend eight of the world's leading dance schools.

Fourteen Australian dancers placed among the top winners – and 45 won scholarships to such pre-eminent schools as the Royal Ballet (UK), John Cranko School of Stuttgart Ballet (Germany), Princess Grace Academy (Monaco) and many others.

*To see who they were, visit our website!*





# Driven to dance

Dimitri Kleioris couldn't stop dancing from the day he was born, he tells **Candide McDonald**.

**H**ALF-GREEK, half-Maltese and growing up in Sydney with three very much older sisters, Dimitri Kleioris was “the baby who was always dancing” whenever there was music. He had also attended about 50 weddings by the time he was five, and somewhere in the family albums is a video of one in which, at age two, he danced all by himself on the dance floor all night, not wanting to engage with anyone, just perfectly happy to be moving to the music. “I would also cartwheel everywhere,” he adds, “including in shopping centres.”

When Kleioris was four, his mum put him into a local dance class near his home in Sydney, where he did jazz and hip-hop. “And I absolutely loved it.” One week later, his dad took him out because he was the only boy. “I tried a myriad of sports that I was horrible at and just kept asking my mum why I couldn't go back to dancing. When I was eight, she said, ‘Stuff this, I'm taking you back’. So I'd go from soccer training straight to dance classes.

“Dance is the only thing I ever really wanted to do as a kid,” Kleioris states. “I had this innate drive from an early age that I think you have to be born with that or be beaten into submission by your parents – which I was not.”

At age 14, he was accepted into the McDonald College with a full scholarship and had his first taste of classical ballet. His mum also began taking him to see shows. “We'd go and see musicals. She'd stand with me at the stage door and ask everybody, ‘What does my son have to do if he wants to be a professional dancer?’ They'd invariably say, ‘He has to do ballet class.’ For some reason I never wanted to, but at McDonald College I moved into the ballet stream and was going to Brent Street after hours to do everything else.”

In his second year, teacher Nigel Burley took over both the ballet program and Premier State Ballet, the youth ballet company run by the college. “In the middle of Year 10 he said to me, ‘Listen kid, I want you to join Premier State Ballet and take on the role of Albrecht in *Giselle*,’” Kleioris





PHOTOS: PEDRO GREIG

Kleioris in rehearsal at SDC studios (with Chloe Leong).

recalls. “I’d only been doing ballet for two years and didn’t know what that meant.”

Burley warned him that if he did so he would have to stop all other styles of dance and just focus on ballet. That triggered a very definite “no, thank you” from Kleioris. “But Nigel told me, ‘I promise if you do this for one year, when you go back to other styles of dance you will be exponentially better.’ So I decided I could give it a go for a year. Three months in, I was in love with ballet and knew that was what I wanted to do, even though I’d only been doing it for two years and was still kind of guessing.”

He then auditioned for the Australian Ballet School, “for fun because there was a boy in my year auditioning. At that point, I actually wanted to go and study in Europe because of my Greek and Maltese heritage and because I had teachers who favoured European schools.” But of 150 in the audition, he was one of three chosen to go to the finals in Melbourne. My dad said to me, ‘If you get into this you’re going here, you’re not going to Europe’. I remember thinking, ‘Oh no’.”

Kleioris did the final week of auditions with 39 other dancers for seven spots in Level 6 and fell in love with the School. “Suddenly, I really wanted to go there, being surrounded by amazing dancers and being able to see the Australian Ballet company. It was all like a dream at seventeen.” In October, the letter arrived and Kleioris had been accepted. “I opened it in my room and got this sinking feeling. While I was happy, I knew it closed the door on Europe.” He spent three weeks asking himself if it was really what he wanted to do. It also meant leaving school before his HSC and leaving home to live in Melbourne. Kleioris accepted in November and moved to Melbourne in January.

Six months before graduating, he flew to New Zealand to audition for the Royal New Zealand Ballet, “because I didn’t want to be left without a job”. He was given a contract for an immediate start but told them he wanted to finish off his studies, so he began the following year.

The next few years brought a wild array of opportunities and mishaps into Kleioris’s life.

“I was getting to a stage at RNZB where I was over ballet and I wanted to go and be a back-up dancer for Lady Gaga,” he states. “I went to LA and signed with an agent who was going to help me get a visa.” But on his return, the then RNZB director Ethan Stiefel told him the company was touring in New York in eight months and asked him to stay. “You can leave after that,” he told me. “What better way to experience a city where you want to live than to go there first to perform?”

“Luckily I did, because two months into the start of that year I had a major foot injury and was off for three months.”

Kleioris began to think about extending his skills to include acting and asked Sir Jon Trimmer, who had been involved with the RNZB for 50 years, for advice. Trimmer recommended Miranda Harcourt and Kleioris found a new passion. When Stiefel became choreographer on the production of US TV drama series, *Flesh and Bone*, Kleioris auditioned, received a two-year visa and his US dream became real. While living in New York, he also began singing lessons. “I’d always wanted to sing but wasn’t sure if I could.”

A year later, after a broken foot and a failed audition, he was asked to audition for *An American in Paris* on Broadway. “While I was at the Watermill Centre working with the amazing artist, Robert Wilson, I was asked to audition for the musical. I did the audition, although my plan was to move to Berlin as I wanted a change.” He was offered an ensemble role and turned it down. But then, “I don’t know what came over me,” he recalls. “I asked for the opportunity to audition for the lead. Two weeks later, after four auditions and cancelling my flight home twice, they offered me the job.” Kleioris played the lead for 10 months on Broadway, then moved to London to pursue his career.

That was when his father became ill. Kleioris came home. “I got to spend his last year with him and that’s what led me to SDC. I was at the opening night of *Ab Intra* in Sydney and was absolutely blown away, I think it’s a masterpiece. I remember thinking I’d love to work with Raf (artistic director Rafael Bonachela) and dance with this incredible company. I auditioned in September, 2017, and six weeks later I was offered a contract.”

Kleioris feels that he has found his perfect place. “I think a career in dance is not for everyone. It’s very different to what you imagine as a student. In a company, you’re a chess piece on a chess board. You are chosen for your unique qualities and what you control are your drive, your determination, your level of fitness and the work you put in, but ultimately your job is to bring to life the artistic director’s vision. I’m happy with that. I don’t have a desire to choreograph. I feel really lucky now to say that I dance in a company that I absolutely love. I’m doing work that’s very right for me right now and I feel very fulfilled by it.”



More people are discovering the wonderful array of live dance films, especially since the pandemic shut down so much live performance. **Emma Sandall** goes behind the camera.

# HOW A DANCE BECOMES A FILM



E

VER wondered how all the wonderful live dance performances available these days were captured on film? Perhaps not, because hopefully you've been engrossed in the magic of the

performance, not thinking about the mechanics of capturing it. You press play and there you are, with the best seats in the house, watching your favourite dance company, or work, or performer thanks to an invisible crew of technicians, camera operators, switchers and directors who brought you the performance.

Their invisible work takes enormous organisation, creativity and expertise. When David McAllister first stepped into the broadcast truck to watch director Simon Francis working his magic, calling the cuts in real time shooting The Australian Ballet's *Swan Lake* (Graeme Murphy), he exclaimed, "BRAVO!"

Even though the development of HD digital cameras and digital streaming have reduced costs,

it's still an expensive business. The Australian Ballet (TAB) budgets to capture one or two performances a year, depending on the season's repertoire and building their digital collection.

"We might do a new work because it is an exciting and known choreographer," explains Robyn Fincham, TAB's Recording and Broadcast Manager. "Or, we will re-do classics like *The Merry Widow* because it is great to get a new cast – and it would be filmed differently from the way it was done 20 years ago. And the film quality has improved too."

Once that's decided, Fincham jumps into action, booking her broadcast team and setting aside house seats for the cameras before the tickets are released. The actual audience experience of the performance must come first. "I have never had a complaint from an audience member. I've been so particular that I block those seats out and there are no masking issues," says Fincham. Audience feedback in fact suggests people actually enjoy the extra buzz in the air.

Since bringing their broadcasting in house in 2013, TAB have used the same team – Simon

MAIN PHOTO: The film of 'Betroffenheit', winner of the Rose d'Or (Arts) and Golden Prague (Performing Arts) awards in 2018.

(RIGHT): Audio Director Tony David Cray at work in the audio suite at the Sydney Opera House.





PHOTOS COURTESY THE AUSTRALIAN BALLET.



Francis, Assistant Director Madeline Holder, Audio Director Tony David Cray and the same team of freelance camera operators. “These guys have become like family,” says Fincham. “And they really love shooting the ballet.” One minute a camera operator will be shooting the cricket or footy and the next day they’re in the wings at the Sydney Opera House.

Francis, known for his work on huge live events such as NYE in Sydney and Dubai and shows like *Big Brother* and *Australian Idol*, had a lot to learn about shooting dance. For a start, what is it about the ballet you shoot?

He started by looking at Gene Kelly and Fred Astaire movies and reading about the way Astaire wanted his dance routines put on screen. He also learnt about the mechanics of dancing and dance story-telling. “For example, you can’t dance consistently for a certain duration without taking a breath and that is usually attached to a motion. The dancer might pause. And that’s the moment you can step away from the dance to create an emotional moment,” says Francis.

He conferred at length with McAllister

about what a dance shot should incorporate. Every tiny gesture is important. “What the body is doing is as much a part of the reaction. So you have to know not to cut to the face too tight or too quickly and miss the gesture that carried the meaning,” he says.

To create a screen version of a live dance performance you have to strike a balance between showing all the action on stage and choosing who to follow and what to cut out, explains Francis. Some purists want to see the whole stage the whole time but for most viewers that makes for very dull viewing. A good dance recording augments the live performance with close-ups of intense moments and reactions.

“Ultimately, it comes down to the story-telling,” Francis says. “When you do a ballet, like *Romeo and Juliet*, where there are a lot of intimate reactions, you can’t not shoot them. But with a ballet like *Swan Lake*, it is all about the dance.”

A multi-camera recording of a live performance is prepared in minute detail. First, Francis and Holder need to know the ballet inside out. They learn the work by heart by watching an

archival recording over and over again. How many times? Twenty-three is Francis’s record.


Holder then writes up a detailed script of the work with timings. This is crucial as her role is to alert each camera operator about the action coming up. “Madeline is briefing them throughout because the role of every camera is so structured. People know precisely what they are there to capture,” says Francis. Then comes the camera rehearsal and debriefing. “We’ll watch it back a couple of times so that nothing is new and there are no surprises.”

It’s the detailed preparation that allows Francis to respond to the spontaneity of the live performance and let his decisions breathe with the ballet literally calling the shots to the switcher while Holder prepares the camera operators. “In live performance, things change. If you’re looking for something it might not be there. It can be as simple as a look which spontaneously happened on one night. If you are too planned you might miss those innuendos and subtleties,” he explains.

It usually takes five cameras to film a ballet – three in the centre and two on the wings. TAB



PHOTO COURTESY THE AUSTRALIAN BALLET.



Filming the Australian Ballet's 'Coppelia' from the wings at the Sydney Opera House.

often has up to ten – four set up at the back auditorium to capture a wide shot, two follow shots and an extreme wide shot; two located at the sides to capture entrances and exits and any side facing reactions; and then a couple of cameras in the orchestra pit to film the musicians. For McAllister's *The Sleeping Beauty*, the company also used a couple of cameras up high on small cranes to capture the lavish sets, filming from the lighting boom boxes angled down onto the stage.

For the music, the idea is to capture the performance pure. "I try not to use too many microphones," explains Tony David Cray, the audio engineer. "I always start with the minimum and position more among the orchestra as needed. A score like Khachaturian's *Spartacus* is so immense it needed a lot of mics."

When making a live/live broadcast, which TAB do from time to time, that one live action edit is what is sent out instantaneously to the world. Francis loves the energy that creates, "Everyone lifts their game. Everyone goes up a notch and chips in. Everyone is on edge."

However, if a dancer slips up, or misses their mark, or a costume gets caught, well, that might be captured forever, too.

A live recording is different. It often uses two performance recordings. This gives the filmmakers the chance to get all the details right in post production, because the editor can use takes from the camera rehearsal to cut into the film if need be. Audio Director Tony David Cray is also the video editor for TAB live recordings. He noticed the editing process lacked nimbleness when these two jobs were separated, so in 2016, he suggested he do both.

"It was a little bit intimidating at first but it worked well and since then I can't work any other way," he says. Cray finds that having the audio mix and video edit in the same suite gives him a

greater range of editing solutions. "Perhaps there is just one leap that is not right, or they hurt their ankle that night. I could use the audio as the master and make the video follow or the opposite way, or come up with a creative solution. It's a bit of a unique way of working."

Usually 95 percent of the final edit comes from one performance with a few takes from a second. It is about finding a balance between when the dancing was best and the music spot on. Getting the two just so creates the magic. Cray says his partner always knows when he has finished an edit – it's when he comes out of his studio with tears in his eyes.

Fincham thinks the great thing about filming the ballets is that people get the chance to see their national ballet company "live" in cinemas right around the country or even overseas. "That's what is really important about filming it live with an audience. It's to get that real sense – oh my god, this is live! Or this was filmed live!" she says.

In the last few years, more and more streaming services and digital channels devoted to arts and culture have appeared, such as ABC iView. Many of these platforms work by licensing content and making it available through subscriptions and pay-per-view options. ABC iView regularly shares TAB's performances as well as work by other Australian dance companies and independent choreographers.

*Since the pandemic shut down live performances in 2020, TAB has presented a digital season of all its ballets since April (At Home with Ballet TV). Each had a limited two-week season, with supporting short form content. ABC Commercial continue to distribute TAB content to iView and globally. <https://australianballet.com.au/the-ballets/digital-season>*

## Hybrid is the future

Just in time for lockdown, in March 2020, the new arts and culture streaming platform Marquee TV became available in Australia and New Zealand. It currently has around 250 dance titles in its catalogue, from the Bolshoi Ballet's *Swan Lake* starring Svetlana Zakharova to English National Ballet's modern *Giselle* by Akram Khan and the recent Crystal Pite offerings: *Betroffenheit* and *Revisor*. Kathleya Afanador, Head of Content, says that contemporary dance is doing particularly well on the platform. One of the reasons is that contemporary dance lends itself so well to being filmed.

Crystal Pite's *Betroffenheit* is a prime example. Not only did *Betroffenheit* win the Olivier Award for Best New Dance Production in 2017, the film itself, directed by British director Jeff Tudor, won the Rose d'Or (Arts) and Golden Prague (Performing Arts) awards in 2018.

Afanador thinks the future will be a hybrid between live dance performance and digital content. Many young choreographers are now using video all the time as part of their process and finding different avenues for their work. They are very open to novel ways of presenting dance. When once the order was live performance to film, creators are finding ways to work the other way too. Especially since the pandemic. Marquee TV is now co-commissioning these sorts of creative experiments.

This really excites Simon Francis. He is interested in giving people the impression of being inside the movement. "As a TV director I try to get cameras in the action – I want the viewer to feel they are inside it." It's not a technique he would use with a traditional ballet, "But with something new and edgy, go for your life. When one comes along I will!"



# DANCE AUSTRALIA

## TEACHERS' SPOTLIGHT 2021

“It is the supreme art of the teacher to awaken joy in creative expression and knowledge.”  
– Albert Einstein

*Enjoy our celebration of dance educators over the next few pages.*







## SPOTLIGHT ON

# Adelina Larsson Mendoza

Lecturer in Dance at the Western Australian Academy of Performing Arts.

### How long have you been teaching?

In Australia I've taught on and off since 2007 in a variety of contexts.

### What drew you to teaching dance?

I was very lucky to have had joyful experiences with really great dance teachers in my life as a young person. My teachers celebrated all bodies and styles of music and dance practices which meant that we got to work in various vocabularies, time signatures and expressions. Because I grew up in this safe, encouraging and creative environment I naturally wanted to create a space for other people to enjoy the body through movement and build trust, strength and joy with others.

### Do you specialise in a particular age group?

At the moment I am working on the lands of the Whadjuk Nyoongar people on Jinjeejerdup (the place of the honey eater) otherwise known as the Mount Lawley Edith Cowan University Campus in Perth, WA. I teach improvisation, choreography and contemporary technique (floor-work). I also teach recent graduates and professionals here. As part of my practice, I guess I work with a pretty broad range of people and contexts. Since moving to Australia I have facilitated movement workshops and choreographed works for ages between three and 75 in both remote and regional communities as well as in capital cities. I've worked with community-members in community halls, schools, dance studios but also in state theatres and institutions with professional dance and theatre companies. I've had the pleasure to choreograph for skaters, actors, singers, circus artists, professional dance artists and dance enthusiasts from all walks of life. I feel very lucky.

### Has the coronavirus lockdown left you with lasting changes to the way you teach?

Not really... I have however learnt a lot about how invaluable the physical presence is to the experience of body-practice work and that it (the "sensing together") is irreplaceable with a screen. I should also say that I definitely learnt how privileged I am to be able to connect and dance with others during this pandemic. I really feel for my fellow dance artists and teachers



Adelina Larsson Mendoza (with Ahil Ratnamohan) at Bundanon Trust, NSW.

PHOTO: MATT CORNELL

around the world who are still unable to share a physical space. For us in WA the screen and dancing online has been a tool to "play with" until we were able to get back in the studio again, which was after a relatively short period.

### How do you balance the importance of technique with the importance of artistry in your students?

I try to merge the two and don't feel the need to compartmentalise them. Finding texture, imagery and refinement (anatomical understanding, micro-articulation, body-mass/time/space interplay) is a stimulating way to stay tuned-in and deepen the learning, I think.

### What is the most rewarding part of teaching dance?

The ongoing learning that takes place for me as a teacher. Working in an art form where the body is given the space to sense and imagine, and to share that space and work with others. Being in the studio – it's a place for contemplation, discovery and experimentation. I feel very lucky to be able to do what I do. 🌟

*Adelina Larsson Mendoza is an award-winning Swedish/Mexican choreographer, curator, producer, performer and educator.*  
[www.waapa.ecu.edu.au/](http://www.waapa.ecu.edu.au/)

## Career Highlights

Adelina trained at DOCH, Stockholm, and CODARTS, Rotterdam. Since moving to Australia in 2007 she has choreographed and performed for the Melbourne Festival, Federation Square, Sydney Opera House, the State Theatre Centre of WA, Australian Institute of Sport, Canberra Theatre Centre, Perth Institute of Contemporary Arts (PICA), The Lock Up, Newcastle and Fremantle Arts Centre.

Adelina has worked with BighART, intermedia artist David Pledger's Not yet it's difficult (NYID), Q12 Dance, STRUT and LINK company.

She is the founder and director of Strange Attractor Lab – an interdisciplinary lab that focuses on experimentation and artistic research. Adelina received an Australian Dance Award 2019 for Independent Dance for her work In the Rite II: Solo – a commission by performer Laura Boynes and WW project.

She was Associate Artist at Critical Path Choreographic Centre (2017-2019) and Caretaker of ReadyMade Works, both in NSW.



PHOTO: JAMES BRAUND



## SPOTLIGHT ON

## Leanne Stojmenov

Teacher at Youth Ballet WA, after a glittering career with the Australian Ballet.

**How long have you been teaching?**

During my professional career I coached and taught ballet classes sporadically. However for the last two years I have been more involved in teaching as daily work.

**What drew you to teaching?**

The journey to become a dancer requires intelligence, physical attributes and a hunger for the pursuit of excellence. This sounds like a simple formula; however, it is a difficult path and requires absolute commitment.

Having spent thousands of hours refining my art and honing my body I wanted to pass on what I have learnt. It is my hope that perhaps I can help to make a young dancer's journey that much richer by helping them to understand

how unique and special they are. I believe it is their vulnerabilities that can actually become their strength as an artist.

**Do you specialize in a particular age group?**

I think my strength in teaching lies with older students, particularly those with the desire, openness and commitment to make real change for themselves.

**Has the coronavirus lockdown left you with lasting changes to the way you teach?**

It has opened my eyes to how much a student can achieve from home. I was impressed by how the students conducted themselves and how their commitment carried over into and through the lockdown. Here in WA we were

back in the studio reasonably quickly so in that respect we were lucky.

As well, the lockdown opened the possibility for teachers and students who wouldn't normally work together to coach and be coached on-line. In this respect, lockdown closed many doors but broadened the horizon and opened doors on opposite sides of the country and, for many, the world. For me this was exciting.

**How do you balance the importance of technique with the importance of artistry?**

In my opinion neither exists without the other. Strong technique is redundant without the artistic element. Artistry without technique is not classical ballet. ~

[www.youthballetwa.org.au](http://www.youthballetwa.org.au)

## SPOTLIGHT ON

## Brooke Arnold

Classical ballet teacher at Terry Simpson Studios in Adelaide.

BROOKE has always been passionate about dance and so, along with her nurturing nature, it was a natural progression for her to move from dancing to teaching. "Being able to help students achieve what they didn't think was possible, encouraging and developing their technique and artistic qualities, is why I love what I do," she explains.

She teaches all age groups, both recreational students and vocational. The 2020 pandemic has made her grateful to go to the studio and teach her students in person. The simple routine of walking into the studio now feels an empowering act. "It's amazing how a mindset can change the way you teach, in the sense that you make the most of every class, every turn and every jump."

"The lockdown, and having to make massive adaptations and changes in order to keep dancing, was a very hard experience. Students dancing in their living rooms is great at the time and kept them thinking about ballet and dance. But when it was possible to return to the studio,

seeing the students dance in person again, it made me realise that nothing compares to a pre-Covid ballet class, with room to move and jump. My students were not only unfit, but larger movements also such as grand allegro were non-existent due to the lack of space. Students who were trying their best to learn over video and with a mirror often had accidentally learnt bad habits – all of which had to be retrained by teachers upon returning to the studio." Brooke believes that technique and artistry go hand in hand. "If a student has no technique their artistry won't shine, or if they are all about the expression there is no foundation to their dancing.

The most rewarding part of teaching, she says, is seeing students achieve and progress, whether it's a new step that they had been struggling with, the joy of dancing on stage or succeeding in their latest examination.

"Even a small progression is the reason why I love my job." ~



ABOVE: Brooke with Charlie Carr (back) and Emily Dennis, both Qld Ballet Academy Guest Associates who attend the ABS Intra/Interstate & International Training Programme (ITP).

*Brooke has completed her RAD Advanced 2 and has trained in all facets of dance. She completed SACE Stage 2 Dance and her Certificate in Ballet Teaching Studies through the RAD.*  
[www.terrysimpsonstudios.com.au](http://www.terrysimpsonstudios.com.au)





## SPOTLIGHT ON

# Hilary Kaplan

Director and Principal of Alegria Dance Studios in Sydney.

### How long have you been teaching?

Approximately 33 years.

### What drew you to teaching dance?

I think it was always in me to want to teach. I remember as a five-year-old saying I wanted to be a school teacher when I grew up. This was before I had attended any dance lessons.

During my time as a dance student, I would often assist my peers who may have been struggling with a movement or an *enchainement*. It gave me great pleasure to see them improve and gain confidence.

This continued through my entire training (even while I was at the Royal Ballet School, I would coach my peers for our assessments and performances) and then when I was performing professionally, I would often assist a peer with something he or she was struggling to perfect.

When I finally decided to retire (in my mid-20s) from the company, I just knew that I had to teach – I actually did not even think about what I was going to do – it was the natural next step for me.

I thus opened a studio while simultaneously completing a degree in linguistics.

### Do you specialise in a particular age group?

At this point in my career, I do focus mainly on the afternoon vocational ballet students as well as the full-time students aspiring to have a career in either ballet or contemporary.

I do, however, still teach our grades students at our exam preparation seminars and thoroughly enjoy working with them.

There are not enough hours in a day to teach everyone so working with 10- to 11-year-olds in Intermediate /Foundation right through to the full-time students going off to company schools is my focus and it gives me great satisfaction and joy to see how they progress, develop and grow, not only as dancers but as human beings. I also frequently teach the younger grade students at local and international summer schools and I always find this very rewarding.

### Has the coronavirus lockdown left you with lasting changes to the way you teach?

The lockdown showed me that we often do take things for granted and do not always fully



appreciate what we have; however, it did not really change my teaching methods. I found that the students came back into the studio confident with the knowledge they had acquired through the Zoom classes.

The focus on Zoom was amazing and I was thrilled to keep all our students actively involved in all classes and maintain some normality in the challenging times.

### How do you balance the importance of technique with the importance of artistry?

The two are vitally important and go hand in hand. We would not want to kill any natural sense of artistry even if the technique was weak.

Technique is a means to an end – it is absolutely vital to have a strong, well established technique so that the body can move freely and elevate the performance to a level that mesmerises an audience.

In all levels, we work very hard on the basic technique, strengthening each element, but, simultaneously, placing and encouraging

equal importance on the artistry and performance at all levels. So, for example, we may work on the technical movements in an adage; then, we will get the students to perform the adage focusing on the musicality and expression, tying the two together.

One has to gauge the intensity of the teaching in every class in order to sustain interest and concentration and ensure that the students are motivated to strengthen their technique in order to be able to develop the artistry.

### What is the most rewarding part of teaching dance?

The most rewarding aspect is seeing the students progress, strengthen and develop as they master the movements and find joy in that.

Obviously, it wonderful when our students have great success in a competition or exam or when they secure places in company schools or companies, but it is equally rewarding to see a student finally master a movement with which they have been struggling. ~





## SPOTLIGHT ON

## Valmai Roberts

Classical Ballet Lecturer and Training Coordinator at the Australian Conservatoire of Ballet. Valmai has been teaching since 1984 after retiring as a dancer with the Joffrey Ballet (US).

**Do you specialise in a particular age group?**

Initially, I taught pre-professional students and professionals. I began teaching in the degree program at the Tisch School of Arts, New York University, as well as classes for American Ballet Theatre and Metropolitan Opera Ballet Company.

On my return to Australia I continued teaching these groups as well as teaching children from their first ballet class upwards at the Australian Conservatoire of Ballet (now Melbourne Conservatoire of Ballet).

**Has the coronavirus lockdown left you with lasting changes to the way you teach?**

Yes, I feel it has. I had to ensure corrections were more positive and verbally accurate on “how to improve” as I was aware of the

difficulties each of my students were coping with daily and the commitment that each of them made in all classes via Zoom.

At times I had to bring some extra humour to the classroom, such as asking the students to make headaddresses and asking the students to introduce their pets that seemed to enjoy being on camera.

**How do you balance the importance of technique with the importance of artistry in your students?**

I feel they must proceed “hand in hand” but, as I explain to the students, a dancer cannot develop their artistry and the ability to express their emotions if they don’t have the control of their technique and musicality. Their technique and musicality has to be so secure and well placed it is

not noticed and allows the emotion, artistry and freedom of movement that are unique to dance be shown and remembered. The audience needs to be “transported” by a performance otherwise it becomes almost a gymnastic competition.

**What is the most rewarding part of teaching dance?**

For me, it has been working with students who are focused, committed and trying to achieve their best and hopefully giving them the opportunity as I had to be involved in the magic of dance and achieve their dreams. It has been rewarding to see many of my former students dancing in professional companies world wide. ~

<http://www.melbourneconservatoire.com.au>

## SPOTLIGHT ON

## Layla Burgess

Classical ballet teacher at Amanda Bollinger Dance Academy (Qld).

LAYLA was a dancer with American Ballet Theatre Studio Company before returning to her home on the Gold Coast. She has been teaching now for four years.

Teaching has enabled me to share my passion and experience. I always knew I wanted to be working in a field where I was able to help others. After being plagued with injuries I knew I could make a difference preventing the next generation from going through something similar.”

She enjoys teaching children “at an age before their neural pathways for technique have been formed”. “A lot of dancers tend to grow bad habits which are extremely hard to replace and often lead to injuries. In saying this I also love watching any age improve over time and it’s never too late to create new neural pathways.”

She says the experience of the coronavirus has definitely impacted on her teaching.

“I have never been so grateful for studio space! I am a visual learner, so I tend to show

corrections by using an example on the body. The lockdown really made me focus on how I was verbalising the corrections instead of relying on display or physical cues.”

Layla finds that the most rewarding part of being a dance teacher is seeing the students grow. “Not only in their ability to dance but in life. From seeing the excitement on a young students face as they learn their first solo, to hearing from a teenager about their first driving lesson.

“2020 was a year when students needed support more than ever, but it goes both ways. The energy and positivity I try to give my students is always given in return. The ballet studio always has been and always will be my happy place. Walking through the doors lets you escape from life outside and for a brief moment time almost stands still. All that is left is music and beauty.” ~

<https://vaganova.com.au>





## SPOTLIGHT ON

## Elise Frawley

Associate Artistic Director at the National College of Dance in Newcastle, NSW.

**How long have you been teaching?**

27 years.

**What drew you to teaching dance?**

Growing up as a dancer I had always idolised my own teachers, not only for their expertise in dance but for their nurturing and their role in enhancing my own sense of confidence and self-belief.

Later, while I was studying for my degree in education at the University of Newcastle, I found myself drawn back to ballet with an ignited passion for specialising in dance teaching and nurturing the students as my teachers had done for me.

**Do you specialise in a particular age group?**

I enjoy teaching all ages but especially from about five years up to advanced. The younger students are particularly enthusiastic and it is a pleasure watching them as individuals developing a kinaesthetic understanding of their own body along with the unpredictable moments of expression that capture your heart.

As the students mature and the dance journey has truly begun I recognise the need for positive role models and encouragement, allowing each student the gift of self belief as they make their way through many vulnerable stages of their personal development and learning many things about their own strengths or different areas to focus on.

Working with advanced students is equally rewarding for all of the above reasons. There is a different sense of fulfilment that comes with a feeling of respect for these students. At these advanced levels the students have maintained their level of commitment, dedication and grit over the many years. These students are dancing every day for themselves with goals of achieving their own dreams. We expect a lot from these students and when they have the confidence to truly give themselves wholeheartedly to their dancing it becomes a true gift to any teacher.

**Has the coronavirus lockdown left you with lasting changes to the way you teach?**

Yes. In my delivery and tone I have noticed myself speaking slower, more calmly and being far more articulate in my explanations of what I'd like to see. I am especially proud of our students this year and I want that to come across in the delivery of

my classes. I really want *every* student to enjoy dance no matter what level they are.

In a practical sense I have found that teaching on Zoom meant that I had higher expectations of the students and their understanding of their bodies in a proprioceptive sense but also visually in the shapes they were making. The students would look at themselves on the screen and we would take more time to visualise, feel and understand the shapes. Under COVID guidelines I am still keeping my distance from the students so I have maintained these teaching methods in the classroom.

**How do you balance the importance of technique with the importance of artistry in your students?**

This is forever a challenge, as we all know technique is so important in the foundations of good training. As teachers we are constantly demanding more. More range, more precision, more turnout, cleaner footwork... the list goes on and on and as we continually comment with technical corrections we take away the opportunity for our students to actually dance with artistry.

I remind myself every now and then to stand back and quietly watch, giving the students the chance to be an artist without the coaching being spoken over the top. Besides that, I've realised over the years that some students need to be taught how to be expressive. I try to demonstrate with as much artistry that I can and help them to find ways to create artistry within the body rather than just the use of the face. I spend a lot of time in class detailing arms shapes, line of heads and the details of the fingers to help students realise it's more than just the legs and feet that makes a dancer.

**What is the most rewarding part of teaching dance?**

There are multiple rewards that occur at different levels and on a daily basis but for me, especially, I become quite emotional when I see my students move onto the next part of their journey and knowing they leave as confident young adults full of appreciation, passion and inspiration. 🌟

<https://nationalcollegeofdance.com>





# TAKE A BOW

Dance teachers and their pupils had a tough time in 2020. We asked them how they coped.



Terry Simpson with pupils.

**T**HE pandemic hit dance schools hard. Forced to close for months, it jeopardised the income of teachers and forced a frustrating interruption on the progress of their students. It's not completely over yet, but most teachers are now looking back and marvelling at how they survived. "It has definitely been one of the hardest years ever," says Terry Simpson, who has been running her studios for "about 40 years" in Adelaide.

Simpson has four venues – two in Adelaide city, one in a church hall and one in a community centre in Mitcham – with about 300 students from beginners to full-time taking day and night classes. When the shutdown was announced "we had half a day to let everybody know", she says.

Her initial reaction was that she couldn't "possibly reinvent myself at this point in my life".

But like many teachers and studio owners facing the situation, she discovered new abilities in herself. "It's amazing what you can do," she exclaims.

She began by using the school's facebook page to post pre-recorded classes but soon realised the students would need more to keep them engaged. So she moved to a schedule of streamed on-line classes. "I can't remember how many timetables we wrote in those three months." Even though it was a skeleton program, at considerably reduced fees, and

"full-on and extremely tiring and stressful dealing with the technology," it kept her staff employed and her pupils happy.

In fact, like many other teachers, she found that the on-line classes brought her closer to her students and families. Rather than seeing pupils as a group, dropped off at the door of the studio, she and her teachers found themselves in their pupils' homes, "looking at their sofas, their dogs, their washing," she laughs. "A few mums were in the background, dancing away!"

**“It has been one of the hardest years ever.”**

Another positive aspect of the experience was the gratitude of the parents. "People suddenly realised what you did with the children, even though [in these circumstances] it was so limited. They were so thankful. You have no idea the positive feedback I got."

In Sydney, Sarah Boulter, the director of Ev and Bow full-time school in Kirrawee, was similarly daunted at the prospect of adapting to new technology. "I'd never run Zoom in my life; I didn't know what it was!" she exclaims. Once her classes were up and

running, however, she quickly realised that keeping the connection with her students during the lockdown "was really important, especially for the fulltimers". "They had invested their time into the school, their training, and then they had nothing. I was really surprised by how engaged they were."

Boulter ran a trimmed-down timetable of technique and conditioning classes. She also drew on her professional friends and contacts to augment the classes with some "very exciting lectures", on such topics as casting, life on Broadway and the West End, and audition techniques. "I found that often stimulated them more than moving. I guess we're lucky because with full-timers they want that type of education, they're not children."

The pandemic has been particularly tough on vocational students, especially those senior students nearing the peak of their training and hoping for professional experience in the near future. But just as their teachers have found unexpected new skills and the ability to adapt, so have their pupils shown impressive resilience. Anecdotal evidence collected for Dance Australia has shown that most persisted with their classes and returned in surprising good physical condition. "It really sorts out those who want to dance more than life itself," says Simpson.

– KAREN VAN ULZEN



# Lessons for life

While much was made in the media of the hold-up to the careers of elite athletes during the pandemic, what about the careers of our elite young dancers?

**J**UST as with promising athletes, the timing of the training of dance students is crucial. Young, developing bodies must be strengthened and refined progressively and methodically in order to reach their peak without injury.

Additionally, with careers being so short and so dependent on physical prowess, even a few months away from training can be a big setback.

Students at the Australian Ballet School, our national elite ballet training institution, were in that awful position nearly all 2020. Situated in Melbourne, the school was subjected to the lengthiest shut-down in the country, with no classes held on site for months. Yet the school kept going throughout. With 110 students ranging in ages from 14 to 19, with day students as well as boarders from around the country and overseas, how did the teachers manage?

Like all Victorians, when the first lockdown was announced in March, the faculty at the school first presumed it would be for a fairly short time. As Joanne Michel (Ballet Mistress and Level 8 Coordinator) recounts, “When the news came through, the board and the director (Lisa Pavane) decided there and then that it was in the best interests of students and the staff to close the school. It was close to Easter holidays so it worked out well in that we could let the students go a little bit earlier and they were able to get home safely, including the boarders.”

When it became apparent that the school would have to be closed for much longer, the teachers quickly went into action and set up remote teaching. The health team ran a survey of each pupil’s home conditions and advised on setting up appropriate facilities such as barres and

flooring. Meanwhile, the teaching faculty embarked on a steep learning curve with technology, working out how to translate the packed timetable of hands-on, bodily training in the dance studio to the virtual world of on-line.

Classes were kept together as much as possible, so students still had social contact with their classmates. Technique classes were maintained, though travelling steps (especially grand allegro) were not allowed. Students also continued with their contemporary, repertoire, variations and pas de deux classes, except alone and with recorded music rather than live piano. “We decided to learn the pas de deux which we would hopefully be able to do for our assessment work,” Michel explains. “The boys would be doing the pas de deux as if they were partnering the girls, and the girls as if they were being partnered, but not on pointe.”

“Within this timetable they also had their conditioning, strengthening, wellbeing and mindfulness sessions. Their mental as well as their physical health was a priority.”

At the time of writing, Michel was still hopeful that, should the restrictions be lifted according to the Victorian roadmap, students could do their end-of-year assessments. After the first lockdown, she says, “they returned to physical fitness very quickly” thanks to the school’s conditioning and strengthening program. “If you’ve maintained that conditioning and strength, when you come into the studio, you can work hard. They had a gym class every day. That’s made a huge difference. If they had only been doing class, it would have been much more difficult.”

The lockdown, however, was longer the second time round and Michel admitted it was difficult to know what the students’ condition would be like until they returned to the studio.

For Level 8, the final, graduate year of the ABS, the lockdown would have been especially frustrating. Normally the young dancers would have been touring Victoria on the Australian Ballet’s Regional Tour, gaining valuable performing experience, and holding their big graduation performance showcase at Arts Centre Melbourne. Such experiences make lifetime memories. It is also the year when they would be auditioned for professional companies. At the time of writing, these auditions had not been held, but teachers have been getting ready to help students put together video auditions.

What does she see for the future for these students, with overseas travel restricted and dance performances still uncertain? “Everyone is so different,” she replies. “But I think they’ve learnt a lot about themselves, possibly surprised themselves as to what they have been able to do in these circumstances. They will be able to deal with whatever is thrown at them in the future.”

An Australian Ballet School takes class wearing the latest in dance attire.



PHOTOS: LYNETTE WILLIS



# Time to take action

The lockdown gave some a chance to take up new plans.

**J**ASON Coleman (pictured) is the CEO and artistic director of the Ministry of Dance in Melbourne – a huge enterprise that encompasses full-time senior and junior schools, a talent agency and a production house.

Last year he was poised to produce some “massive” off-shore shows in Singapore and Japan when everything was brought to a standstill by the pandemic. “I lost a million dollars in the first eight weeks alone,” he says.

So what was his immediate reaction to the lockdown?

“I believe we’ve done the right thing as a nation and as a state in Victoria. I don’t know how we’ll ever make that money back but I really think we have to put life before economics and I’m very proud of us as a nation for making the sacrifice to look after the vulnerable in our society.”

As for keeping alive his school and businesses, he took up the challenge with a positive attitude.

“When we first went into Covid lockdown I gathered together all my staff and I said, ‘it’s not about what we can’t do, it’s about what we can do’. That has been our philosophy every day regardless of whether we were locked down in stage 2 or 3 or four. And I’m very proud of my entire team for keeping as many balls in

the air as we could through this time.

“I decided to keep all my staff on full-time – about 11 full-time and 35 casuals. . . I really want my beautiful Ministry to be running on the flip side of this and I need these amazing dedicated people.

“Now in doing so I challenged them all as well – let’s still find 38 hours in our week of things to do. So we’ve absolutely not stopped – some of us have been doing more hours remotely than we would have been doing normally.”

He and his staff ran “every single class” remotely. Their efforts have been appreciated. “I know some of the bigger schools have lost up to 30% of students but out of my whole school I’ve only lost three. I’ve received so many letters from parents really appreciating how engaging we’ve been, how positive. We’ve really focussed on the kids and keeping them going, not just by doing plies and tendus on Zoom, but by really keeping it active for them, giving them a reason to turn up and do it again. And I’m really proud of what we’ve managed to do.”

In addition, he used the unexpected spare time to finally put in place his plans for the Ministry of Dance Performing Arts High School, combining academic studies with dance, voice and acting for Years 7 to 12, which



opens this year. “I trained at the Victorian College of the Arts myself, and I’ve wanted to provide a school like that where the tertiary students are separated from the secondary, but the timing has never been right.”

Shutting down was also never an option for Damian Smith, the artistic director of the National Theatre Ballet School in St Kilda. “We all have our own ways of dealing with change, either permanent or temporary,” Smith says. “There was only one option for us, which was to remain up and running, make the necessary changes according to the circumstances, take into consideration the wellbeing of all students and staff, and get on with it. The situation is not ideal, especially for an organisation in the performing arts. We are a very busy school.

“... Yes, it was scary, complicated, and challenging, but we have been very fortunate compared to the impact this pandemic has had on many other organisations.”

Adaptability has involved using Zoom for classes, delivering as much of the content as possible but making adjustments where necessary.

The School conducted Zoom assessments for full-time students in their Diploma and Advance Diploma courses in the areas that could be fair under the circumstances. It also created small projects, events and online challenges for the students, helping them stay motivated, and preparing students for their RAD exams. Many of these were made possible because of the NTBS’s network of supporters, including The Australian Ballet, as well as its business partners.

“We would not have survived through any of this without the love and support of our incredible board members, generous supporters, full-time and part-time faculty, supportive families, and our devoted students, who have all stepped up to the plate working hard in undesirable circumstances,” he adds. “We are indeed a strong community.”

ABOVE:  
Jason  
Coleman

RIGHT:  
Damian  
Smith  
takes a  
live class.





# Being COVID-19 Positive

Some good things came out of the pandemic, writes **Matthew Lawrence**.

**A**T the time of writing, I was expecting to hear the result from my COVID test. As thanks for being a dad, and living with young snotty noses, this was my third such occasion; never has the family cold been so inconvenient! In fact, life has become tiresome by necessity, with uncomfortable tests and awkward rubbing of elbows, while keeping 1.5 metres, all within a seated two metres squared. Do not forget the COVID survey, and sterilising, before another Zoom, showing off your rounded “iso-body”, to hear you are now paid less, and then perhaps not at all ... after-all, who can predict the future? Anxious and depressed anyone?

Oddly, considering all the inconvenience, hardship, lives lost and news channels spreading ubiquitous pandemic gloom, I have also been buoyed by positives.

Eminent psychologist Paul TP Wong wrote: “Adversity is an opportunity for creativity, because it forces one to dig deeper and discover something new about oneself.” Nothing speaks more of adversity than a global pandemic. And how each dance company has adapted, or not, has been exposing and fascinating. Much of the art created by dance companies in 2020 had never been attempted before. Queensland Ballet’s *60 dances: 60 stories* is an apt example (as the Project Coordinator I admit bias but bear with me). A ballet company presenting a digital program involving all 60 dancers in a choreographic project, and then transposing it to a live performance, is a world first.

There were numerous other examples of likewise interesting online seasons being presented, such as Sydney Dance Company’s *Dance Locale* – an initiative with the NSW government’s “Love the place you live” promotion; and *Lazuli Sky*, Birmingham Royal Ballet’s digital broadcast, which was ground-breaking as a new program offered, literally to the world, for £10 (£15 or £20 for those feeling charitable). It has also been lovely connecting again (and at times

reminiscing) with various companies’ past repertoire and re-released digital content.

Another positive: chunks of the year were spent at home, another boon in small doses. Saving money, tick. Shaving less, certainly. Wearing fewer clothes (always a plus). Lessening my carbon footprint while increasing my outdoor exercise footprints. And, of course, additional time spent with my precious little snotty noses. All positives.

As Queensland Ballet’s Ballet Master, taking class to a room of 30-plus dancers is the norm, with future performances and rehearsal always pressing the attention forward. The homebound isolation period was a rare pause, and a chance for all to step back, reflect and work more intrinsically. Regular coaching sessions, with no more than four dancers, became the new weekly ritual. The result was intense focused attention on technical development, typically only reserved for rehabilitation of injured dancers.

Zoom dance classes, with all their connective possibilities, also burgeoned and boomed. Essentially, a new dance industry was founded during the pandemic. Students from remote regions, interstate, or even internationals, could now train online with a variety of teachers ... without even needing to book a studio! Of course, dancing in your lounge, from experience, can have some health and safety risks for those lacking good spatial awareness.

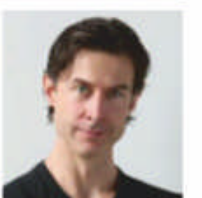
One of my favourite children’s story books – *A Squash and a Squeeze* by Julia Donaldson and Axel Scheffler – perhaps might explain the simple psychology behind my COVID positivity. The story starts with a little old lady who, being

unsatisfied with her tiny abode, asks a wise old man to help her. He suggests new tenants might fix the problem. In moves her clumsy egg-laying hen, followed by the table-nibbling goat, then the larder-raiding pig, and finally the jiggling cow. “Heavens alive!” she complains. The wise old man then says, “Take them all out” ... and now she’s “full of frolics and fiddle-de-dees”. Her previously tiny cottage now seems a mansion.

COVID-19 has taken its toll on the performing arts and dance in particular. A dancer’s life is short, and every year counts. It has certainly renewed appreciation for this and other comforts we become complacent about, such as good flooring, studio space, job security and performing. Queensland Ballet’s live performance of *60 dances*, to a half full theatre in Caloundra, seemed packed to the rafters and buzzing with excitement.

Worryingly, Dr Anthony Fauci, America’s leading infectious disease authority, at a recent University of Melbourne webinar, predicted theatres could be potentially the settings for “super infections” and would not fully re-open world-wide until the end of 2021 and perhaps not even until the year following. Even with a vaccine. Perhaps by the time you are reading this, I might not be so COVID positive. By the way, my test result came back: negative. ~

*Matthew Lawrence is a former principal artist with the Australian Ballet, Birmingham Royal Ballet and Queensland Ballet. He is currently Ballet Master at the Queensland Ballet.*



The Old Ballet's  
Yanela Pinera and  
Camilo Ramos.

PHOTO: STEPHANIE DO ROZARIO



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# Food and body – back on track

Nutritionist **Fiona Sutherland** advises on how to heal your relationship with food, eating and your body post-COVID.

**E**VERY time the year “2020” is uttered, it is met with a variety of responses, facial expressions and gestures. Our experiences will have varied widely depending on where we live and our degree of access to our “usual” life but it’s probably safe to say that for many dancers last year was one out of the box. It was a year which pushed us to the edge and one which – completely without our consent – asked us to test ourselves out in ways we’ve never experienced.

Emerging research is already letting us know that mental health issues, including food, eating and body image difficulties, sky-rocketed over the year and are expected to stay high long after the more acute phases of COVID restrictions have lifted. Uncertainty accelerates and amplifies our tendency to want to reclaim control in any way we can. For this reason, many people have experienced a change to their eating patterns and body image.

Although the way we experience our body – or body image – changes over time, this might be one of the first situations for many dancers where specific ways our body moves or feels is significantly different to usual. Interestingly, one’s body image is often independent of actual body shape; in other words, anyone of any shape or size can experience more positive or more negative body image. Additionally, one’s body image can change even if the body shape does not. Merely a significant change in routine and environment is enough to trigger a cascade of responses which leaves us feeling uncertain and lacking in stability and confidence.

From here, body uncertainty or body anxiety can in turn lead to a person making changes in their food choices, eating patterns and routines to help them feel comforted and in control. The trouble is, these changes can also lead to under-fuelling and perpetuating further anxiety about our bodies.

If you relate to this, please know you are not alone. Some people have experienced changes to their body shape which have led to negative feelings, others have experienced very little change, yet still feel more negative. If your body has changed, please also know that this would be common, and expected. You are not

doing anything wrong and embarking on a restrictive eating plan is likely to do the opposite to what you intend.

## Tip 1: Nutritional self care

Coming out of the pandemic, it is more important than ever to take good care of your body and yourself as you readjust to more regular routines and schedules. Experiment with planning some balanced meals ahead of time (with grains, meats/eggs/plant proteins and vegetables), and make sure to keep your pantry and fridge stocked. Home delivery services such as Hello Fresh can be useful for those extra-busy weeks.

## Tip 2: Don’t diet

Although it is really understandable and tempting to make dietary changes to change your body shape, remember that even the energy-restricted diets that are designed for “health” still come with risks. They will not meet your energy needs and they will put you at risk of fatigue, anxiety, depression, injury and hormone dysregulation (in the form of missed periods or low libido). Eating enough

food, a decent variety, at regular intervals needs to be a priority. Now more than ever.

## Tip 3: Be kind

Any adjustments back into life take time, and your relationship with food, eating and your body will be no exception. No doubt you will want to “get back to normal” ASAP, but that’s not usually how bodies – or lives – work. Gather your support crew around you and aim to be kind to yourself as you and your body adjust to a post-COVID 2020 life.

## Tip 4: See a sports dietitian

For individualised advice, see a sports dietitian. To find someone in your local area, or a good match for you, see [www.sportsdietitians.com.au](http://www.sportsdietitians.com.au).

**Find more great advice about nutrition from Fiona on our website.** ~

*Fiona Sutherland is an accredited practising dietitian and nutrition consultant and yoga teacher at Body Positive Australia and The Mindful Dietitian.*  
[www.themindfuldietitian.com.au](http://www.themindfuldietitian.com.au)





# Meet Libby-Rose Niederer

Company Artist at the Queensland Ballet.

W

## Where are you from?

Originally from Auckland, New Zealand.

## Where did you undertake your full-time training?

Queensland Ballet Academy.

## What level of education had you attained before beginning your full-time training?

In ballet I completed my RAD exams to Advanced level 2 and NZAMD jazz exams to advanced level. Academically I completed my NCEA level 1 (year 11) in New Zealand, before moving to Brisbane and the Queensland Ballet Academy where I continued my ballet training and academic studies (Year 12 QCE).

## Did you make any unexpected discoveries while undertaking your full-time studies?

I made so many discoveries about myself and my dancing. I feel that full-time is when you really discover who you are as an artist and dancer, and that you can grow on from there in a company. I also found that I really enjoy yoga -- which we did once a week as part of our training. In yoga I found that the mixture of strengthening and stretching, combined with coordinated breathing, related a lot to ballet and I found it very useful to transfer those same principles over to my training.

## Did you change your mind or have a change of attitude about your career goals in any way while you were studying?

From an early age I have always had the goal to be a professional dancer in a ballet company. I strive for a feeling of fulfilment from my dancing, and for me this comes from overcoming challenges, e.g. by conquering a hard solo. So I am now extending my goal further, so that in the future I progress from corps work to achieve a rank where I am able to dance some solo parts.

## What was one of the main life lessons you gained from full-time studies?

That it's really up to you! You make the choices to do the extra class or not, to take it easy if you're feeling a worrying niggle -- and then accept responsibility for those choices that you do or don't make. Your teachers will give you

every chance and tool they can to help you reach your goals, but ultimately it's up to you to decide what you do with those opportunities. And this carries over into normal life outside of ballet, too, you always ultimately have the power to make a choice, so take control and ownership for your actions and situation.

## What is your best memory of your studies?

The opportunities I received during my studies were extremely beneficial and I am so grateful to my teachers for the amazing memories I have. A highlight for me was the opportunity to perform the Nutcracker pas de deux with the Queensland Conservatorium Orchestra. The opportunity to dance a pas and solos that are usually roles for company principal dancers was an amazing challenge for me and I know this has helped me grow as a dancer. I also have such good memories of comradeship with the other dancers. We had some amazing times in the studio and I will always cherish the memories and friendships I made.

## How quickly did you gain a professional position after graduation?

The great benefit of Queensland Ballet Academy is that it's attached to Queensland Ballet. This gives opportunities even as a student to perform in some of the company productions. I received a contract after my first full-time year in the Pre-Professional Programme.

I am now in my third year as Company Artist and looking forward to performing in the exciting ballets which are on the calendar. At Queensland Ballet we perform classic ballets as well as brand new works and contemporary pieces, too. This has all been put on hold because of Covid-19, but I truly believe we will be stronger after this and have a new appreciation for the performances that lie ahead!

## What do you know now that you wish you'd known when you were a student?

I wish I knew that although you can be as prepared as possible technically and physically, it's not just about that! You have to be extremely confident and mentally prepared for company life, too, as once you are in a company it's as much about staying on top of your mental game as it is about staying on top of your physical game. ~





# Meet Jemima Scott

Guest dancer with Royal New Zealand Ballet.

W

here are you from?

I am from Wellington, New Zealand.

Where did you undertake your full-time studies?

National Theatre Ballet School, St Kilda.

What level of education had you attained before beginning your full-time dance training?

I have level 1 NCEA and have credits towards level 2.

Did you make any unexpected discoveries while undertaking your full-time studies?

I had to really work on adage in pointe shoes. I find adage the most hardest thing in ballet and adding a pointe shoe was very hard! I took a lot of time just standing on one leg balancing in a pointe shoe just to get a feel for it and then I eventually did more complicated things.

Did you change your mind or have a change of attitude about your career goals while you were studying?

I had a huge change towards healthy eating. I used to eat pretty unhealthy and not really take notice of health. While I was training I kept finding myself tired and lacking in energy and then I started focussing on fueling my body correctly and it made a huge impact on my strength-- which made me a much better and more intelligent dancer.

What was one of the main life lessons you gained from full-time studies?

That only you can do it for yourself -- no one else can. At the end of the day you can have amazing teachers but if you don't put in 100% you won't see any change.

What is your best memory of your studies?

Probably performing in our end-of-year concert of *Swan Lake*. I was lucky enough to dance Odette and it was an amazing experience I will never forget!



Jemima performing the lead role of Odette in the National Theatre Ballet School's production of 'Swan Lake'.

“It's not all about how high your legs are or how many pirouettes you can do, it's all about how you do it.”

How quickly did you gain a professional position after graduation?

After I graduated from NTBS I went to Munich to train for a few months but due to COVID I had to come home to NZ. While I was back I contacted the Royal New Zealand Ballet and was lucky enough to receive a position as a guest dancer there. I will start working on the upcoming season of *Venus Rising* on July 13 which will tour through New Zealand. It is great doing class with a company

as it is so different to a school and quick – meaning you need to be on your game 100% of the time and no slacking!

What do you know now that you wish you'd known when you were a student?

That it's not all about how high your legs are or how many pirouettes you can do, it's all about how you do it. Also focus on bettering yourself and not competing with other people. 🌸



# Meet Leilani Holmes-Skrill

Dancer in Young KC Dance Company at the Royal Conservatoire of The Hague, Netherlands.

# W

hat level of education had you attained before beginning your full-time dance training?

Before studying dance full-time, I finished my high school education at Mosman High School (Sydney). I graduated in 2018 after completing my HSC, with an ATAR above 97.

Regarding my dance background, I had trained since I was about eight years old in classical ballet and contemporary dance, and was completing my RAD Advanced 1. I had also completed HSC Dance at high school, undertaking the subject accelerated in Year 11, to allow more time for dance training while I was in Year 12. Most recently, I have just completed my Advanced Diploma of Dance from Sydney College of Dance.

Did you make any unexpected discoveries while undertaking your full-time studies?

I think the most important things you need to discover throughout full-time training are your strengths and weaknesses – both of which can be unexpected. It is important to know what movements and styles come to you naturally so that you can put these forward to directors and in audition settings. In my training at SCD, I ascertained that my strengths related to flexibility, extensions and styles that possessed a more sustained dynamic. I have also learnt how my love for theatre influences my creation of diverse roles; I love incorporating in-depth facial expressions and body language into movements to create a certain character or atmosphere.

However, equally important is to learn where your weak areas are so that you know how to conceal them in pressured environments, and you can invest more energy into improving these. My teachers and I quickly realised that I needed more strength in my larger muscle groups and core, to provide more power in my jumps and improve my stability. Therefore, I allocated more time and focus on strength training, and developed individualised exercises

to help me both gain more control of my body and start my day with activated muscles.

What was one of the main life lessons you gained from full-time studies?

Studying as a full-time dancer has expanded my perception of my physical and psychological capabilities. On top of my comprehensive and invaluable training at SCD, which helped refine my technique and artistic abilities, I have learnt discipline, time management, self-motivation and have developed a strong work ethic.

I think that just “doing full-time” isn’t enough – you need to be driven and determined every single day, aiming to be better than you were yesterday. That could just mean refining one specific element, such as holding a balance for a second longer, lifting your leg one millimetre higher, or simply tweaking the headline in a certain movement.

Therefore, this would be my biggest lesson from full-time studies; only you are responsible for your own progress. You cannot rely on external sources or allow yourself to get comfortable. Of course, we all need to take care

of ourselves too, but dance is about pushing boundaries, learning what you are capable of, and maintaining enthusiasm and curiosity for the endless possibilities within the international arts scene.

How quickly did you gain a professional position after graduation?

I am very excited that I have been offered a position before graduation at SCD, in the Young KC Dance Company at The Royal Conservatoire of The Hague, in The Netherlands, commencing in August 2020. I will have the opportunity to perform in joint productions with the Netherlands Dance Theatre and perform both romantic ballets and neoclassical repertoire, as well as new contemporary pieces. There will be opportunities to work with world famous choreographers such as Hans van Manen, Jiří Kylián, Nils Christie, Johan Inger and Crystal Pite. I am beyond excited to begin the next chapter of my dance career, and I am extremely grateful to my teachers at SCD for helping me obtain this opportunity. ~



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# Lewis Major

is an award-winning independent choreographer, producer and creative entrepreneur.

**D**escribe your childhood. I was born and raised on a farm about four hours south of Adelaide on the border of Victoria and South Australia. I went to what is colloquially called a “bush school” for the local district – a lot of lessons were still taught over the phone back then – with my younger sister until we shipped off to boarding school in Adelaide at the age of fifteen. That sense of place, of space and freedom that growing up in the vast expanse of the Australian bush instilled in me as a young person definitely helped shape the way that I think about the world and the work that I make today.

## What first drew you to dance?

I’d always been a very active kid (having 11,000 acres of scrub to run around in helped) and was on the state gymnastics and cross-country teams in early high school. By the time I moved to the city for boarding school I’d started getting involved in theatre and acting, though I never knew that working in the arts was something that could be, you know, an actual job. I saw Australian Dance Theatre performing Garry Stewart’s *Birdbrain* on a regional tour around the same time and my mind was simply blown. That work was such a perfect synthesis of virtuosic physicality and theatre – two great interests of mine at the time – and it really affected me. It was still two years until



Lewis Major (below) and (here) a scene from his Adelaide Festival double bill.

I would take my first ballet class but after that that I was hooked, and then obsessed.

## Who are your main mentors?

I have been incredibly fortunate throughout my career in that I’ve been supported by a network of mentors and I am immensely privileged to have learned and grown from their knowledge and support. I don’t have the space to list everyone here, but I really do stand on the shoulders of a group of incredibly generous artists and teachers. First and foremost, my first teacher, Susan Taylor, without whom I really would not be where I am today. Russell and Dana Maliphant, together with Michael Hulls. Akram Khan opened my eyes to what dance could be. Hofesh Shechter always seemed to give me a kick up my butt when I most needed it. Shaun Parker has been a friend and mentor for the better half of a decade now. He really took me under his wing.

## Describe an achievement you are especially proud of.

I broke my back in my second year at New Zealand School of Dance due to a congenital condition. My doctors said it was the end of my then nascent dance career and I’d be extremely lucky not to be in a wheelchair by twenty-five. Somehow, I managed to stave off that eventuality through careful physical management, hard work and a dogged, stubborn determination to prove people wrong and have had an amazing career – albeit, not so much as a performer. Opening a show at the Royal Opera House in London a few years back I did take time to reflect on this and acknowledge how hard I’d worked to get to that point. That was certainly a moment of pride.

## Do you think your background has influenced your artistic aims?

Absolutely. From growing up in shearing sheds and chasing kangaroos through the bush, to working with luminaries of the international arts scene while living and creating with people and cultures from all over the world, I like to think that I have a world view that is at least somewhat more informed by lived experience than the average. My work tries to be reflective of this: as undidactic and cognisant of contradiction as possible and, above all, respectful of my audiences.

## What music are you listening to at the moment?

The Italian Baroque-Renaissance “straddlers” right now – Monteverdi, Frescobaldi, Peri, Boccherini. I’m also making a drive-in dance performance with my cousin’s band Indiago at the moment.

## What word(s) would you use to describe your feet?

Tolkienish – a bit of hobbit, some orc and a lot of roads well-travelled. Ballet feet they are not.

*Lewis Major’s ‘Unfolding’ and ‘S/WORDS’ are opening in the Adelaide Festival in February. His ‘Satori’ premieres in April at Adelaide Festival Centre and he is “chipping away” at three other works, ‘Two’, with Chris Dyke, another solo ‘Ophelia’, and ‘Lien’, a rework of his Keir Choreographic Award commission. He is also planning for a recent Churchill Fellowship in Europe in the second half of next year.*  
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