

# Cities of Art

Early Culture Journalism, 2005-2017



M. Alexander H.  
trans. August French

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## Foreword

The following selection of writings explore the early culture journalism of M. Alexander H. as he began his career in a regional newsroom in the small, New England city of New Bedford on the Atlantic coast at the age of eighteen. And, after a time in and out of university studying in the Middle East and Europe, he returned to North America, to publish in public journals from a prairie town in Western Canada, primarily to write about its young music scene.

His interests in the performing arts blossomed in New York, where he saw numerous theatrical productions every week throughout the vertical metropolis. These exploits, from a traditional newspaper, to cooperative media, indie mags and digital reviews, trace a budding internationalist and multicultural journalist as he began hearing his own voice amid the crowds of other storytellers and their emergence onto the stages, records and canvases of contemporary life.

Along the way M. Alexander H. wrote in a number of borrowed tongues. He had a knack for their sound on the page as an autodidactic, teenage student of Latin, reviving its dead vocabulary into luminous prose. After attending universities in Latin America and the Eastern Mediterranean, he became adept in Spanish, French, Hebrew, Arabic and Greek, while exploring a number of dialects with a fascination for Jewish hybrids, such as Ladino and Yevanic.

Yet, as a native anglophone, M. Alexander H. seized the opportunity to divulge a relatively plain manner of written expression, i.e. cultural journalism, with the ear of an Old World philologist, accommodating his interests in prehistoric folklore as part of his practice as a flaneur-critic and observer-scribe with the key to the modern world, searching to convey the living essence of the *vox populi* with an appreciation of its timelessness, its literary and artistic merit before the artifices of reason; history, culture and language.

As editor, and translator, I've taken liberties to bend reality in retrospect, sharpening and polishing phrases, not so as to impose, but to flavor and clarify the grease that might keep this old machine of gut-born passages humming.

August French  
Jan. 1, 2023  
Istanbul

*The Standard Times*  
*New Bedford, 2005-2007*

## Dexter Gordon, "One Flight Up"

I can just see the smoke-filled lounges and bars of Europe illuminated with dim incandescence, the quick scent of alcohol, and, through the mist, an aura of Dex on that tenor. He wouldn't play fast and his style exacted the perfect notes in their slow, uninhibited succession. Gone from America and the detriment of racial criticism, he found a freedom in Copenhagen and Paris; a refuge to create his timeless rhythms. This four track album was recorded in 1964 in Paris. Rounding out Dexter Gordon's crew is Donald Byrd on trumpet, Kenny Drew on piano, the eighteen year old prodigy Niels-Henning Ørsted Pedersen on bass, and Art Taylor on drums. In this setting the quintet had found a religious freedom as they had never known as individuals.

"Tanya" written by Donald Byrd, exemplifies the soft eruptions of physical relaxation, developed musically. Each player exhibits a natural completion to their solos. Dex's playing is pure and full, relaying a quiet understanding. And while his path was not as well known as some of the others from his age, it is a style all its own. The first track feels like a progressive build up and its color is of an authentic mood, taking you into the bowels of an unknown universe. It is a meditation on nothingness, and slinks throughout your insides.

The next track discovers a more diverse sound as the instruments play alongside one another. "Coppin' the Haven" was written by pianist Kenny Drew to a more upbeat tempo, giving way to Byrd's quickened pace and a piano solo stealthily finding its way to the controls of this complex song. "Darn That Dream" slows the beat down even slower than the first track, letting Dex smooth his way across the open measures of improvisation with a grand, indescribable beauty. And the last piece, "Kong Neptune" is an eleven minute bonus track, the only tune on the album written by Dexter Gordon.

This was not part of the original album but, together with "Tanya," I can't decide which is my favorite track on the album. The melody is easily played off by some of Dex's tranquil progressions and on this track is an awe-inspiring solo by Kenny Drew followed by the magic of Pedersen who, at the time, was apparently not a speaker of English, yet could communicate powerfully and immediately with that stand up. One long and tireless evening, I was explaining to a friend the sound of Dexter Gordon and happened to parallel his music with the taste of green tea. As you may know, green tea is wholesome and round, it does not assault with a staggering array of pungencies, for it stays its course, filling you up damn good.

June, 2005

## Bill Frisell, Dave Holland and Elvin Jones

It seems odd, I suppose, to title an album merely with the names of its artists. But when one looks at the names all else is forgotten. What remains is a healthy desire to play the recordings as quickly as possible. This is one of those absolute gems. It may not become a classic. It seems more destined to become an archival record that will fall short of canonization. But it had to be done, and deserves all the respect and admiration as that which the most esteemed milestones in jazz maintain.

Recorded in 2001, it was one of Elvin Jones's last appearances. Jones, who died in 2004, was a bravura performer who swept the stage and lit up every recording on his long resume. He was part of John Coltrane's Quartet, his sound is the epitome of jazz drumming. In his off-beat, unconventional, yet always sleek and stylish way, he will never be lost in the world of the jazz musicians. Dave Holland is a tireless bassist, matching Frisell's guitar riffs with cool, refreshing rhythms.

I saw Bill Frisell play at the Regattabar. His fusion of country and jazz melodies peer into the mysteries of music, places yet forayed. Frisell is undeniably unique, and his sound can only be described as "Frisell." He rarely plays uptempo on this record, unless a nicely placed trill is called for, but his style does not call for quick licks. The words earthy, charismatic, reserved, old-fashioned, and utterly captivating come to mind. The music takes you to a different plane, and it is a wild trip. The style is so infectious that it trickles down into the voice of Holland, the beats of Elvin, all for a combined sound that defines the album in all of its life-embracing pursuits.

The record clocks in at about six minutes over an hour. Each of the songs mesh together and there is a feel of each being intended, in their place. But behind the dark feeling and subtle rising tones, there is a frivolity to the music. This session must have been one fun time. The artists never really purvey their full abilities, but such a sense gives way to a creativity that makes the album a true rarity.

My favorite song on the album is "Blues Dream," a slow, moody tune that sends one straight into the music. It is relaxing and calm, yet complex. There is a palpable vibe between the artists on this track, a slight rhythmic communication that I find reveals itself wonderfully. "Convict 13" is lively and full, and its style is a showcase for quick flits from Frisell mixed with Elvin's call-and-response. Then, the second to last track "Justice and Honor" is simply a great listen. It is beautiful and melodic, and transparent in its penultimate place on the record.

One of the more memorable remarks I made while showing this recording to a friend was that it sounded like music for three o'clock in the morning. I thought this was telling of the album, and listening to it a number of times as I had before the thought, until the last semblances of night, I felt the ambiance of that time, its singular feeling, after night, before morning, estranged from worldly being. This album is one of the best contemporary jazz sessions, but it won't be one to appeal to all, only those who listen to its time.

June, 2005



## John Coltrane, "Ascension"

It is an album that sears deep down into your pores and, at first listen burns and scorches your ears and senses. But when you allow it to hit you, it will stir, capture, incite, and root out all that you had thought about music. For John Coltrane, music was about more than creating stimulating sounds. Coltrane had always said, "I'll just keep searching."

Recorded in 1965, *Ascension* remains an astounding feat in human capability, reaching a paramount in the history of musicianship. Under the direction of Coltrane, the session was held with ten of the most avant-garde musicians of the time; Freddie Hubbard, Dewey Johnson (trumpet), Marion Brown, John Tchicai (alto saxophone), Pharaoh Sanders, Archie Shepp (tenor saxophone), McCoy Tyner (piano), Art Davis, Jimmy Garrison (bass), Elvin Jones (drums) and of course Coltrane on tenor saxophone.

The music is chaotic, profoundly complex, and to the narrow minded, wholly impenetrable. There is an opening where seemingly all instruments play with simultaneity. It is jarring and beautiful. Enter Coltrane's first solo, and the heights of the tenor saxophone extend to new lengths. Every proceeding solo blares with faultless scales, which Coltrane had specifically intended for his theme of "ascension". With each listen, the hearer becomes more in tune, the music becomes clearer, and there arises a wondrous simplicity amid its myriad emotions. At times there are places of soft, melodious humming and a slick beat is always present by none other than Mr. Elvin Jones.

The album, re-released by Impulse in 2000, includes Coltrane's first edition. There are two forty minute tracks, but one hadn't met his expectations and therefore Edition II became the first track. Only a man like Coltrane, one who had undergone a self-proclaimed spiritual revolution, could drastically change his lifestyle, and devote his life to a search for something he so did not understand. Yet he arguably became closer to that "thing" than anyone before or since him. Music does not get better.

June, 2005

## Tom Waits, "Nighthawks at the Diner"

It's a classic album, iconoclastic in its informality, yet an essential recording for any fan of the man known as Tom Waits. His melancholic material is poetic and humorous in the recording, "Nighthawks at the Diner". In his rugged style of comedy and abrasive lyrical recitations, Waits never ceases to affect the nightclub aura with his subtle sentimentality.

His third album, recorded in 1975 for Asylum Records with a live audience, rendering Waits's priceless atmosphere, it is a bravura performance of showmanship and charisma. Along for the ride, there is Jim Hughart (bass), Bill Goodwin (drums), Pete Christlieb (tenor saxophone), and Mike Melvoin switch off with Waits on some complementary piano riffs.

Influenced greatly by Bob Dylan (as a kid he obsessed over Dylan's lyrics, framing them on his wall), Waits's lyrical poetry is revealing and poignant; appropriate still for the times as in thirty years he has not lost a bit of his humor. Most of the lyrics are based on his late night travels as a bachelor in the city streets and bars (he does not hold back with dirty jokes).

Whether singing "Warm Beer and Cold Woman" or his most sincere, "Better Off Without a Wife," Waits shows his wit as a wordsmith with rhythmic phrases as innumerable as they are wonderful. Melodious jazz beats undertone his more up tempo stories like "Spare Parts I" and "Spare Parts II," but most of this recording are dedicated to the loneliness he had felt at the time with songs like "Nobody" and "Eggs and Sausage."

This seventy minute recording was performed only a year after touring with Frank Zappa, just as he was beginning to enjoy premium success as a musician. But with his trademark guttural voice he directly speaks to the audience as if he were one of them.

This is the essence of Tom Waits, so profoundly illustrated in his third album, as he reacts with the audience in improvised remarks as poetic as some of his lyrics. His style is easy and smooth as the background music, but his material is not as fleeting and insignificant as the jokes that surround them, and saturated by his own self-mockery there is a deep, affecting love, his romance with music.

September, 2007

*The Media Co-Op*  
*Calgary, 2012-2013*

Rob Stewart, "Revolution"

I arrived at the University of Calgary at noon to attend a recital of Baroque music by a friend studying violin. We soon found our way into the Native Center, which is the best kept secret on campus.

Above the hustle-and-bustle of the McEwan Student Center food court, the Native Center is so quiet and calm you can literally hear the sound of a pin drop most hours of the day. Idle No More news headlines were posted beside ancient symbols of unity-in-diversity under the contemplative wisdom of eldership. There is complementary tea, and to muse on an old Irish proverb, "Laughter is best where acceptance is broadest". As my two companions and I walked out, a pizza was being served to the delight of any and all.

Next, I attended the farewell party of a beloved peace worker, Saima Jamal, to offer her a sincere gift of thanks for inviting me to interview Emmanuel Jal. Peace-making colleagues and community members alike shared words of gratitude and appreciation for the many gifts bestowed by one of the most active employees of the Consortium for Peace Studies at the University of Calgary, a fully public-funded initiative based on the peace activism of professor, scholar and writer George Melnyk.

I had interviewed Professor Melnyk that afternoon for my independent work as a freelance journalist with the Media Co-Op on the topics of literature and self-determination, Iran and Afghanistan, foreign policy and resource economics. Outside professor Melnyk's office, my eye scanned a bulletin board, as I often did to become aware of new events and prospects.

"Revolution" hit me smack dab in the eye. The serendipity of the occasion fell on me like a ton of bricks. I do not often visit the University of Calgary, as I live and work in downtown Calgary, though I remain a 2010 alumni no less.

My article, "Bans Work", published in The Dominion in February, 2013 is mostly a result of an interview I conducted with Rob Stewart via phone, yet there was still one burning question I had yet to ask.

After listening to a classical guitar recital, I entered the theatre. Before the film began, presenters informed the audience that Rob Stewart was on his way over to do a post-screening Q&A with us. I was thrilled, and this only added an extra dimension of significance to my coincidental presence at the screening.

The film screened: "Revolution". Expertly photographed, with Rob Stewart himself at the helm of the cinematography. His is an important documentary that

demonstrates an unfiltered voice and expedient agency for the voice of youth all around the world. Felix Finkbeiner and a young Lebanese woman whose name I'm unable to recall were two among many subjects in the film who brought me to such wellsprings of emotion. The grandchildren of the world are fighting for the survival of their grandchildren.

As Rob Stewart told me in my February interview with him: In the past the people affected by a destructive culture were the ones who moved to resolve it, for slavery it was Black people, for women's suffrage it was women. Now, youth are facing the greatest social challenge. Youth have not drunk the Kool-Aid of adult conformity, so they don't rationalize they just do what needs to be done. We are eating their future.

The striking beauty of the cinematography featured in this film is a testament to the way in which Rob Stewart and many others he platformed view the ocean: with such vivid and lucid beauty. The ocean is the lifeblood of all life on Earth.

"Revolution" brings into very clear focus, as clear as possible, the incredible efficacy of the multi-tiered project of global awareness, whether from the leading environmental scientists, or public demonstrations, everyone has an integral role to play in the fight for human survival on this gorgeous planet.

We can change, because we are changing. The question is not whether or not we should change, the question is, what direction do we want to go in?

Canada, and more specifically Alberta, is home to the most destructive industrial resource project on Earth, the Tar Sands. It is no wonder Rob Stewart chose Alberta as a focus-group to pre-screen his film, as Alberta is exactly where the change of direction needs to occur.

As the "godfather" of coral and former chief scientist at the Australian Institute of Marine Science, Charlie Veron, said in the film: the only way to that we can avoid increased ocean acidification, which is the cause of most major extinctions in the history of life on planet Earth, is to stop burning fossil fuels.

Canada, home to Greenpeace and other environmentally-savvy networks, has been the recipient of the Fossil Award, given to the nation which has most hindered global efforts to reduce carbon emissions, 5 years in a row. As another subject remarked in the film, we feel that the atmosphere is a place where we can dump any waste or toxic by-product, without any repercussions.

Through insightful glimpses of friendly sharks, flamboyant cuttlefish, and the Canadian lynx, Rob Stewart takes us on a narrative journey into the depths and

heights of evolutionary progress, and how the will to live is our greatest asset as inheritors of the great and mysterious onus called life in this universe.

We must realize that our responsibility as living beings is to reciprocate the generosity of nature, or we will get exactly what is coming, without exception, regardless of our being a singular species of unrivaled capacity, we are not invincible to extinction. In fact, we are especially vulnerable to extinction as large mammals.

There are over 7 billion people on Earth, yet non-renewable resources are consumed exponentially. Canada has no energy policy. During a conversation before the screening with George Melnyk, professor of literature, film and Western Canadian identity at University of Calgary, he said:

I'm in my sixties, and I've spent most of my life in Canada under Liberal federal governments. Since 2006, under the minority Harper government and now the majority Harper government, so we're talking like seven years, we have moved much more clearly towards a partisan position, meaning that we support a group of nations, a group of people that want to act a certain way in the world, we don't want to stand away from that a little bit, right? So that balance being partisan and trying to be non-partisan, that has now disappeared. We're very military-oriented. The experience in Afghanistan has been completely wasted.

An increasing number of people bear the brunt of starvation, while trillions are spent to wage what is fast becoming the longest war in modern history [Afghanistan] and bail out indebted banks. We have continue to raise the bar of economic growth in the name of progress, development, modernity, etc., to the great disaffection of the global majority, who are increasingly marginalized by the few in positions of power, wealth and control.

"The scientists have done their job, now it's time for the politicians to do theirs," says an interviewee in Revolution.

Ultimately, this is a film that asks the question: can we shift our way of life towards sustainability or do we want to destroy all life on earth? We don't have to have a nuclear winter to devastate all life on earth. The explosion of the atom bomb was symbolic of our power, a power which unfortunately is not solely derived from the bomb itself. If nuclear energy provides only about 5% of the world's energy, and is simultaneously linked to the most destructive military

technology, how much more destructive is the energy that provides for the 95%?

At the end of the film, Rob Stewart told us about the many awards the film had already received, and he was glowing with optimism. "Revolution" is due to appear on more screens than any other documentary in Canadian history.

One hand raised came down to a more pessimistic tune. To that, Stewart simply responded that it is usually the people who are not doing anything who are pessimistic, the people who are actually involved in helping to make positive change are optimistic.

For the last question, my hand went up like lightning. He took my question; what I had been waiting to ask for months since our private phone conversation would see the light of day in front of a full crowd at the university theatre: "What is the biggest thing that makes you optimistic every day?" I asked.

I remembered the way I felt after I first spoke to Stewart; crushing powerlessness. He responded something to the tune of: What makes me optimistic everyday is observing life itself, and how life has survived. I think that especially now when we are bombarded by over-consumptive habits in the use of technology, finding meaning in helping to save ourselves and the Earth is the greatest source of fulfillment that we need right now.

To me, Rob Stewart is one of those urgent and immediate storytellers, who tells the story of us all from his own heart with a sharp tongue and visionary eye.

May we all listen, and carry the vision forth into a world where our grandchildren might live to remember that we took up the greatest responsibility, which was to change our own selves, for their right to enjoy life in a way so rich with living that we could never fathom.

March, 2013

## The Ostrowskis, "RecoSolutions"

Jorg Ostrowski and his wife Helen are two trained architects who have blazed trails toward sustainable housing in Canada and around the world. On April 20, 2013, Jorg opened his home on Scurfield Drive in northwest Calgary to the public in celebration of Earth Day, for RecoSolutions, offering free tours on architectural sustainability.

"All of my projects since 1972 have been sustainable," Jorg wrote in an email. "We have built with rammed earth, straw bale, stack wall, double log, EcoStuds, prefab, Blackie Block and stick built. I have given 'hands on' workshops on rammed earth and straw bale in various provinces, including a 6-day workshop for the David Suzuki Foundation, in BC."

Arriving at the doorstep beneath the iconic awning painted with sun ray motifs above the front door, Jorg announced, "Transportation is part of the equation," pointing to two automobiles in the driveway. Behind the Smart Car is a VW Golf with an engine converted to run on waste vegetable oil as part of a continuing R&D program.

Recent trips to Vancouver and back, and cross-country on other excursions have cost zero dollars. People often donate vegetable oil and Japanese restaurants are reputed for the highest-grade waste vegetable oil. "The goal is to download electric and thermal energy into batteries, grid and slab," Jorg wrote.

Along the outside porch, the most noted sustainability measures are various blue water bins collecting rainwater that goes into a cistern able to store enough water for many months, based on low consumption and average rainfall. An apparatus below the front porch is shaped like an oversized foghorn with a square container fitted inside with a cooking pot. The solar cooker concentrates enough sunlight that even in -25 Celsius on a clear day, the inside temperature rises to 100 degrees centigrade.

Inside the home, a large office space to the left leads down a short hallway to a cozy living room reception area. About ten people attended the ecoTour at three o'clock in the snowy afternoon under unlit LED lights, also fitted throughout the home. With over 140,000 guests so far in its 20-year history, the Alberta home and office is unique in Canada for not using city water, sewer, gas or a furnace. The ecoHouse is heated by passive-active solar, internal heat gain and left over waste as backup.

On any given month, schoolchildren will graduate from the ecoTour, given by Jorg Ostrowski himself, chock-full of architectural knowledge (the legacy of a



career spanning four decades beginning with an M.I.T. graduate education in architecture) and an astounding display of hands-on examples for small-scale, local sustainability.

Beginning in the living room, natural light pours in from all angles, especially south-facing, including an “experimental window” featuring unrivaled five-pane krypton-sealed glass. On the coffee table, a seemingly unimpressive array of likely architectural samples is strewn about.

As conversation ensues, each item reveals itself as highly innovative environmentally friendly material or technology, including organic wool carpet, flaxseed Marmoleum flooring, recycled newsprint insulation, and solvent-free adhesive, motorized airtight damper, and the latest LED lights, among others.

The moral of the story: making the home airtight is the key to conserving energy. Utilizing natural heat sources like the position of the sun, and even body temperature are integral and often underwritten in the dominant modes of contemporary architecture.

A centerpiece of the home is a traditional fireplace and oven common to many European and Asian traditions, known as a Russian Stove, Korean Ondol or Chinese Kang heating systems among many other names. The fireplace is used for central backup heating and cooking, including for heating water. After priming the central heating mechanism before a recent month-long trip during the winter month of March in southern Alberta, the empty house only lost about eight degrees centigrade without additional oversight.

From the living room through a concave hallway into the kitchen, numerous plants line windows and vegetation of all kinds hangs from the ceiling. A beautifully set deadfall tree acts as a post for second floor beams. Allowing live trees is important to continue to absorb CO<sub>2</sub>.

Especially abundant are aloe plants for their exceptional capacity to purify the air and provide a natural source for glyco-nutrients and medicine. The energy mainstay of the kitchen is the refrigerator. Used for only about six months in the year, an indubitably pragmatic cold closet replaces the need for a refrigerator in the cold climate, substantially reducing kilowatt-hours per year and extending the life cycle of the very energy efficient fridge-freezer right beside it.

Next, Jorg leads the ecoTour into a personal office space, where small portholes, reminiscent of a ship’s cabin, line the wall. Behind the glass at least six examples of alternative insulation are exhibited, including sheep’s wool, an

expensive though probable example. Around the house, vents are fitted to facilitate heat and air circulation. Air-to-air heat exchangers minimize heat loss.

The middle of the home features the dry compost toilets on both levels, with the upstairs fully functional for guests. The system is “not perfect” said Ostrowski, although an exemplary means to recycle human waste, and in addressing a crucial need for water management in mainstream housing infrastructure. All biological waste goes into an engineered multi-purpose year-round composting chamber, combining 3 critical household operations:

1. Major blue box recycling centre and deposit box of the house to receive all biodegradable waste, including all human and kitchen waste.
2. Major water conservation equipment to save 200,000 liters of drinking water per year (family of four)
3. Fertilizer plant to produce healthy earth, and compost tea, a great liquid fertilizer

"In summary, although not perfect, it is the stomach of the house, quite efficient and critical to the sustainable future of the planet," wrote Jorg.

Upstairs, bedrooms are designed for accessibility. Two smaller rooms on one side have a connecting doorway, to facilitate spatial linkages for small children and potential opportunities for “bed & breakfast” hospitality or simply an office-bedroom combination. The master bedroom is flooded with natural light from a panorama of south-facing windows tastefully mirrored, with ceiling windows, two hallways, and a catwalk built of metal grating above the living room, offering a distinctly interconnected ambiance between the master bedroom with the rest of the home. Ventilation above the center of the bed draws from the central, water-based heating system.

An antique tub is installed in the adjacent ensuite, with consideration for recycling the work and material required to reuse such conventionally obsolete fixtures. With adequate attention, there is natural light enough to grow tomatoes aplenty on the windowsills. A small addition alcove to the master bedroom, located above the greenhouse, provides much needed sanctuary.

Outdoors, solar panels are fitted on ground level around the ecoHouse with mind to wind, dust and snow that often collects on often poorly conceived roof-installations. Ground placement allows optimal accessibility in maintenance, and effectively the highest degree of energy output.

All in all, RecoSolutions is a lesson in successful, off-the-grid sustainable housing within the limits of a major city in North America. With a single prime

mover, such as the 70 HP power mechanism used in the VW Golf to provide heat and electricity for a long-distance car ride, over one hundred homes in the likelihood of Jorg Ostrowski's ecoHouse can be sustained. These homes not only sustain renewable energy sources, but also reduce the risks of outgassing from chemicals in standard building materials, contaminants in public water and damage from power outages. Furthermore, the ecoHouse can facilitate the production of energy, exporting power back into the grid.

The lack of sustainable housing development in Canada, especially when so willfully and ably illustrated as in the RecoSolutions ecoTour in Calgary, only adds to the shameful prerogatives of national priority. Helen Ostrowski, who co-organizes events and activities at the ecoHouse, also active with international development work in the Philippines, China and most recently Iran, among others, commented that when they were starting out in the 1970s, there was no opportunity for young people to be involved with sustainable housing in university programs, or to apply environmentally friendly architectural products as is available today. When they built their ecoHouse nearly twenty years ago, the city of Calgary was uniquely open to their alternative housing development with respect to their work as two highly trained graduate architects, active and recognized in the field.

At the end of the ecoTour, a very intelligent participant was flabbergasted that mainstream society continues to neglect the most important of these very simple and doable measures. Western lifestyle identifies human settlement first and foremost through consumer values. Modern human life is defined by consumerism, and is inextricably linked to the catastrophic waste-chains of urban and suburban housing. In the normative social and political agenda of North America, human existence depends on consumerism. True productivity and actual development does not merely contribute manufactured material to the growing waste stream but reciprocates human life by taking advantage of natural energy cycles.

In the growing petro-state policies of the federal government of Canada, energy consumption far outweighs energy production. Without public awareness campaigns such as the RecoSolutions ecoTour, ignorance perpetuates the consumer mode of being as the only way of being. Yet, in this the same world as that of increasing urban sprawl, one energy-grid independent, sustainable ecoHouse illustrates how human beings also produce energy and give back to what Jorg named as the three most important points of sustainable living; clean water, healthy earth, and reusable energy.

May, 2013

## The Great Canadian Scandal, “Tar Sands Healing Walk”

“It's a scandal,” environmental activist Tzeporah Berman shouted to an encamped crowd at Indian Beach, south of Fort McMurray, Alberta, the night before the Healing Walk.

Each and every CEO of all the employees of the oil and gas industry is flagrantly raping their mother and profiting obscenely in the act. The Tar Sands scandal has gone viral. “[The Enbridge Northern Gateway pipeline] is probably the most controversial project in the history of British Columbia other than perhaps Claquoyot Sound logging operations,” said Ben West, Forest Ethics Tar Sands Campaign Director, at a Project Ploughshares event in Calgary on April 27, 2013.

It had been the number one talked about news story in British Columbia for two years and running. A study showed if you combined all of the coverage for the five next most popular stories, they still did not get as much coverage as the Enbridge Northern Gateway pipeline from 2011 to 2012.

The entire world is a voyeur to the most heinous crime of physical abuse on Earth today. “All fights, all battles for the planet are important, but some are more important than others. And there is no battle on the face of the Earth more important than what’s going on here in Alberta,” Bill McKibben, climate change scientist and founder of 350.org, said for the outdoor press conference immediately prior to the beginning of the Healing Walk.

“There are three or four places on planet Earth where there is enough carbon below the soil, that if it gets dug up and burned, then there is no chance that we’ll ever stabilize this planet’s climate, and this is one of them.”

Yet, since 1967, when the first commercial project began to exploit the Athabasca Tar Sands, the crime intensifies to the benefit of a society corrupted by cheap oil across Canada, and around the world. “From the seven pipeline spills in the last five weeks, we know that oil corrodes, and what we’re just beginning to learn is that it’s not just corroding our pipelines,” Berman asserted. “Oil in Canada is corroding our democracy.”

The 4th Annual Healing Walk, attended by about five hundred demonstrators, sent a clear message: local people matter, have voice and are strongly represented across the country and the world. While international activism often necessitates globalization and fossil fuels to wage struggles for peace and life in the Tar Sands, the First Nations of Fort McMurray, the Athabasca Chipewyan and Dene peoples, are leading humankind by simply walking, in prayer to the Four Directions. Because of ancient wisdom and the spirit of traditional

ceremony and community, industrial traffic slowed to a near halt as far as the eye could see on July 6 around the 14km Syncrude Tailings Loop.

“When I went into that town of Fort McMurray, you know what it reminds me of, it reminds me of going into the town that’s the ecological equivalent of Auschwitz,” Anishinaabe author Winona LaDuke proclaimed during her keynote speech the night before the Healing Walk.

“The town that’s sitting right next to Auschwitz and saying, ‘Hey, we’re good here, you can get a \$35 steak, you can get an \$18 hamburger and it’s okay.’ There’s something just psychotically wrong with all that.”

LaDuke’s Auschwitz comparison, especially in the light of modern consumer culture, is significant. Another outspoken critic of power politics, Hannah Arendt, had once led a scandal, transforming international dialogue on the perpetrations of Auschwitz into a parable of modern life.

Arendt’s notion of the “banality of evil” speaks to the mass consumerism that fuels the current destruction of the planet. Status quo consumer society encourages technology and energy overconsumption. One tier of society justifies through intellectual analysis regarding energy, society and the environment, while most are overwhelmed by the unreasonable complicity of leadership.

Therefore, most people remain ignorant of the fact that their immediate, daily actions cause the very atrocities committed against marginalized people and the environment. Espoused in 1961 during the Eichmann Trial, the philosophy behind Arendt’s “banality of evil” teaches how everyday people perpetrate the greatest crimes of humanity, often more so than their leaders. The idea is slowly gaining acceptance among genocide scholars, such as in Daniel Jonah Goldhagen’s 2009 book, “Worse Than War: Genocide, Eliminationism, and the Ongoing Assault on Humanity”.

“If you breathe air and you drink water, this is about you,” Crystal Lameman, Treaty 6 activist of Beaver Lake Cree Nation, declared at the beginning of the Healing Walk at Crane Lake Park. If the great-grandchildren of Canada look back on the current generation, will they see the current society as people of today see Nazi Germany? As the Jews were liquidated for business purposes, so the Earth and its First Peoples are being bought and sold, and killed in the process, for the liquidation of bitumen tar into petroleum gasoline. Every day, Canadians are told that progress must continue and economic growth must never regress for any sake outside of myopic and anthropocentric politicization of human values.

“On the eve of the NEB hearings for the Enbridge pipeline, when our National Minister of Natural Resources put an open letter to Canadians [in the Globe and Mail], calling anyone who opposed these pipelines a terrorist,” Berman reminded demonstrators camped only fifteen minutes away from Fort McMurray.

“Essentially saying that if you express concerns then you are acting against Canada’s national interests, that you are an enemy.” When environmentalists and Aboriginal peoples who oppose pipeline development are deemed terrorists, political-economic rhetoric in Canada begins to look more like that of the Department of National Defence.

Dissuading public debate is typically fascist. The undemocratic nature of the petro-state further supports the colonial Eurocentric project of civilization, where marginalized minorities, such as Indigenous peoples, are meant to suffer the growing pains of modernization. Indeed, modern progress is often underhandedly defined by the achievements of warfare and genocide against marginal ways of life.

The Canadian infrastructure, as with much of the world, is dependent on the continued suffering, and the scandalous crimes, of the continued power imbalances from the colonial past. “We’ve got to feed these people that consume a third of the world’s resources. That requires pretty much constant intervention into other peoples’ territories, whether they’re Dene, Anishnaabe, Cree, or whether they’re in Venezuela,” LaDuke said with a voice of experience and reason at the Healing Walk. “Constant intervention into other peoples’ territories to keep up this level of entitlement.”

Today, there is global complicity in the status quo, in the consumers and beneficiaries of non-renewable energy resources, and its concomitant intergovernmental policies. If Canada survives into the future as a memorable entity, people may look back on the country as having committed yet a deeper atrocity, against Earth, and as with a genocidal inclination towards the entire human race.

Will others follow the example of the First Nations of the Athabasca river basin, whose warnings resound with deep socio-ecological truth? Will Healing Walks spring from the people across the Earth, so that in the name and significance of Mother, the destruction stops and healing starts? Are people around the world willing to stop the destruction and walk for the healing of the Earth, to find a path that slows the destructive course of industry (business) as usual and that offers not one direction alone but Four Directions, whole and undivided? When will people begin to pray through movement, action, and participation?

Around the same time that unparalleled innovations in alternative energy came to the fore, there was a great leap in Western consciousness of natural philosophy. Contemporary science is providing the world with unprecedented advances in material technology and innovation.

“The last two years, we have seen more advances in clean energy, in renewable energy and technology, than the last twenty years,” said Berman, at the close of her keynote speech at the Healing Walk conference at Indian Beach.

“The last two years were the first two years in human history where new investment in electricity generation for renewable energy, for wind, for solar exceeded new investment for electricity in oil, coal, and nuclear combined!”

Nonetheless, today there is a greater vacuum of innovation, and that is within the human mind. The current struggle for life on Earth is within each and every human being bridging the great rift between modern life and ancient wisdom.

“I think what has to happen is a change in understanding. It’s not a matter of power, or of muscle or of energy,” the late philosopher Alan Watts said in the 1998 documentary, *Zen*.

“It’s a matter of the way in which we understand and feel our own existence, not as strangers in a hostile universe, but as integral parts of that universe, as fruits of the universe, in the same way as an apple is a fruit of a tree we are a fruit of this galaxy, we belong to it, we are something it’s doing, but we don’t feel that.”

Similarly, in the name of modern physics, the same basic knowledge that allows for the expansion of physical technology offers renewed integrations between ancient wisdom and modern life. The same way of applied thinking that might destroy life on Earth when derived from philosophies of conquering nature and ethno-cultural assimilation also affirms interconnectedness with all forms of life.

Yet, petro-state fascism muzzles scientific inquiry that affirms rootedness, while ensnaring science with political ideology. “The internationally recognized journal of *Nature* this year, in an editorial, said ‘It’s time for Canada to set their scientists free,’” Berman, author of the 2011 book, “This Crazy Time: Living Our Environmental Challenge”, said at the Healing Walk. Science, as a truly inventive field of human inquiry, would logically presuppose the very undoing of its concurrent technological manifestations.

“The natural environment is treated as if it consisted of separate parts to be exploited by different interest groups. The fragmented view is further extended

to society which is split into different nations, races, religions and political groups,” physicist and international best-selling author Fritjof Capra wrote in *The Tao of Physics*.

The belief that all these fragments – in ourselves, in our environment, and in our society – are really separate can be seen as the essential reason for the present series of social, ecological, and cultural crises. It has alienated us from nature and our fellow human beings. It has brought a grossly unjust distribution of natural resources creating economic and political disorder, an ever-rising wave of violence, both spontaneous and institutionalized, and an ugly, polluted environment in which life has often become physically and mentally unhealthy.

Life is without meaning, not because it is despairing, but because it requires no other meaning than itself. Life itself is significant. Life is self-renewing. Modern human life is more and more devoid of a connection to the sources of life, and so, the mind, and its encouraged symbolic outputs, estranges daily existence from the nature of life. Proactive language (e.g. solutions-oriented media), as with the most advanced scientific thinking, gives voice and agency to ways of life that are self-sufficient, yet still recognize the interdependent nature of life.

The First and Original Peoples of Turtle Island, Aboriginal Peoples of Canada, continue to share the fundamental philosophical similarities with the ecological consciousness of wise, ancient cultures from bygone eras and faraway lands. Understandings that had once triggered a revival of interest in the practical philosophies of interdependence and rootedness are not only springing from Western science itself, but are being voiced by the First Peoples of the Land with greater potency.

“Science is important but only if it’s governed and held in check by wisdom, and that wisdom that people have been ignoring for hundreds of years on this continent is finally reasserting itself at exactly the moment when it is most needed,” Bill McKibben said, closing his speech only moments before the Healing Walk began.

Bad news is good news. Spotlight triggers response, and, at the end of the day, people think as they please, or, more accurately, as is pleasing. Regardless of what it is called, Oil Sands, or Tar Sands, industry gets the lip service. “I don’t want to squander my energy entirely on being reactive, on being reactive to their craziness. Be clear on where we are going,” LaDuke stressed with grounded intensity. “It’s our choice upon which path to embark. One *miikanan* [path] is well worn but it’s scorched. The other path, they say, is not well worn but it’s green, and it’s our choice. It’s our choice. That’s what our people said about 800-900 years ago.” The ancient wisdom of the Anishinaabe prophecy for the time of the



Seventh Fire shared by Winona LaDuke at the 4th Annual Tar Sands Healing Walk offers all a path, or *miikana*, to a future that is fresh and green, and very simply, to a future.

Beyond pro- and anti-, beyond reaction and action, there is a beginning; a place, from where all people would begin life renewed. That beginning is the elephant in the room; it is every last man, woman and child. In the name of Mother Earth, the Original Peoples along the Athabasca River, and every Healing Walker: All my relations.

September, 2013

Transformative Decolonization, “Gender, Immigration, Indigenous Perspectives”

*“How do you mobilize people who fear change, who fear shifting the status quo, and how do you suggest to them that as a minority they can win?”*

—Dr. Linda Tuhiwai Smith, “Decolonizing Methodologies” (1999)

Transformative art is rule-breaking art, all the more so when addressing the obsolete norms, values and laws hindering Indigenous rights and Decolonizing Gender. For the purposes of this essay, Decolonizing Gender is to be defined as the process of removing all stigmas placed on gender roles by society, religion, and popular culture.

Transforming the normative model of gender as a binary (i.e. male and female) is about transcending the concept that all gender identities that lie outside of mainstream identity are freakish. Despite history and society, gender is a life force, paired with the wildness of sexuality and subject to all of the natural transformations implied in simply being alive.

Decolonizing Gender is also a process that recognizes the ongoing history of colonization in relation to gender, whereby colonization is defined, foremost, as a process of assimilation. Thereby, Decolonizing Gender recognizes the traumas of assimilation and offers an opportunity to self-educate and overcome through active participation in social justice. Decolonizing Gender affirms human identity as fluid, with regard to individual self-expression.

Indigenous cultures have a legacy recognizing two-spirit, or multi-gendered and androgynous identities. Settler (un)civilization is marred by an implacable lack of capacity to harmonize socio-economics with ecological sustainability. Nowhere is this dysfunctional relationship more revealing than in inter-social conflicts between dominant hetero-normative and settler cultures with Androgynous, Gendered and Indigenous ways of knowing, being and relating.

Multimedia and performance artist Shigeyuki Kihara essentially decolonizes the image, decolonizes art and the body in the same breath, or the same pose, as she decolonizes gender. The first living artist from Samoa, New Zealand and the Pacific region to hold a solo exhibition at the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York City, Kihara’s work is now part of its permanent collection.

Kihara’s signature series, “Fa’a Fafine: In a Manner of a Woman” is on loan from the Met for the National Gallery of Canada’s Sakahan: International Indigenous

Art exhibit, which was held until September 2, 2013. Sakahan n means “to light a fire” in Algonquin languages.

Expressly stating her identity as an artist first and foremost, before *fa’afafine* gender and ancestral heritage, part of Kihara’s work in decolonizing art itself has brought her to what in Samoan is called *tanaloa*. As she translated for ABC Sydney speaking of her 2010 work for the Sydney Festival, *Tanaloa – Walk the Talk*, “*Tanaloa* in the Samoan philosophy translates as a process of discussion between two parties coming together in order to find mutual ground based on love, harmony and peace.” In *Tanaloa – Walk the Talk*, Kihara gathered different cultural, religious and ethnic communities through musical collaborations to exhibit social harmony.

Kihara’s work speaks to decolonization in the context of the LGBTQI+ liberation movement, where for example, Kihara is quoted in *Aesthetica Magazine* speaking to the independence of the Fa’a Fafine “because most of the time the Western queer movement is driven by, catered for, and to benefit gay white men.” As in the wider area of international indigenous art, “Fa’aFafine: In a Manner of a Woman” confronts normative misrepresentations of transgender persons, “particularly with those who are documentary filmmakers, journalists and anthropologists who continue to misrepresent Fa’a Fafine purely through their fascination with the ‘primitive and exotic’ cultural sexual practice,” Kihara said for *Aesthetica*.

Themes related to how exoticism and primitivism play into authenticity and representation are a focal point of reflection for the indigenous artists in the Sakahan exhibit. Kihara’s art stands among over 150 works of art by over 80 artists from 16 countries, including the work, “Blanket Stories” (2004-05) by Seneca artist Marie Watt from Seattle, USA, which invites public participation. Kihara’s work, exhibited at Sakahan, invites viewers to take a closer look at the human body as a medium in and of itself, in the creative project of modern history. Indigenous art, in the manner of Kihara, addresses colonial history through both austere criticisms as well as through satire, relating to Western history as a history of relation to the human body as subversive in its natural form. Historic representations of the gendered and feminine body are re-presented to the dominant psyche through transformative and self-expressed representations of the full spectrum and innate diversity of human identity.

With a background in fashion education, Kihara addresses not only the decolonization of the human body through multi-gendered perspectives, but also the decolonization of body coverings, such as clothing and consumer accessories that so often define modern identity. “To me the global fashion industry is one of many imperial forces that is driven by, catered for and to

benefit the First World through the exploitation of the Third World resources,” Kihara said in an interview with *Peril Magazine*.

Other indigenous artists express similar distaste for the representative values and norms of fashion consumerism, such as Canadian First Nations artist Kent Monkman’s satirical pieces, “East vs. West” (2011), “Sunday in the Park” (2010) or “Charged Particles in Motion” (2007), which displaces the Western imagination of the stoic Indian with the homoerotic fantasies of Louis Vuitton-toting Aboriginal men sexually dominating white settlers in the pristine landscapes of the pioneer days. Again, the artist challenges normative gender perspectives in light of a racially biased history, most illustratively emphasized by subverting culturally predominant re-presentations of the human body.

Literally, *Fa’a Fafine* translates from the Samoan, “like a woman”, the complex gender identity has been defined by Kihara as “Samoan of Third Experience” and also as the central and foundational human gender identity, from which male and female originally derives. To many, including those at the Asia Pacific Triennial, Kihara is simply “Diva”, where in 2002 she exhibited a dance performance celebrating the role of women and simultaneously recognizing the impacts of colonization and Christianity with a subversive and entertaining twist.

Kihara’s art conveys a universal depiction of how colonization seeks to deface indigenous cultures and eventually makes a big spectacle of it, packaging it and making a profit off of it. To survive is to see through the power of control. After privately engaged in active cultural preservation, survivors become highly educated and rise above the oppressors, while passing on vital knowledge to future generations.

In its more immediate and poignant forms, art is not merely show, or exhibition. Art is an emotional representation of life, and a most able facilitation of cultural knowledge, especially where it voices the internal psyche, or the spirituality of an individual or community. Everything else – worldly experience, common perception, media information, and modern consumerism – is more characteristic of a show, as nothing more than appearance, spectacle or display.

“Swamped by the knowledge of external objects, the subject of all knowledge has been temporarily eclipsed to the point of seeming nonexistence,” wrote Carl Jung in 1946. Throughout his life, Jung alluded to the notion that reality occurs first and foremost in the psyche, and that the objective world “out there” is merely a reflection of a more true, internal experience. Similarly, Jung’s notion applies to the meaning of stories shared from a multi-gendered or androgynous worldview in all of its diversity.

Contemporary Samoan novelist, painter and poet, Sia Figiel embraces her multifaceted intercultural spirituality, as she exemplifies Jungian existentialism, through creativity. “I definitely work towards a merging of the physical and the metaphysical to create a more spiritual space with my art,” said Figiel in an interview for Issue #3 (September 2001-June 2002) of *Frigatezine*.

“Beauty and peace and chaos. I am a painter of the twenty-first century — a walking contradiction. Art allows you to create spaces for yourself that otherwise do not exist. If that means a progression towards abstraction or toward or away from indigenous art, then perhaps it is both. But ultimately, people see my paintings, and their interpretation is really what it’s all about as well.”

The artist fulfills a narrative role in society that refocuses normative cultural attitudes toward a deeper reality of internalized identity, psychic belonging, and a sacred union between human life and the life of all creation.

Still, immigrant narratives revitalize the relational knowledge of ecological tradition. Where storytelling arts give voice and agency to a Gendered worldview and Indigenous voices, the holism of human individuality becomes central and necessary to the enduring harmony of collectives. The story of “Elephant Song”, a multimedia theatre work by Green Fools Theatre in Calgary, Alberta, speaks to the perennial themes of collective harmony, addressing gender, immigration and ecology along the way.

Honoring ancestral and ecological heritage is integral to Elephant Song, as heard through its music, composed and performed by a daughter of Southeast Asia who immigrated to Canada in 1982. Through dan tranh and electronica, experiential individuality is the common denominator for both the content of immigration and the style of intuitive composition featured in the play. Semi-autobiographical, Elephant Song, as with Indigenous art, is both a representation, as well as example, of retaining one’s honor for ancestral and ecological heritage, and the journey of finding holism in the ambiguities and spectrums of contemporary human identity.

Elephant Song depicts the hardships and displacements of wild Thai elephants, as well as the displacement of a Vietnamese family. To begin the story, a mother flees from the fall of Ho Chi Minh City with two infant girls. A wild Thai elephant later discovers the feral infant protagonist, displaced from her mother and sister. The depiction of a feral child raised through interspecies compassion is a metaphor to represent every child as born of nature, without a predetermined gender identity.

The elephants leave the infant to be raised by a shaman, who soon after has a vision of the girl walking with elephants. The vision is fulfilled when the girl grows to become an independent elephant conservationist, rescuing elephants for the rest of her life. As the girl grows into her role in the environment, so she grows into herself, in comparison with the cultivation of gender identity as a spiritual maturation.

Along the way, other human characters influence the nameless protagonist of *Elephant Song* in her journey to self-identify as a woman, conservationist and member of a displaced immigrant family. Most of the male characters are quite absent and violent, such as poachers and farmers with guns, exhibiting widespread physical abuse toward elephants, currently pressing many species to the brink of extinction. Male characters are sundered from ecological harmony through preoccupations with demolition and construction over the once lush, fertile forested land.

*Elephant Song* calls forth the complex interrelationships of gender identity within one's being, as with the environment. Female characters are mostly facilitators, who exhibit the maternal nature, yet more, are facilitators of proactive solutions to sustainable living. Despite the pure negativity of a few male characters, others exhibit a relational complexity with the environment and their fellow human beings, to mirror the sophistications of modern gender identity.

For example, the pirate murders the mother with two infants during their emigration by sea. Similarly, the poacher and tourists disrespect and disregard elephant life. The passport hawker, however, gifts a passport, and therefore freedom, to a mother after hearing her traditional music. Likewise, the farmer releases an elephant from harm after taking advice from the child protagonist.

Uniquely, the shaman signifies the holism of the human being, in mind and spirit. The shaman is a male, yet exhibits the feminine traits of hurting, compassion and understanding, effectively transcending the mutual separatism inherent in the dominant gender binary. Similarly, the shaman envisions the harmony of interspecies relationship, crystallizing a vision of holism among all creation, as within one's self. Exemplified in the feminine, the mother sacrifices herself so that her two babies can carry on in life.

The protagonist finds solitude and contentment in her inner strengths, building effective communion with wild elephants. Bringing them to safety at an elephant sanctuary instated by a compassionate Thai lady, *Elephant Song* disseminates conservationist sympathies. Convinced and moved by the protagonist's persistent rescue efforts, the Thai lady is also based on a true story of biological conservation in Thailand. The Thai woman offers sanctuary for elephants, and

also temporarily nurses the heroine back to life. In keeping with respect for the self-expression of gender identity, and the non-predetermined gender of the feral child, at no time does the Thai woman say, “be my daughter.” She only facilitates the protagonist in being proactive in her quest for life.

The protagonist of *Elephant Song*, raised by elephants and a shaman, was led by her deep cultural roots, symbolized in the shaman, and her ecological heritage, symbolized in the elephants, to tread a journey of self-identity. Balancing holism and independence cultivates harmonious relationships between self and nature. Out of the touch of his loving heart, the shaman provides the protagonist personally, as his cultural legacy would provide to all collectively, an opportunity to fulfill a unique role in life: to share responsibility and empathy for all creation through human-ecological awareness.

*Elephant Song* explores Shamanic Taoism as a spiritual tradition of Vietnam, and Southeast Asia, among other regions on the planet. Shamanic Taoism reveals the duality, and the thin veil of the masculine-feminine binary. Here, light meets dark, destruction meets rebirth. The Buddhist teachings of Southeast Asia, exhibited in the way of an immigrant’s reconciling her traditional worldview, sees unconditional compassion and the Bodhi nature in all as the facilitation of kindness. Likewise, dualities inherent in gender identity cultivate internal interrelationships with respect to the immigrant’s navigation of family behaviors, out of a marginalized cultural upbringing with the learned behaviors of the normative social model. Such dualities arise from the immigrant experience in the examples of reusing things, purchasing power, work ethics, relationships and friendships.

Like the assimilation of Indigenous and Gendered identities, immigrants are also compartmentalized into acceptable and protocol-based cultural assimilations where their originating cultures are recognized as token and superfluous. The cultures from which the immigrants originate are seen as entertaining tidbits to add to the receiving country’s so-called multicultural tapestry. In reality, most immigrants face culture shock and are persuaded to enter a Western culture of overconsumption and overstimulation by consumer entertainment. In Canada, immigrants are encouraged to exhibit their original cultures merely in a show-and-tell, talent-show style.

Like gender identity, an immigrant’s cultural identity is abandoned, often due to feelings of shame while submitting to the dominant culture. Immigrants accept colonization. As Healing and Reconciliation Program Animator and member of the Algonquins of Pikwakanagan First Nation, Lori Ransom said at the ‘Wisdom on the Journey’ Truth and Reconciliation Conference in Indus, Alberta, “When you took your citizenship, you essentially signed Treaty with me.”

The Western culture has provided education, so that the immigrant can see to decolonize oneself by actively preserving one's own self identity, cultural identity, gender identity, and rise above to lead a life with honor for one's self and heritage. Still, Aboriginal leadership from global Indigenous eldership warns of the dependence of First Peoples' on Western institutions, whether spiritual as in Elder Dave Courchene or artistic as in Samoan poet Sapa'u Ruperake Petaia.

"That was one of the most successful things that the colonizer did, was to remove that special significant role that the Grandmothers had in our society," Leading Earth Man of the Anishnabe Nation, Eagle Clan and former member of the Wisdom Keepers of the United Nations since 1992 Elder Dave Courchene Nii Gaani Aki Innini said in Calgary, Alberta during Aboriginal Awareness Week. "Once they were put into institutions, our people suffered great loneliness from the Grandmother and from the Mothers."

Transformative Decolonization honors and instills a worldview of unceasing revolutionary freedom through creative acts in continuity with the nature of life as diverse and self-expressed.

"Literature is, in essence, the subjectivity of a society in permanent revolution," stated the French philosopher and anti-institutional writer Jean Paul-Sartre in his 1948 essay, "What is Literature?" So, in keeping with revolutionary existentialism, art, and more specifically transformative Indigenous art, evokes the subjectivity of an individual in permanent revolution.

With diligent grace, Kihara often repeats and affirms the role of the artists in keeping with a society in permanent revolution in various manners throughout her voluminous interviews.

"As an artist, a Samoan and a Fa'afafine my daily existence questions a wide range of Western classifications that people base a major part of their lives on, that shape their cognitive systems and worldview," said Kihara for *Peril Magazine* in 2009. "People like me can cause havoc to the point of getting physically attacked, especially by those who feel their whole existence and worldview has been undermined and threatened."

July, 2013



The DI, “Theater of the Unhoused”

*“Theatre is a language and so it can be used to speak about all human concerns, not to be limited to theatre itself.”*

— Augusto Boal, Rio de Janeiro 2004, founder of “Theatre of the Oppressed”

This season at the theatre, the unhoused are giving to one professional artist more than any had dreamed. “Requiem for a Lost Girl” is a theatre project not merely inspired by, but created out of Calgary’s largest shelter for the unhoused. The play confronts the living reality of being unhoused.

Unhoused writers, actors and composers, from both New York City and Calgary’s shelters for the unhoused will perform this musical alongside internationally renowned theatre artists in the New York Musical Theatre Festival this July.

With a 650% increase in unhoused people in the past decade, Calgary is experiencing an epidemic, regardless of employment. “Half of the clients living at the DI have jobs,” writes Onalea Gilbertson, in her author’s notes for her upcoming project, “Requiem for a Lost Girl.”

Her new project brings her activism at The DI (Calgary Drop-In Centre) to New York City, to perform her second all-original theatre work, commissioned by Land’s End Ensemble. Although never unhoused herself Gilbertson shares, “Homelessness is close to my heart. I grew up in Calgary. When I was a kid, homelessness wasn’t visible. I knew a girl who became homeless. Her story provides the basis for my piece, “Requiem for a Lost Girl” (formally titled Two Bit Oper Eh? Shun) which premiered at the High Performance Rodeo in January of 2012 with the Land’s End Chamber Ensemble, Soloists, Revv52 Community Choir and the Drop-In Centre Singers.

David Rhoads, a member of the Drop-In Centre Singers group, turned his life around after his involvement. David’s first show was at the Drop-In Centre for a play entitled, “DI Wedding”. Prior to this show, he had been unhoused for two years, from age eighteen to twenty.

“On my first day homeless I was sprayed by a skunk, bitten by bugs, weak with hunger, it was terrible.” Eventually, while hitchhiking, a kind stranger led him to the DI Centre. Now, Rhoads continues to be active in the greater arts scene in Calgary as a spoken word artist, poet, actor and playwright. He is also at the top of his class at SAIT (and the only person from his class from the DI).

In January 2011, when DI Wedding was performed at the Drop-In Centre, two professional artist peers of Onalea were in attendance, including David Rhymer and Vi An Diep.

Diep reminisces, “it was a superb and heartfelt collaboration...they [the unhoused] exemplify great human potential when given the opportunity to be creative and constructive, while under the leadership of a very well-established artist as Onalea.”

What’s in it for the artists? For Michael Frisby, a volunteer manager and arts programming coordinator at The Drop-In Centre in Calgary, the largest shelter for the unhoused in Canada, it’s not about what the artist’s get.

As he strongly states, “...all I know is that the musicians who come and play for my program [ArtBeat]...that is artists just coming to give. They’re not trying to be entrepreneurial. I don’t get involved with artists that are trying to further themselves with that. It’s good for them in a different way.”

Does charitable art engender sustainable growth in our disadvantaged communities? Frisby continues, “...artists get the same type of nourishment from coming down and giving as the clients there get from receiving.”

In Onalea Gilbertson’s words, “The experience there changed my life. Going there to the DI and seeing people experiencing homelessness, sharing my story, hearing their stories – we were all there in the group because we love music.” For Vi An Diep, “When I give myself to not-for-profits it’s more about giving myself completely because there’s an initiative, continuing the vitality of an arts community and a real essential human need for culture as opposed to being a commodity. I can earn money anywhere but I know my role when approached by a not-for-profit arts company.”

The down-and-out have always been a major theme in the arts. This year, many of the artist’s traditional human subjects reclaim their voice. Michael Frisby, recently began a new weekly arts program at The DI.

“We provide it [community] through art forms that provided it thousands of years ago to the origins of every human community on planet Earth,” Frisby said.

May, 2012

## Cooperative Media, “Community, Not Commercial, Journalism”

*“What I began by reading, I must finish by acting.”*

Henry David Thoreau

Where is our all-inclusive local media source, one that is not generic, yet doesn't cater to only one group, one that embraces local lore, custom and myth, one that encourages people who live in the story, who are located downtown or in the community, whose lives are on the pulse of the daily, local narrative?

The voices of journalism are there to tell their story, to emphasize select statements made by people on the ground, in their own voices, who speak from experience. Good media should begin with experience and end with experience. Local media should reunite with social cause, and ultimately, incite action.

In the context of modern literary history, Hungarian-American Jewish newspaperman Joseph Pulitzer set the quality standard for publishing at the turn of the century. Pulitzer, best known for the eponymous award for not only journalism, but also photography, literature, history, poetry, music and drama is attributed with the quote:

“The newspaper that is true to its highest mission will concern itself with the things that ought to happen tomorrow, or next month, or next year, and will seek to make what ought to be come to pass.”

Good media begins with the very real ground-level experience of people who are the subject of good stories. The middle ground is where people read and learn. Finally, good media ends when the lives of the people voicing their story are changed as often as the people who learn that story. Good media compels and instills action.

Mediocre or awful media begins with inexperience, namely the daily political rhetoric, hearsay, or at best a secondary source. Next, its core value is the repetitive sound of a cash register receiving a dollar and some change for the cost of paper. For the tremendous act of reading is enough for some literati, however news media should be a call to extroversion and community.

Oftentimes, media consumerism ends with apathy, inaction and at best a satiated boredom, and at worst, accepting that life merely boils down to hearsay. More subtly, office-enclosed research on secondary sources so conveniently bolsters today's social (and unsocial) media frenzy; a frenzy that can overwhelm experience into the dull silence of an unprovoked voice in an abyss of unquestioned answers, facts, statistics, records.

In his 1998 book, "Yesterday's News: Why Canada's Daily Newspapers are Failing Us", John Miller wrote: "It's as if newspapers have broken their bargain with democracy in turning away from editorial excellence and towards profit, marketing and cost-cutting...fewer of us can turn to our papers and see what we all have in common, or what our common stake might be if we participate in our democracy."

The glossy overdub display of empty space is often filled with meaningless advertisements, meant to convince people that their lives are as empty as an unfulfilled consumer niche, such as the newspaper; slowly becoming a dying, trivialized miscellany for the intellectual exploits of the few.

If only media behaved as it once did before politicized buyouts and delegitimizing advertisements, when a paper was a conduit of experience through which new learning passed to connect, share and welcome all voices to truly and transparently voice an urgent cause to act.

Dominant news sources less and less provoke action, and more and more reveal mere dangers. Is our fear-based culture a result of the classist leadership in dominant sources of media and information in the public sphere, where stories are always politicized according to the dominant agenda?

As a result the rhetoric dissuades change, i.e. delegitimizes alternative perspectives. The narrowing national and public debates are also a result of the unremitting and domestic war on terror and its repercussions within the consumer identity crisis of the West.

Local media often promotes reliable, ongoing coverage, because people are interested in the longstanding nature of their community. Merely because a story is told does not mean the story itself is over. Ongoing coverage on a topic that immediately concerns people, on which they have daily experience as a default to their local lives, provides opportunities for readers to learn more, gain news perspectives, contact key leaders on the issue, and most importantly, become involved in currents of change.

Dominant papers don't often voice underprivileged perspectives because they are the least marketable consumers. Instinctually, good journalism bolsters weak areas of coverage, not simply profit margins.

As Pete Hamill wrote in his 1998 book "News Is A Verb: Journalism at the End of the Twentieth Century":

“True accomplishment is marginal to the recognition factor. There is seldom any attention paid to scientists, poets, educators, or archaeologists.”

Traditionally, papers would lead communities toward mutual solutions and shared values. Consumer marketing instills myopia and is, finally, beside the point and decidedly antithetical to providing useful information.

The advent of community, as opposed to commercial, journalism can teach citizens of a democracy (and more, a democratically inclined world) how challenging it is to create a consensus. Journalists are practitioners of democracy. Their work necessitates service and humility.

Community journalism cultivates voluntarism, and promotes education, vision and friendship. An unknowing public spawns a culture of denial, impotence and misinformation. The more a society realizes its source of community, the more its people are independent, thoughtful and generous.

September, 2013

## The Music of Greek Storytelling, “The Rembetika Hipsters”

Sunday April 21, 2013 began like any afternoon on a late winter day in Calgary, where sporadic snowfall lights on the sprawling residential landscape. A few blocks from the university in the northwest quarter of the city, one home opens its doors to lovers of Greek culture, ancient and contemporary.

A neighbor walks down the road, on her way to the event, to show a bewildered downtown urbanite the way in a dizzying maze of suburbia. Host Karen Gummo greets at the door, a member-at-large of TALES, The Alberta League for the Encouragement of Storytelling.

The house concert event features Jennie Frost, selected in August 2012 by Storytellers of Canada / Conteurs du Canada as an Elder in Canadian storytelling, a prestigious recognition awarded only once a year. She will be recording for the StorySave Project, which honors and preserves the oral storytelling traditions of Canada.

Aboriginal, Irish and Canadian heritages are among the many recognized by Story Save storytellers. Frost, a classics scholar, published her first book, “The Courtship of Hippodameia” in 2005. Frost has performed stories for festivals, concerts, conferences, libraries and over one hundred schools in eight provinces and one territory since 1996. A 2-CD set of her work Pygmalion and Other Greek Myths was for sale at the event, along with her book.

The event did not begin with storytelling, however, but a *taksim*, a term and practice borrowed from other Middle-Eastern cultures meaning the improvisatory opening to a song in Greek music. Calgary's Greek music band, Rembetika Hipsters, were present to provide dynamic energy to the overall muse and meaning of story in the Greek tradition.

Having toured much of Canada and Greece, the Rembetika Hipsters have released three successful CDs. The band continues to receive praiseful recognition in Greece, especially for a video recording of their tenth anniversary concert in Calgary, where they played with a nine-piece ensemble. After performing the first song, bouzouki player and vocalist Nick Diochnos told one of his own personal stories, set during his Greek wedding in Athens, where he bought his first bouzouki with extra wedding money.

Rhythm guitarist and singer Allen Baekeland of the Rembetika Hipsters gave historical background and taught the meaning of the Greek band name. In the wake of the most significant and traumatic period in Modern Greek history, the Greco-Turkish War (1919-1922), the Rembetika culture formed. The war, known

as the Catastrophe by Greeks, led to the forced expulsion, or “population exchange treaty” of all Greek communities in Turkey, including the notable city of Smyrna. Over one million Greeks in Turkey were forced into exile. As a result, one in five people in Greece were refugees.

With their Turkish-influenced culture, vagrant impoverishment, drug use and outlaw mentality, refugee youth became what in Greek is known as “manges”, loosely translated as hipsters. While very popular in the 1920s and 30s, the Rembetika music, likened to American blues, was banned by government authorities. Nick explained that there are two connotations to the word, either it is used between buddies to denote camaraderie, or between parent and child as a means of castigation. Throughout many songs played during the course of the event, Nick would exclaim, “Hey Mange...Opa!”

With a repertoire of over a hundred songs, the Rembetika Hipsters played a diverse selection, not only of Rembetika songs, but also of Greek folk and popular songs. Two songs were especially poignant for their performance, as well as the stories that accompany.

Firstly, they sang *Sto Perigiali To Krifo*, with music by legendary Greek composer Mikis Theodorakis in collaboration with Greek poet, and Nobel laureate, Giorgos Seferis. The work of Theodorakis, spanning from orchestral suites to popular tunes, has also been integral to the revitalization of Rembetika music into post-WWII popularity.

Secondly, *Ta Pedia Tou Pirea* was sung in memory of Melina Mercouri, a Greek actress, singer and political activist, who sang the ode to the beauty of the Greek port town of Pireus in the 1960 film, “Never on Sunday”. The Rembetika Hipsters commented that the port town’s charm is actually a bit more of the rough than the diamond.

Jennie Frost captivated a silent crowd of about twenty keen listeners with stories from the ancient sagas of the Greek pantheon. Storytelling alternated with the music throughout the afternoon. Frost introduced her storytelling modus operandi with a short prefatory anecdote regarding her break from conventional academic interpretations.

She gives ancient stories a refreshing new life. During her lively orations, she holds an elegantly crafted wooden cane, in homage to Indigenous traditions of the talking-stick. An elephant sculpture melts into an Ankh-shaped handle, in which are tied innumerable paper-crafted memorabilia from all of the communities she has visited to enlighten through the living tradition of oral storytelling.

With detail enough to craft the most intricate narrative, Frost weaves in and out of character dialogue and illustrates setting with the lithe energy of the overseeing deities she so magically conveys.

One of her most memorably enchanting stories drew from Zeus, in relationship with his children, Hermes and Apollo. The visceral imagination of ancient Greek life, as in the story of Apollo's maturation into his role as the god of music, knowledge and poetry evokes the divine majesty of creative human faculties. Hermes, who ultimately gifts Apollo his lyre in the story, becomes messenger of the gods, evincing respect for the underlying interconnectedness of all great worldly and divine phenomena into a harmonious narrative of familial interrelationships.

Frost told many stories, drawing not only from classical Greece. Her final story revealed a welcome gift for diverse cultural expression. Before reciting a quaint Chinese tale about a half-wit boy named Noodle, who eventually outsmarted the gentry of an ancient city through a spirited affinity to poetic meter, Frost proclaimed to all her enthusiasm for epic storytelling sessions. For Frost, a five-hour long telling passes with sparkling enthusiasm. Nonetheless, Frost finished telling her last line on time to close the three-hour event, leaving all with a smile.

The Calgary cityscape glowed from the picture window behind the musicians and storyteller. The love of storytelling is a common root of social cohesion, yet the traditional arts of oral storytelling are too often ignored with similar cultural dissolution as seen in the disappearance of global language diversity.

Storytelling, in the traditional and artistic forms of oration, is not simply a nostalgic reversion to childhood.

The lyrics of Giorgos Seferis speak with god-like insight and metaphoric clarity. Impermanent love, the hasty fool's rush to consummate young lust, is the subject of his poem "Denial", published in 1931 and better known by its song title, "Sto Perigiali To Krifo", sung by the Rembetika Hipsters.

In a society dependent on non-renewable life sources, is the consumer resource paradigm of a young nation as Canada not also likened to a parable of the impermanent lust of young love? As Seferis writes in "Denial":

On the secret seashore  
white like a pigeon  
we thirsted at noon;  
but the water was brackish.



On the golden sand  
we wrote her name;  
but the sea-breeze blew  
and the writing vanished.

With what spirit, what heart,  
what desire and passion  
we lived our life: a mistake!  
So we changed our life...

[English translation by Edmund Keeley and Phillip Sherrard]

Oral storytelling roots people to an inner renewal of life, as innately creative, and in continuity with the most fundamental and longest standing traditions of humanity.

April, 2013

Calgary WordFest, “The Devil’s Curve”

Arno Kopecky, writer of *The Devil's Curve*, arrived in Calgary earlier in the month of October, to speak on behalf of the subject matter in his new book: the impact of Canadian oil business in the Amazon.

The meat of the book lies in the 2009 crisis in Bagua, where Peruvian police officers opened live ammunition on a peaceful protest by Awajun Indigenous people demonstrating against extractive resource industry on their land.

The week of the crisis, I was in Peru, only a few miles away, living in the city of Cajamarca. As I watched on television, preparing for my flight back to Canada, my personal friend, Arno Kopecky was on his way to Peru to take a closer look.

I began following Arno's coverage while I was engaged in an extensive research trip in Cairo, Egypt, where I would often comment on his articles in *The Walrus*.

Later, I became further involved when an Achuar delegation arrived from Peru to protest the proposed extractive business operations of Talisman Energy, a Calgary-based oil corporation, on Achuar land.

Weeks before Arno arrived in Calgary to read from his book, *The Devil's Curve*, the Achuar had won their fight in successfully convincing Talisman that they should not conduct an extractive industry on Achuar land.

Arno's first presentation at Mount Royal University, was paired off with Waubgeshig Rice, who I had learned of prior on Black Coffee Poet. His second presentation was at Auburn Saloon, with Andrew Nikiforuk, a colleague at the *Tyee*, and probably the most well-known Tar Sands whistleblower journalist.

In both presentations, he was especially emphatic in his regard for the complete lack of empathy for the Amazon's Indigenous peoples.

During the Achuar Campaign to protest against oil extraction on their territory, they had officially charged invading oil companies with attempted genocide. I have great respect for Arno's work and look forward to his next book, which to paraphrase his personal communication, condenses the beautiful majesty of northern B.C.'s wilderness, including one of the largest unlogged forest watersheds in the world, into words.

September, 2012

*BeatRoute*  
*Calgary, Brooklyn*  
*2013-2014*

Ketamines, "So Hot!"

Do I hear a tinge of surf rock here and a splash of psychedelic vocals there? And all wrapped up in a split beat!

The new Ketamines 7" "So Hot!" opens with its killer two-and-a-half minute title track. Resistance vibes ebb and flow as they bray and stomp through lyrics held down by the kind of upbeat clutch that makes this Toronto group well worth a listen, if not a full-fledged tracking down.

Released in October, the band's three-track album buzzes under the genres of punk, garage and power-pop. Spacey breakdowns mood out these catchy and tight musical explorations with extra-hot reverberating guitar riffs smoothed out over ambient and effectively eerie vocals.

"New Skull Tattoo," the second cut on the album, begins with a daze of light-hearted, fifties-era doo-wop rhythms fused together into punk lyricisms.

The Ketamines provide a riot of trickster stylings, as the lyrics carry us through into a stupendous poetic irony. Final track, "Summer Mothers," sounds off a dream-pop show with the power of good feelings, impressing the listener with a kind of end-of-concert bittersweet rush that takes no prisoners. It reminds us that when the summer or the year ends and all is lost, we should just hold fast to the driving rhythm and we'll all be okay.

All in all, each and every song on the 7" is good listening. Even multiple listens later the songs groove pulse more and more in the veins. Straight to the head, this one's a gem.

November, 2013

## Thee Silver Mt. Zion Memorial Orchestra, "FUCK OFF GET FREE WE POUR LIGHT ON EVERYTHING"

For the Island of Montreal! Listen to a child's voice, set the tone. Four years after *Kollaps Tradixionales*, Thee Silver Mt. Zion Memorial Orchestra releases their eighth long-awaited release with Constellation Records, *Fuck Off Get Free We Pour Light On Everything*.

*Fuck Off Get Free* revs up with some good ol' charged rhythmic groundwork. The steady movements are simple in their honesty, edgy, rough and high with the kind of creative madness only wrought from 13 years of solid continuity from core band members Thierry Amar (contrabass), Sophie Trudeau (violin), Efrim Menuck (piano), Jessica Moss (violin) and David Payant (drums) – 15 in total from the initial three. And their sound, more unified than ever, hones their genre-defying music in three acts. First, *Fuck Off*; second, *Get Free*; third, *Pour Light on Everything!*

Vocal harmonies mix and flash above the cacophonous parade of the lead track, "*Fuck Off Get Free*," before "*Austerity Blues*" softens the round with the mounting strum of guitar. It's soon transformed by elastic ambience, the electronic breathing of string effects, bowed and plucked, that layer and texture over the insuperable crest of freedom in the pure and innocent light of this vastly aerating music.

Entrancing, the second track calms with syncopated arrangements in sophisticated grandeur not normally envisioned in the punk rocker's noisemaking and vein-rushing ecstasy of their own unlit and flooded garage roots. Frequencies such as those heard on this blindingly gorgeous light of a record soothes one easy, though it embodies a specific type of no-holds-barred character. The harmonized gravity melts and merges into the unified viscera of experience by way of listening; this is one of the lost arts in today's hyper-modern, on-the-go 'pod, media-saturated existence.

Thee Silver Mt. Zion Memorial Orchestra's reinvigorated sound breaks clear of the trails run by such compatriots in sonic likelihood as *Godspeed You! Black Emperor* and *Do Make Say Think*, trespassing onto uncharted music with innocent bravura, unfiltered as the grinding cold under northern lights. This seasoned group's musical lure still warms fans to freedom after well over a decade with a light poured indiscriminately through a sound both subtle and overwhelming in its powerful grasp.

*Fuck Off Get Free We Pour Light on Everything* holds the listener in a grasp that seems, mystically, to free when close listening becomes close feeling. In this

way, the band perfects its ability to close in on even the most devoted of listeners with newfound intent, stunning and impressive. With unrivaled skill, they access the open spectrum of sound to lead those who might dream with eyes wide and see everything alit, as in a dream, from within.

“Take Away These Early Grave Blues” uplifts. The track starts up with a volatile, spiraling vocal reach that curls above a melodious atmosphere of hard-edged and seething guitar, bearing down with an electro-magnetism that orbits in a tight noose around the neck of the universe. Space, infiltrated by the moving earth of lyrical motion, coils and sparks as from a human brain gripped with mortal fear. Listening, one can almost hear the meaning of the sound: Get Free!

Triumphant rock breaks crash and fume with an ambient haze locked against the backdrop of a flitting near-explosion of wild commotion. The heaving bursts find earth under the launching fire of a rooted, war-cry beat. Then, as the stars lower over the sighting of a child’s own eye, the freedom of innocence and longing finds footing in the aftermath of a crash landing.

Survived by creation, now fucked off, gotten free, there’s only one more step home, and it’s quickened in the enchanting lilt of a song called “Little One Runs.” We, living of sound, personified of beauty, strengthen the seed that filled the once-cold ground and warms the hand that pressed firmly against the soil with a song of the future. Doubt, and fear emerge together yet again, albeit to the hopeful tune of “What We Loved Was Not Enough”, which brings the frightful to their knees at the tombs of love, light and Everything.

January, 2014

Xiu Xiu, "Angel Guts: Red Classroom"

Angel Guts: Red Classroom is a rip-roaring exit from sanity into a mute staircase towards the icy burn of hell-realms unknown, guarded by the two-headed sonic phenomenon that is Xiu Xiu.

The smoldering ash of television static stands as deafeningly still as a lonely mountain in the distant volcanic rage, as the album opens with a cinematic, guitar-swept cloudburst. We enter into the looming storm. Soft clashing metal echoes with a voice resonant of dungeon-cold electronica beats, sparing no mercy in the ghastly awe of new American music.

Xiu Xiu's latest album splurges from the quixotic essence of Los Angeles noir. Analog drum pads and synthesized vocals inundate with an unchallenged pace along monstrous waves of unreason, as the lyrics spew forth a vicious realism — see "Black Dick."

The overall rhythmic punch strikes straight through the vein as a mangy and growling junkie in need of the suicidal fix. Songwriter Jamie Stewart animates his cold-throated voicing through sexual perversion and stigmatic violence.

The tide recedes back into the calm of "New Life Immigration," reverberating with a solemnity to the core. This new avant-garde masterwork, influenced by everything from Japanese erotica to Einstürzende Neubauten, is a diamond in the rough, wrought from the deadening mines of the soul from which it rose through and into the fantastic production of John Congleton.

Angel Guts: Red Classroom is indispensable Xiu Xiu, American avant-garde music ruthlessly exposed.

March, 2014

## Mogwai, "Rave Tapes"

The newest from Mogwai fills our terminal electrocution of Earth with the afterlife soul of heady, melodic riffs. Escapades through oneiric glory launch sky high in this anticipated latest in the well-pronounced career of one of the freshest rock sounds out there. Deliberate rhythms set a mature pace from the first break on, as a vibrant mural in the historic illustration of groove.

Rave Tapes is multicoloured, a living creation of new instrumental music.

The second track spirals outward from the traditional post-rock sound towards a heavier, more staccato, stoner drone, buzzing as an overcast horizon, falling and rising above luring, sonic mountains ahead. Triumphant drum-kit percussion angles in a geometric fade throughout the backbeat graces of the third track, "Remurdered," offering a staggering open-road mood, propped up by a single steady beat throughout, alternating between live and electronic rhythms.

The growing escalation of sonic vibrations glide atop gusts of atmospheric guitar, all held down by a synthesizer's precision-work. And as flight rocks to an apex, the grounding pressures of Hexon Bogon strengthen the upright backbone of rock traditions, reanimated with each step towards absolution.

Then, in mid-album, "Repelish" serves as a narrative embellishment on the theme of rock history, recollecting the animist mind of instrumental rock over the vocal disillusionments of rock nostalgia. Mogwai remains as thoughtful and straight-up original as ever, leading the way through a mindful stare into the third eye of a new global music.

March, 2014



## Average Times, "Average Times"

Bomb agog!

Punk-like stitches ripped from the arm and chest of a writhing, drug-addled garage riff, the new self-titled LP from Average Times explodes with big, fantastic vibes. Each measure is tightly erected from their mounting personage, as this Ottawa band refreshes any punk rocker's palate from here to Beijing. Toronto-based Hosehead Records and German label P Trash will release 500 copies on vinyl this month recorded under the helm of Paul "Yogi" Grainger.

With edgy breaks over hot and moaning moods from the first track on, the wildness of an ageless youth is unleashed. The beat on "Snakes" challenges the quaking pit to the last seething vein that rushes pouring in a pool of joy.

The band's self-stated influences, the Oblivians and the Mean Jeans, stir to mind when a body is fully embellished under the jagged, shattered rhythms, and the ears open to hear the swells of down-home, anti-fix, slacker glory as on the record "Summer Nights."

"Average Times" offers sounds of an endless party seamlessly continued from '90s nostalgia resurrected with unimpeded freedom into the vain, slapstick night.

The band's impeccably listenable feel overrides any sense of redundancy in the throwback mix, offering nothing short of an authentic drive into the back-country of camp beauty in all that was and is punk rock. The very title of "I Hate Tomato Juice and I Hate You" sends out an ever-lucid message into the age of apathy that, if it ain't broke, don't fix it.

After a hearty, 13-track album chock full of two-minute ecstasies, the only question left to wonder is where the hell in Ontario is the band's first show when they kick off their next tour, and can I catch a ride?

March, 2014

## Freak Motif, “Across the Nation”

Freak Motif is an all-original Alberta legend, spawned of the Calgary hotbed of summer festivals and underground venues, such as the sorely missed venue Area in Inglewood.

Whether grooving on the the freaky days of Halloween Howl, Freak Motif put the funk in many of the now-defunct best performance venues in the city, such as the Uptown Stage and Screen.

With an ambient and unfailing brass section to boot, Freak Motif features some wicked percussive flavours, led by drum-kit master Victor Ulloa, often seen fronting the seven-to-nine-piece group.

The group is also led by guitarist Stu Wershof, a clever sort of fellow known to put on a just-right-feeling show of his own with loop pedals and backing vocals, under a fine touch of expert electronic sweetness. Danceable funk vibes swing and rattle in the oft-touring group, who travail national Canadian circuits with a special namesake.

The latest release “Across the Nation”, purchasable by nominal donation on Bandcamp, is an absolute must-have for music lovers inside and outside of Calgary. The EP is an extraordinary example of indie production at its finest — the cool sound hits all the right buttons.

Dedicated to “all the musicians who have rocked with us and who continue to inspire us,” the group’s sincere focus and impressive charm can add a little something to any mix. Whether into reggae, trance, hip hop, world, funk, jazz or Afro-beat, Freak Motif’s newest release provides just the right feel for everyone from the newbie listener to the touring groupie.

March, 2014

## Los Lonely Boys, "Revelation"

On the newest LP from Los Lonely Boys, the trio of musical brothers opens with a down-home, Lone Star swing, with cowbell keeping the rhythm sharp over that iconic drawl. Lyrics impress with the revelatory stylistic diversity exhibited in this stupendous masterwork of an album.

After a more traditional Texan opening, the Garza Boys groove on some real sound reggae magic in "Give a Little More." With lyrics imbued with expression and meaning, a band has never exuded such heart-rich sincerity through so many different musical modes.

The band's full sound features everyone as a thrilling singer, each with a unique vocal sound. Jojo (bass), Henry (guitar) and Ringo (drums) all exhibit a fantastic sonic spectrum together rarely heard in the trio context.

All in all, the band offers a clear and direct hit into the soul, in step with the heartbeat of any open listener.

"We want to make music that reveals something to people about their lives and their world," says Jojo, referring to the album's nominal inspiration.

The Boys also drew from a reputable mix of co-writers, Radney Foster and Matthew Gerrard, to name a couple, collaborating liberally to create the exceptionally original grab heard on Revelation.

Released on the band's own label, the album's release also celebrated the recent healthful recovery of the Boys' guitarist, Henry Garza.

Whether a longtime fan, or after gaining newfound interest in this upstanding and genuine American family band, the Revelation LP, and the Los Lonely Boys, are not to be missed.

March, 2014

## Tokyo Police Club, "Forcefield"

Forcefield maintains a lifeline of superbly driven charge, the scope and strength of which is hardly paralleled in the world of electro-pop sound. The gravity and rage of the rhythms fill the empty space of urban music with a whole new and viscerally electronic meaning.

Vocals laze and spin, wandering into a heady plane in the wobbly world of drunk driving stoned surfing and even a touch of the junkie's cold and broken whisper. The four men who make up the electronica ensemble Tokyo Police Club sing, intone and beat with exceptional clarity — it rings almost uncannily into the blurring nightlife scenery.

The hounds have been loosed and we are listening closely, as there's bound to be an echo, at least a few thousand that trail into the early spring night this year. Whether on a slack jaunt to balance beam the neighborhood sidewalk, or to dress in front of a cracked and borrowed mirror, or drive off into the ecstatic bliss of another danceable night, Tokyo Police Club delivers a nine-track Forcefield of sonic welcoming.

March, 2014

## Rufus Wainwright, "Vibrate"

A man's only as good as his word — so echoes the age-old adage. And when it comes to the contemporary musical landscape, the songwriter's only as good as their poetry.

And in the bitter escape-exit vanity of North American culture, such triumphant success as that of the musical career of Rufus Wainwright is as rare to come by as the voice of the poet in the current commercial-capital media maelstrom.

His words, like his accompanying music, harmonically trail and encircle in a diversely rapturous infinity of directions, interpretations and receptions. Most seductively, they leave the listener wanting more.

"Vibrate: The Best of Rufus Wainwright", invites listeners, new and long fanatic, to strengthen their bond to a cherished contemporary voice. Soul, truth and the pop mix blow through the ear like a clear sky, the whisper of a wishing well on a lazy Friday afternoon, the empty conch-shell's cry, burning into the spring air.

But enough said — wordlessly, Wainwright's uncategorized self-reflections on the theme of notes and beats stir the roots of popular musical grandeur. With a new song, "Me and Liza," and a bonus disc full of rare live and studio tracks, Wainwright's opened himself all the more.

March, 2014

## Mutations, “The Construction Site of Our Lives”

TRUCK has been Calgary’s most spot-hitting, artist-run, collaborative, contemporary gallery since 1983, especially while hosting the exhibition “Mutations”, by José Luis Torres.

A Quebecker since 2003, though originally from Argentina, Torres has exhibited his architecturally integrative, artistic vision in 30 Canadian cities and nearly a dozen countries around the world.

“Mutations is a site-specific installation that was inspired by the permanent ‘construction site’ of our everyday lives. I create fragments of history via the use of personal items,” Torres explains succinctly, while elaborating freely.

“The installation is created from objects found in everyday life, symbolizing the ensemble of possessions that we acquire in a lifetime.”

Indeed, questions of time, memory, and the intergenerational acquisition of objects is referenced, as truly poignant matters of inquiry for Canadians, as for everyone alive today, as concerns the constructivist and waste-stream models of dominant Western ecology.

Torres clarifies, “The question of time is explored in this accumulation of cumbersome pieces that have lost their sense of importance and that we cease to see because we hide them away in storage.”

Evidently influenced by Marcel Duchamp, Torres’s Mutations expands upon Duchamp’s notion that “art is not about itself but the attention we bring to it.”

A staunch proponent of such active principles as the role of creative observer in artistic continuum, Torres invites public participation.

“The entire creative process is an invitation to reflect on the time that has passed and the time that remains. A community approach to the installation will be favored. I will invite the public to leave their personal items, creating a legacy from their donations.

“Usually the mounting an exhibit is in relation to these questions: do we not feel, at times, prisoner to all of the things that surround us – the things that we don’t dare get rid of? Does getting rid of something mean renouncing a part of our own history?”

Torres exposes the vision of history as purely literary, or academic, a filter through which to oppress and/or distort lived experience. It is lived experience that artists such as Torres so often dare to respect, through every known medium, and with unbridled intimacy, albeit sometimes irreverently.

“Snow shovel, step ladder, used clothing, stroller, chairs, night tables, old magazines, ironing boards, lamps; all of these objects brought together highlight personal stories. The search for a home and the concept of exile are both conditions of existence, the work attests that our constant displacements obliges us to rebuild our universe many times over,” Torres adeptly muses on the modern experience of international migration from a strikingly original, and critical, perspective.

“My pieces are also a critique on today’s consumer society where people hide behind private property. The accumulation of ostentatious possessions is a way of avoiding exposing the emptiness and inadequateness of those people.”

Torres shares his thoughts on the hopeful creative-observer at the Mutations exhibit; that, ideally, his work will “Generate a reflection... for the pathological pack rat, it is difficult to let go. There is an intimate relationship with objects from the past. It is through keeping the collected objects that the pack rat manages the passing of time. It is a way of mastering time.”

Mutations invited the public to share in a resurgent vision of modern civilization. As Torres envisions, with a discriminating eye, “It is as though our way of life has become a constant construction site in a society of consumers and abundance.”

March, 2014

## Orit Shimoni, "Bitter is the New Sweet"

With her fifth album release, touring Western Canada, Orit Shimoni's "Bitter is the New Sweet" opens up an exciting new chapter in the life and art of one Canada's most brilliant and lyrically impactful vocalists. This special artist is likened to the romance of the troubadour, the mesmerizing wordsmith abilities of Leonard Cohen.

She's an ex-academic with a penchant for the open road, the one with the meanest curves, the one vast enough to carry the wings of an artist. From the chance meeting with Juno award-winning pianist Julian Fauth and his Tuesday night house band in Toronto, it was soon envisioned: Bitter is the New Sweet.

"I've been on the road solo, full-time, for the past six years. I play with musicians in different cities, so it's been really hard to define my sound. 95% of my shows are solo shows," she explains.

On her journey across Canada from the entertainer's cabin aboard Via Rail, Shimoni shares warm insights and thoughtful, albeit coffee-addled, conversation.

"I don't know if it's luck. I seem to have ended up in the hands of really fantastic people," she says. "For instance, I was touring solo in Holland and one of the sound guys booked me for two more shows, said, 'I'll put a band together for you.' People want their hands in it and it's flattering. If you're 'married' to the band, you already have your set up. If you're solo you're really flexible."

Candid, full of fascination and humor, she divulges on such topics as her significant artistic developments, her monumental successes, her views on being a woman in the industry and the travails and fascinations of Europe's music scene, Canada's wonderful diversity, and Israel's bittersweet inspirations.

"I left Jerusalem. It was really violent and awful and, at first, I didn't want listeners to have a bias going into my music," she says, have just made an executive career decision to change her nominal image back to her beautiful and enigmatic Hebrew name, Orit Shimoni (her video release, "Let's Get Persecuted," sounds off on the theme), from her stage name, Little Birdie.

"It made me really uncomfortable when I was identified as an Israeli. But, why did I think that I'm only a Canadian artist? I spent half my life in Israel. The reality of war there has affected me as a human being. I fell in love with protest music."



After all, Shimoni affirms her personal strength to identify with basic humanness regardless of cultural category and to present dignity and class before the oft-belligerent rage of protest music.

“I have deep respect for the written word. It invites people to share in the interpretation. Passion for metaphor is the heart of my creative process. I write from a pretty autobiographical standpoint,” she says.

“It’s gotta be real, I believe in authenticity. It’s gotta be profound. I only have the impulse to turn it into a song when it’s human and relatable. It doesn’t have to be heavy, my songs usually are. They’ve got to be something that a lot of people can tap into.”

An exceptional bout of worldly experience pours from her captivating vocal sound, as with her exceptionally choice, world-class instrumental accompanists. Her recent output has been closely attuned to the high standards of jazz and speaks of her artistic growth, as a once budding local artist in Calgary, then Montreal, rose to the toast of a global musical affair.

“Life experience makes you able to express your vocals differently. At a show of mine a few years back, I sang the jazz standard, ‘Cry Me a River,’ and I discovered another level of singing. I was singing from my toes. I’m singing from my toes with this album, Bitter is the New Sweet.”

March, 2014

## Kim Churchill, "Silence/Win"

Kim Churchill's origins as a young classical guitarist in Australia are further enshrined in the impressive tapestry that is his fascinating musical career as an original artist. The album, "Silence/Win", features the kind of punchy vocals and imaginative songwriting that has elevated this artist from the instrumental wow-factor to the songwriter's grandeur of pure, creative emotion.

For the first time ever, Churchill offered the channels of his inner rumination over to producer Warne Livesey's masterful ear. An impressive breadth of scope and artistry is featured on "Silence/Win", Churchill's third album, produced over the summer in Ucluelet, Vancouver Island.

Canada, with its chill surf and cultural mosaic, is this artist's home away from home. As far as I'm concerned, he's welcome.

"I'm well-educated in Canada. It feels as much home as Australia," he said. "Now, it's become other places — Mexico or Norway, the southern part of the United States — exciting kind of inspiring adventures."

When asked the most inspiring locale for this oft-globetrotting artist, Churchill responds clearly and directly: Montreal.

"Montreal is such a wonderful explosion of cultures, the music is wonderful. Had some good memories here," he explains with a nonchalant air, enough to warm any room with the fresh glow of a new creative spark.

"There are a lot of exciting things here, though it's not as beautiful as BC. I would probably go to Tofino or Canmore, for writing — there is the perfect sort of combination of different inspirations."

Churchill speaks very much as a young artist in love with life, always in search of the next road that leads towards the furthest reaches of possibility, of uninhibited expression. One hears in "Silence/Win" a vocation to the truth of impermanence that is the traveller's experience of life, a phenomenon that everyone can understand.

"The fact is that I don't live anywhere, everything's always changing," says Churchill. "Australia is my home in many ways, but I'm there for only maybe seven, nine weeks of the year."

While "Silence/Win" is a masterful collection of songs with a keen production quality, Churchill speaks of the creative process with humility and candor.

“As I was a guitarist first, I write songs based on guitar parts. This time, I relaxed a little bit more and let it be simple, with vocal melodies first,” says Churchill.

Listeners can expect a special variety of songwriting from Churchill on the release, which traverses terrain as diverse as the gently paced serenade to the hard-hitting reggae stomp.

“I’ve often been very pedantic, the same way I used to write guitar parts, trying to be very clever, with very deep songs and deeper layers of metaphor. Here, I just kind of stopped trying so hard. A lot of the lyrics of this album I just pushed record and started playing something on guitar that’s how a lot of the lyrics came about,” says Churchill.

“It turned out to be kind of a fun way to write. There’s no point trying to write good lyrics. Write about what you’re really feeling. I have an inkling that that’s where real art begins, when the artist is no more than the medium.”

For anyone who’s seen Churchill’s multi-talented live act, “Silence/Win” is as true as ever to the real thing. And for those yet to merge their sonic pathways with the impeccable fruition of the musical joys of Kim Churchill, the album may be the perfect solution to the beginning of a journey towards such unforgettable sonic travails.

March, 2014

## Sea Wolf, “Old World Romance”

Sea Wolf, who has been on the move going on seven years now, and going strong, was recently heard again, directly from the open roadways of Texas.

As a seasoned deep-folk artist who operates along the new musical horizon, this impressively talented and soulful singer-songwriter was in the process of completing a more local, solo, acoustic tour between two dates in Austin and Houston, Dallas, and Little Rock, Arkansas.

Sea Wolf lit through the mix at a handful of other locales before turning north in March, to hit the likes of Seattle, Portland, Chicago, Vancouver, Anchorage and, finally, Calgary, all of which basked in the warm glow of Sea Wolf’s contemporary momentum. Bordering on experimental, minimalist and improvisatory instrumental music, Sea Wolf’s newfound ventures as an independent artist harken back to the early days.

“I set out to make an album similar to my earlier work — stripped-down experimental, quieter songs, early Sea Wolf days, getting back to having fun and messing around with stuff,” says Alex Brown Church, the brainchild behind Sea Wolf. His break from Dangerbird Records to produce an indie record afforded a creative freedom since, “Old World Romance”, hit shelves on Sept. 11, 2012.

“There’ll still be a few more traditional Sea Wolf dance songs,” Church says, reminding this tremendously multi-disciplined artist’s diverse fanbase that the momentum is indeed forward-moving, an integration of previous impulses and moods into a refreshed, and exposed, unbranded effort. After a successful crowd-funding effort ended in October 1, 2013, L.A.-based Sea Wolf is still keeping soon-ecstatic listeners on the edges of their seats while the mixing was in progress.

“I’m still promoting Old World Romance,” Church says, working hard without his usual five- or six-piece band, which often includes your standard bass, guitar, keyboard, drum, electro-folk foundation, as well as an occasional cellist. “As soon as I’m done with this one, I’ll start writing the next record. I’m feeling inspired.”

He’s on the road day in and day out, with no one to follow, and no one to proceed, as the romantic songster’s edge proves all the more sharp and entrancing into the bitter core of such creative truths.

As on earlier of Sea Wolf albums, such as *Leaves in the River*, human solitude and the natural wilderness is called forth as tried-and-true inspirations of the

sonic thief on his endless road to self-willed freedom: “There is a man inside a room in the forest / He sits alone upon the chair his father left him / In the dark in the dark in the dark with the radio on.”

“People have been responding really well during the acoustic tour, these live concerts only feature about two of the latest songs,” says Church, assuring all listeners, and followers, that the original Sea Wolf sound is, in many ways, untouched, and simply growing, revitalized and charged as ever with a new, impeccable subtlety. Immediately prior to Sea Wolf’s February 21st show at Lambert’s, Austin, *Fusion Magazine* said his “folk-pop arrangements are perfectly suited to intimate acoustic performances.”

“Old friend come back home / Even though you always were alone,” start the lyrics to Sea Wolf’s opening to *Old World Romance*, in the absolutely classic verve of a first track, “Old Friend.” “I know you don’t believe me when I believe in you / I know it will get much easier if we want it to,” the chorus repeats with an especially nostalgic twist around the solitary night bend towards the full, heartening beauty of an artistic spirit unknown, now bursting with the tragic smoldering light of youthful wonder.

In 1904, the nominal origins of Sea Wolf were born in the mind of American adventurer and author, Jack London, whose sea-faring characters can be heard nudging their way through the dense cartography of the human heart.

Listen closely, and in the subtext of Sea Wolf’s rhythmic tempests, as they move and beat over the swaying ocean of the Old World. From the humblest of moments writing tunes in Alex Church’s living room, Sea Wolf has risen from murky waters and foggy coastlines to the smoky call and searing lamps of the international stage.

One of the band’s more evocative songs, which calls out to the old spirit of the Sea Wolf, can be heard in *White Water, White Bloom*, their second album, where the song, “Orion and Dog” splits like elder salt through the creaking cracks of the ever-voyaging ship that is the sound of Sea Wolf.

“Orion said I’m just a humble hunter / The dog the only company I keep / Forgive me if I fear that you will change me / But I’ve seen my fortune written in the leaves,” or ever clearer in the title track, “I’ve felt the cold of the ice and water / Come flowing through as it poured me under.”

April, 2014

## The Red Priest, “Eight Ways to Say Goodbye”

It is the 1700s, quaint, provincial, perhaps refined, and it is the night of a concert, to be given at the French court of Louis XV, a.k.a. the “Well Beloved,” the last monarch who ruled prior to the storming of Bastille.

And who emerges but a bona fide rock star, a violinist, dressed all in black, with flaming red hair, and an absolute virtuoso, a triumphantly matured child prodigy. He is known as The Red Priest, or in the annals of history, as the Baroque Italian composer, Antonio Vivaldi.

“Very theatrically, he would come out and dramatically play the violin,” said Canadian playwright Mieko Ouchi about Vivaldi, an inspiration for her first full-length, and immensely well-received play, *The Red Priest (Eight Ways to Say Goodbye)*.

“His family was poor, and priesthood was a way to become a musician. In those days you could only become a musician if you were in aristocracy or if you were a priest.”

Originally from Calgary, Ouchi cheerily welcomes new audiences to celebrate the 10th anniversary of the production, beginning with Ouchi herself as one of the original actors, and now numbering at over 160 performances.

“I grew up playing his music as a child, taking violin lessons. He wrote a lot of music for young people. I had this sort of childhood connection to his music,” explains Ouchi, whose accomplishments include *The Red Priest* becoming a finalist for the Governor General’s Award for Drama, and winning the Canadian Authors Association’s Carol Bolt Prize.

“It’s so amazing that it’s back at ATP. Vanessa [Porteous, the director] has done a really lovely job directing it. I’m thrilled to see their take on it, always neat to see someone else’s interpretation.”

April, 2014

## Shaani Cage, "Demo"

A light forecast and, on the shadowy horizon, the cool bending, harmonic rhythms of the brotherly duo Shaani Cage, brought to life by Aleem and Kaleem Khan. First break "Dance Community" is a fantastic downbeat exercise in cool.

Wayfaring synthetic ambience and multi-tracked guitar riffs speak volumes over a dream-pop air, studded with a lush backdrop of that heady blue glow of bounce-beat wanderings.

With a humorous edge, the likable sound of Shaani Cage's demo reveals the soulful depth of an authentic lyricism.

"You say that's love, baby / That ain't a part of the plan," croons second track "Come Up" as each slow, delectable sound nourishes the fateful ear lucky enough to close in on a listen. The demo's sound is a perfect complement to any room in need of that rest-and-relaxation vibe.

And keep those ears open, for this demo's sure to soon transform into an even more mature and fuller sound via future works. Hopefully, later offerings from Shaani Cage will present what final track "Put it Right" moves to with its lazily comforting and tragicomic moods. Evangelos Typist of Sanctums mastered their forthcoming EP, which makes it even more worthy of throwback listening.

May, 2014

## Kamchatka, “The Search Goes On”

Fried, not stirred — that’s how the Sweden’s rawest metal-fuck, Kamchatka, sears through brain and under the midnight sun, splits shipboards in the salty cabin of the mind.

Triumphing over America’s bittersweet rock scales, the band’s clean delivery assails the listener like a blind man at the end of a pirate’s death plank.

The group allies the sons of such progressive metal gods as Opeth, from whence Kamchatka’s bassist, Per Wiberg, has descended, to flex the synthetic layerings of a strong keyboard into the fiery mix.

While seemingly overrun with the conventional, albeit masterful, metal vibe, Kamchatka reminds that even hell offers the essential delight of surprise, as the second track “Tango Decadence” ends in a folkloric Euro-South-American animation of acoustical flight.

Next, “Coast to Coast” frees up a country cool amid the licking flames of a heavy rock drive, flattening every last living thing with a powerfully authentic guitar solo from Thomas Anderson (also the band’s vocalist), battered down with a sweet rhythmic cowbell.

Kamchatka is synonymous with the estranged, far-off peninsula wilderness of the furthest reaches of eastern Russia, home to a chain of world heritage volcanoes, which may just offer the eponymous kicker for the band’s legacy.

By mid-album, “Broken Man” sounds much like the mid-life wicker-chair guitar force that chokes and burns in the throat grappling with the failing voice of age. Still, “The Search Goes On” reflects more than nostalgia, and for the metal buff certainly offers a firm grasp of one of the sharpest of Europe’s most resounding musical edges.

May, 2014



## Bombay Bicycle Club, "So Long See You Tomorrow"

Fresh off the press, one of the hottest mixes anywhere, North London's cheer has erupted in the form of "So Long, See You Tomorrow".

Each and every track is an epic foray through a brilliant spectrum of vermillion, with vocal harmonies and quixotic guitar-work emerging from the pale azure of a transparent and honest direction towards pure originality.

Thoughtful measures swing and glide in the rhythmic air, as sonic mountains flex and relax in the course of beauty. Artistic to the core, the band has innovated live animation in their debut video and in their single, "Carry Me," as well as offering homage to the relative obscurity of 19th-century stop-motion photography pioneer Eadweard Muybridge.

Inspired by Jack Steadman's travels through India, Turkey, Tokyo, the U.K. and the Netherlands, the record animates a sonic charge into the ambitious front of human discovery.

Here, the inner and outer phenomena of change is blurred and bridged with a special grace. Listen, and listen again, and the meaning of "So Long, See You Tomorrow" may become ever so succinctly apparent to you.

Dream-pop eyes slow into a moving, hip hop downbeat with "Home By Now," which features video-game bleats to the tasteful rhythm of a synthetic drum. And the moment is right, as vocal harmonies blend with the sweet pleasure that comes from knowing that Tomorrow is right around the corner, always.

May, 2014

## Rising, “Alberta Flood”

Lambert is one of those genuine Canadian literary figures who remains at-large and on the horizon. Last year, that horizon filled to the brim with the raging flood of the Bow River, as it spilled and snaked through East Village developments, Kensington communities, Chinatown thoroughfares and Bowness backyards, and on and on, overflowing above the High River stop signs.

The Bow did not stop, but neither did people in Southern Alberta. They rose, literally and figuratively, to the very top and proved themselves, almost to the last man, woman and child, that community is number one.

Characterful, and a charm to the last crack of his wit, Lambert looked on at the flood from his Toronto hotel after a bout of book signings, as he wrapped up a tour following the release of his second book, *Leaving Moose Jaw*.

“Funny story, I wasn’t even in Calgary. I was on a national tour to support my previous book in Toronto. I woke up in Toronto, as the flood happened,” Lambert recounts, with a slight bashfulness.

“My apartment was up on a hill and my family was safe. I was watching news reports, and there was nothing I could do.”

Like most people, he expresses an initial powerlessness before the livid waters, with an honesty derived, characteristically, from his self-reflective, laconic prose. From a fiction writer bugged by trials as a drunkard youth in Montreal in *Time of Growth*, to a travel memoirist with an itchy footpath through India, Lambert has arrived back home, to chronicle one of the most devastating natural disasters in Canadian history.

With a keen, journalistic eye, and trained in the ways of literary perception, Lambert found mainstream news coverage on the flood to be sorely incomplete. The people who are often least regarded during crucial times often have the most important, critical stories to tell. Such was the case in Southern Alberta, with regard to the ways in which First Nations and unhoused people survived, coped and overcame their struggles during and in the wake of the flood.

“Siksika First Nation is kind of removed a bit from the city. It took an extra day for the water to get to them, but they were very much devastated. Because they were a little bit removed, the media didn’t report on them as much initially,” recounts Lambert, who found the Calgary-centric media reality of the flood hard to swallow in light of the real challenges experienced by those in communities

on the fringe. “It took a few days for those stories and photos to get out. Eventually they did get a good volunteer response.”

When it came to the unhoused in Calgary, people turned up in droves to donate to the Drop-In Centre. Yet, despite the overwhelming incidence of charitable donations and volunteerism, the stories of those left without a home amid the city in a state-of-emergency went largely unheard. They were fated to wander, often alone, to find shelter along roads lined with natural gas leaks and flowing contaminants, among other, more unspeakable dangers.

“The homeless gentleman who is in the book, the handful of people who edited drafts for me, every person who’s read it, has picked that man, Gary, as their favorite character,” Lambert says. “I think the reason partially is that it’s sort of an adventure, stuck in downtown Calgary trying to get a place to stay. It’s a riveting read, a story no one’s heard. I never read anything in the media from the homeless perspective.”

Lambert himself, in his literary career, has taken to the extremes, the outsider perspectives, and exhibits that in his publishing as well. Among his many professional credentials as a former sports writer, columnist, investigative journalist and the list goes on, as a reporter for the *Yellowknifer*, he even saved the city of Yellowknife from the sure-unraveling, however then-modest, intensity of a forest fire.

Lambert’s *Rising* is a testament to the final truth of good literature: that it’s the writing that counts. *Rising* will allow Calgarians to remember the strength of their community, remember that the extraordinary, and startling force of the Bow River could not outmatch the human will to cohere in times of struggle.

“I grew up in Calgary, it’s very much home to me, and I know the city quite well, Southern Alberta in general. To write a book about this place is very familiar,” says Lambert, on the core meaning of *Rising*. “It does feel very comfortable to write about a place that you call home.”

May, 2014

## Jocelyn Burgener, "Naked Under My Coat"

For former politician and businesswoman Jocelyn Burgener, Parkinson's disease opened her heart and led her to holistic, life-affirming, creative transformation. Like Michael J. Fox, Burgener does not wish her condition away. While there are certain challenges, the disease has instead enlightened her to a newfound, public confidence through art, creativity and family.

"I've always written and have sent notes, cards, and little stories to my families and friends. Now that I'm living, my voice writing has become very important to me," Burgener says with a gentle, inspired tone.

"One of the things about Parkinson's is it's so visual. You have tremors. You can't hide it. My tendency is just to live with it and put it out there. That ties into being authentic."

Burgener's self-published tome, "Naked Under My Coat", is a brilliant force of wisdom worked through poetry and short stories, offering readers visual stimuli through concrete forms and a pithy style.

"When there's a story to be told, I prefer to use prose. When there's an observation to be made, I prefer to use poetry. Poetry is concise. It's sharper. You hone in more definitively," says Burgener, who then muses on the similarities between the quality of writing fiction and living with Parkinson's.

"Parkinson's has heightened my awareness of things. I see things as stories. I see things as relevant. I see things as active."

"Naked Under My Coat" is a heartfelt collection of 14 short stories and 43 poems chronicling one woman's transformational urge to write, as it coincided with the onset of Parkinson's disease.

"The art scene in Calgary is revitalized. I actually coauthored civic art policies for the city back in 2005. I have a sense of where the city has been and where it's going," says Burgener.

June, 2014

Geoffrey Simon Brown, "Control"

Between the years of 2010 to 2014, the Major Matt Mason Collective (MMMC) developed its dynamic output in the performing arts scene in Calgary. With an impressive DIY and for-us-by-us attitude, the Collective produced four plays in those years with intentions to keep certain creative productions in the city powered first and foremost by youth.

A host of multidisciplinary artists representing Calgary's younger generations made up MMMC, all fostering an inclusive, collaborative ambiance throughout each and every aspect of their productions and community outreach programs.

Two of the four plays produced by the MMMC were written by Geoffrey Simon Brown, who now stands before his dramatic creation, *Control*.

"I wrote *Control* while working at a key cutting shop. It was just a sort of a day dream play for me, in a place where I graduated school, before starting a career in theatre, a lull period, figuring what I'm doing with my life," says Brown about MMMC's newest production, which centers on two pairs of teenagers, exhibiting themes of crime, loneliness, love and fear of taking control.

"Our whole mentality is created specifically, and directed to and about, a younger crowd. We don't try to be hip and cool, we make plays that are interesting to us and for this generation that we belong to."

While MMMC's past productions have often been the result of collectively generated scripts, *Control* is an auteur work by Brown, who was initially spurred on by the now lead actors in the play, Charlie Gould, Lindsay Mullan and Stephen Hair.

"I see a lot of companies going towards work that is safer or doesn't challenge people. I think that's something that's turned off a lot of people. They want their entertainment, their media, their art to challenge them," Brown says, as he worked with a close-knit team of actors, directors, designers, lighting technicians, sound engineers, stage managers, and administrators.

June, 2014

## The Roots, "...And Then You Shoot Your Cousin"

The Roots busked themselves out of the street corners of Philadelphia and into the arms and ears of a virtually unceasing stream of fans worldwide following their initial 15 years of aural sweetness.

"...And Then You Shoot Your Cousin" is the 11th album by the Grammy Award-winning hip-hop fascination and, never missing a beat, their sonic dreamscape opens with wonders stupendous. "Theme from the Middle of the Night" introduces the musical zeitgeist with a hearty dose of true sound from the back record collection of one of America's prized musical acts.

Lyrical ingenuity stops and breaks over harmonic artistry, as the album commences to exhibit a dynamic energy rarely heard in hip hop and from other contemporary artists with a mind to the foundational breath of rhythm and poetry.

Cut with the lilting affair of song troupes in their glorious heyday, "The Devil" ends on the notation of the following track "Black Rock," which spins heady, spiraling with rhythmic intensity. With "The Coming," the band highlights its musical display with a moving ambiance, pierced with the charged, ringing light of a female vocalist into the groundless space of that unique sound that can only be heard from The Roots.

There are eleven tracks in total, featuring accomplices Patty Crash, Modesty Lycan, Greg Porn, Dice Raw, Mercedes Martinez and Raheem DeVaughn. And The Roots surf a mighty wave with them, a genuine verve through lyrics raw as their subject matter.

After years of lighting on the American musical consciousness with an unrivaled life force, "...And Then You Shoot Your Cousin" muses on identity amid the oft-overwhelming worlds of sexuality, drugs and money, that seemingly impenetrable, cascading triplet misting from the American falls of history, civilization and culture.

June, 2014

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## MIX-TAPE: THE Z-SIDES at Actor's Fund Arts Center

The eye-studded tail of *Peacock* drifted through the abstract air, alit with painting. Evocative as the palette of the late artist Michael Placenti, whose work befitted the evocative, primordial movements of the first dance of the evening, *Peacock* allured.

From its outset, Mix-Tape: The Z-Sides invited viewers to contemplate the ageless, creative form of dance, stunningly engaged in multidisciplinary juxtaposition. The projected, motionless form of painting captured a multicolored strobe light, crystallizing the creative moment.

The daughter of Placenti, Cecly, also among the dancers, choreographed this Six Degrees Dance work herself, as well as the enlightening Pastel Abstract. In collaboration with dancers Kristen Klein, Anastasia Mercedes, Rachel Russel, and Rebecca Ross (in Pastel Abstract, Kristen Klein, Jeremiah Stanfield, Rachel Russel), all inspired with surging upward movements, captivating the well-attended Actor's Fund Arts Center theatre.

Through her fascinating choreography, Cecly Placenti, a dance teacher at Grant Avenue Elementary School in Bronx, NY, and dance critic with Ballet-Dance Magazine, exhibited spiritual resurrection in the art of human movement as from the archaic past, ever imbued with modern potency.

What intrigued especially about *Peacock*, also a special presage to the originality of the two-hour, nine-act show as a whole, was the use of unknown music, hearkening to the original truth of dance, music, and painting as rooted in prehistory, and as then, and now, best united.

In this respect, modern dance becomes an atavistic catalyst. In such a time as today, the public imagination must constantly revivify the abstract arts, as means to stimulate imagination, and thus, creative resolutions to ubiquitous and perennial tragedies in both domestic, and greater social spheres.

At once, from the most basic level to the loftiest aspiration, when appreciating the art of dance, authentic feeling ensues. Dance is emotionally provocative, because it seamlessly affirms the intense exposure, and full-bodied requirements of the creative process.

So, as such immense feeling ensued in *Perchance to Dream*, a wildly magical portrayal of transcendent love, and natural humanity, and harmonic variance in three movements. Firstly, in *The Sleepwalker*, choreographed by Alyssa Caliendo and Micheline Heal, Mic-Mash Productions proved masterful.



The music was simply perfect. Arvö Part drew all ears to a note, as "Fur Alina Part I" resounded against a moonlight projection. Black, and white, the costumes of the dancers merged with the tasteful grace of sweet remembrance, intoned as through gentle, airy movement. And in that night, love was regained, if only within a wounded, fearful heart.

Enter *The Dream*. Choreographed by Micheline Heal, in collaboration with twelve other artists, *Perchance to Dream* opened into a fascinating triumph of set design, costume, and narrative. Micheline Heal, who conceived, and directed *Perchance to Dream*, also graced the Actor's Fund Arts Center stage with Alyssa Caliendo as lead dancer.

She spun illumined, only to fall inward, embracing the soul of night in a union of body and time. Through traditional Chinese water sleeves, Heal was cast off, and delicately carried, as by a winged, angelic mystery. Lastly, *The Dream* presages *Awakening* with Heal perched above another body on high, as in royal matriarchal regalia.

Finally, the traditional, and antediluvian gave way to the modern, and post-modern. Technophile relishes breathed through *Mirror Duet*, also choreographed, and performed by Micheline Heal, who danced beside recurrent cohort Alyssa Caliendo with a charged fervency as the apt music, *Limelight* by Apparat boomed tempestuously.

Sporting neon lime, and pink magenta skin-tight bodysuits, Heal and Caliendo exchanged movements oppressed by an exaggerated commercial ambiance, enacted through dualistic color schemes. *Mirror Duet* danced an earnest take on the artifices of the computer age, as the splayed legs of Heal, and Caliendo shaped asemic letters, desperately and upside-down as the modern world, and against the split image façade of synthetic light.

Overall, while Mich-Mash Productions and Six Degrees Dance were not without their occasional missteps, and processional admissions, each and every last dancer warmed the early fall night with haunting insight, and nuanced brilliance.

September, 2014

## HOMAGE TO ANIBAL TROILO at Symphony Space

After one hundred years, Anibal Troilo is remembered ever so fondly as the late Argentinean master musician. He lived from 1914-1975, though his music continues to enlighten as delicately and pointedly as the sound of a trilling bandoneón. In his honor, over thirty performing artists have gathered to ask audiences in New York a question, deceptive in its simplicity, though incredibly sophisticated: "Shall We Tango?"

Tango has everything in one bountifully syncretic artistic and cultural genre, displaying a matchless diversity within its particular world. Everything can be heard from its seasoned masters and emerging performers alike, from the precise colorings of call-and-response true to the most technically impressive of world music as from India, to the wildly reflective improvisational solos of jazz or Middle Eastern music, the sonorous melodies and harmonies known to classical traditions, and even integrating creativity soundscapes as far afield from musical categorization as in experimental noise.

Around the corner from the characterful Upper West Side stone-laden treasure, Pomander Walk, at the cusp of Harlem on Broadway, Symphony Stage opened their doors to a crowd-pleasing treasure, Quinteto Tango, a five-piece ensemble hailing from Colombia. Presenting eight variations on the theme of tango for their New York debut, Quinteto Tango, led by bandoneónist Giovanni Parra, delighted with an immense bravura, receiving well-deserved standing ovations aplenty. For Quinteto Tango, exhibiting a Colombian vibrancy to the tradition of tango was not the only significance of the concert, but also to stand in the shadow of the Daniel Binelli.

Tango music, and especially bandoneón music, is a treasured art form. Like any magical tradition that began more than a hundred years ago, it also begs sustained recognition and a renewal of youth dedicated to artistic passion. The outpouring of emotional gratitude that Parra dedicated to Binelli onstage was a testament to the living strength of the musical tradition, and the role of such festivals as "Shall We Tango?" to inspire younger generations to fill the shoes of the living greats, so they can see their work continues before passing on towards the realm where Troilo listens in repose.

As a prelude to the festival run, Binelli and Parra played music of perhaps the most famous proponent of tango music, Astor Piazzolla. Binelli himself played in a late-career sextet with Piazzolla, a testament to his due reverence. To listen to Libertango performed by a living master of the instrument is a rare, indefinable experience for music lovers, and truly all cultural enthusiasts alike. The bandoneón expanded and contracted with piercing lament and bleary-eyed

cheer, evoking the unforgotten lives of countless artists from a bygone European countryside, who fled to Argentina only to suffer unspeakable oppression. Still, they sing violently through a wine-filled hourglass in the creaking wooden bars south of the Tropic of Capricorn. At the lift and fall of the bandoneón, finally crashing at the knee of a founding father of such music, there is tragic hope in creative reprisal.

None so characteristically represented this swaying of time, and memory than in the transition from the Binelli-Ferman Duo to the Quinteto Tango. While much of the presentation was purposed to focus on musical performance, as expressed by the charming Polly Ferman, as she stood from her piano bench to speak between opening sets, four dancers sparked a tremulous fire in onlookers, inspiring with a scintillating wonder. Rousing the well-attended Symphony Space to their feet, Ivan Ovalle and Gina Medina, who also arrived from Colombia, and on their own dime, let it be known, enthralled with voluptuous and sultry finesse.

All in all, it was a night of homages, and splendid in more ways than one. Binelli himself dedicated Images of Buenos Aires in three movements to Polly Ferman, who he charismatically referred to as "faster than the wind". The Binelli-Ferman Duo also played two of Astor Piazzolla's pieces from Suite Troileana, as a special homage to Troilo through Piazzolla's devotional compositions. In the same way that a musician must give the better part of his or her life to the study and refinement of the inveterate complexities of bandoneón music, so the original, founding masters who opened new pathways for creative expression in the enigmatic styles of tango are to be honored for successive generations until the last, prolonged note.

October, 2014

## VIVA PIAZZOLLA at The Shabazz Center

Uruguayan tango pianist Polly Ferman invited a warm audience to her neighborhood of Washington Heights for the second night of the "Shall We Tango?" festival, titled Viva Piazzolla, a special concert featuring virtuosic violinist Eddy Marcano.

With her charismatic eloquence, Ferman introduced the six-piece ensemble, including double bassist José Puentes, accordionist and violinist José "Pepe" Saglimbeni, percussionist Yilmer Vivas, maracas player and guitarist Manuel Rangel, and pianist Dino Dinelli.

Too often, music lovers stay in, or go to Brooklyn, a notion that Ferman aired openly. Clearly, Washington Heights is a treasure trove of cultural and musical wonders, as the magnificently receptive audience appreciated at the Malcolm X and Dr. Betty Shabazz Center at 3940 Broadway.

Entering under a lion statue, symbol of wisdom and strength, the Shabazz Center, as it is abbreviated, welcomes with a standing statue of Malcolm X behind a microphone, delivering one of his richly controversial lectures.

Brilliant murals on the life of Malcolm X are displayed boldly, embodying Washington Heights, and the Viva Piazzolla concert itself, as exhibiting the art of intercultural understanding, by the empathic and compassionate solidarity found through listening.

The art of listening is exactly the legacy of bandoneónist, composer and arranger Astor Piazzolla, who prompted tango music into a future of purely musical development. With over a hundred years of history, well before the name Piazzolla popularized the genre with unrivaled dynamism for the world stage, tango enjoyed various artistic movements.

Piazzolla, who was born in 1920, came into the world just before the time of instrumental tango music, which he would later advance into the modern form. It makes sense then, that a violinist led the concert Viva Piazzolla, as violinists often led instrumental performances in the musical era of tango, which was most prominent during Argentina's 1930s.

Ferman leapt onstage with her characteristic charm, to enlighten the audience with a brief history of tango. Each successive decade in the early to mid-20th century exhibited a marked shift in the style of tango, from instrumentalism, to the era of poets and singers in the 1940s, to orchestral and dance platforms in the 1950s.

When Piazzolla emerged most vibrantly, in the 1950s, he essentially transformed not only a style of music from its foundations, but also the suasions of its listeners, a much more daring feat. Eddy Marcano did every last note a justice only meant for artists of such magnanimous vibrancy, and all with an effortless poise.

The very first piece of the concert, “Libertango”, is classic Piazzolla. Such a masterful performance of what is essentially the unofficial tango anthem brought the audience to the edge of their seats. The band opened like a sonic force to be reckoned with, charging through the melodic soundscapes, moving blissfully towards a fulfilled, and spirited conclusion. Together with two very special guests, the six-piece ensemble played many Piazzolla pieces, including “Invierno Porteño”, and “De Carisma”.

Marcano led the sextet through a blistering fire of sound and drama, evoking the bittersweet history of tango performers, and the Latin American urban culture at large, which has embraced tango as a regional art form with such impeccable heart, and sincerity.

Most of the pieces performed during the night spoke of the virtuosic dedication to art, implied in such wildly difficult styles and in compositions of tango music. In simple language, nearly every piece was raw, fast, and loud. Marcano balanced gentle harmonies with the coarse sounds throughout as he bowed behind the bridge for rhythmic effect.

Special guests during the night included the famed Puerto Rican violinist and conductor Karlo Flores, who performed together with Marcano, inspiring a triumphant and energetic Pan-Latin collaboration. Direct from Venezuela, Marcano, and his group fascinated, impressed, and most importantly, moved the audience with a rare, and genuine artistry. During the heartfelt evening, Marcano, dedicated the concert to bandoneónist Daniel Binelli, who sat near the front of the stage to listen, and grace the Shabazz Center, a legendary former member of Piazzolla's late-career sextet.

The swift glory, and intoxicating vitality of the music compelled the audience to their feet as the band ignited the air, from floor to ceiling, and beyond, with a masterful clincher. The last piece left one young audience member, an aspiring musician from Brooklyn, in tears.

October, 2014

## L.A. DANCE PROJECT at BAM

*Reflections* (2013) opened the evening with the evocative drift of piano compositions by David Lang, performed live by Andrew Zolinsky. The choreography by Benjamin Millepied bloomed as the act of making love, one seamless movement of relationship founded on unity.

With themes of interdependence and individuality, the mutual inspiration of the dancers rose with originality and performance. The qualities breathed with the innate tendencies of relationship, common throughout various forms of art as the multifarious expressions of love.

Performed to a capacity house, the opulent expanse of BAM's Howard Gilman Opera House projected a visual design by Barbara Kruger, featuring the words "STAY," lifted vertically, and "THINK OF / ME THINKING / OF YOU" on the stage floor. In six movements, *Reflections* next moved to flamboyant joy in both dance and music, with a solo male dancer light on his feet, hopping about in rapid ecstasy.

The word "GO" was then lowered as two male dancers moved together, portraying an emergent trust among lovers as strangers. As the spotlight shone on the words THINK and STAY, dancers flitted throughout the stage by nuanced staccato rhythms. The words "ME THINKING" were next highlighted as dancers entered and exited from offstage, exhibiting a truth well known behind the scenes of life and in the world of performance art--when pushing someone away you also move where pushed.

*Murder Ballades* (2013) syncopated dancers with *eighth blackbird*, a six-piece ensemble performing music by Bruce Dessner through a modernist oeuvre of waving stark colors. The string music and featured percussion offered a textured frame, leaving the masculine and feminine bodies in a light and tasteful immersion of beauty.

Dancers fitted sneakers onto their feet, the choreography suggested the mundane, daily act of going out. Music typical of a racing spirit played to the dramatic interchanging roles of each dancer as they moved between spatial possessions with sporadic intensity, matched by a touching fluidity.

*Quintett* (1993) by Wiliam Forsythe called out into the nostalgic emptiness with a rousing musical theme based on both recorded and live musical production. Gavin Bryars manifested a magical soundscape, starkly lit by an opaque bleakness, with dancers standing motionless and silent. In the dream of a soft old radio voices, music played a melancholic enchantment.

On and offstage, crawling and darting about, the movements of dancers in unison varied with perspective as the live musical ensemble integrated harmonies with effortless subtlety. The vibrant, and often humorous lightness in the rapid movements spelled joy in the midst of a nostalgic poignancy.

The L.A. Dance Project as a whole exuded harmonious energy towards one magical aura of youthful strength and awakened artistry. As the body facilitates a limited frame of movement, requiring the shared variation of a company, so the music befitted the modern harmonies of dance.

November, 2014

## VOICES OF BULGARIA AND AMERICA at 92Y

At the 92nd Street YMHA, the air was welcoming, even communal, an environment where poets and weightlifters share space amid the world-famous Jewish institution. On October 17th an enthusiastic audience gathered in from the chill fall winds, warmed up and revived by a multigenerational creativity spanning various cultural and artistic traditions. Voices of Bulgaria and America could not have been a more ideal exhibition.

Contemplative, refined, and raw, Kathryn Posin devised Voices of Bulgaria and America in memory of her father. She introduced his story briefly to the audience, leaving everyone to enjoy the narrative as told through her choreographic genius. He fled his native Russian Turkestan through Mongolia and China as a forced migrant in the wake of the Russian Revolution, and later found refuge in San Francisco.

*Bridge of Song* began with folkloric costumes originally designed for the American Ballet for Bulgaria project by Hristiana Mihaleva, projecting the worldly traditions of a homeland. Dancers moved through the aesthetics of flight. *Motivy* then had the dancer transfixed, swaying to movements guided by the center stage double bassist. Towards the exhilaration of escape, the music of “Century Rolls” by John Adams enveloped the sensual confinements in a wild freedom.

*In You Are (Wherever Your Thoughts Are)*, named after the composition by Steve Reich, three female dancers portrayed movements to echo nostalgia, loss and regret, while the male dancer exhibited the grayscale shadows of memory.

*Fly, Fly My Sadness* showed a marvelously clever juxtaposition of the exotic. *Buried Cities*, the final piece, achieved a waking emanation of cultural recovery and preservation as contrasted by foreign assimilation and nihilism. The Thracian Sofia herself is the final image of the performance, the Goddess of Wisdom in flight, unearthed from the pangs of hope.

October, 2014



## GREAT BRITTEN at the Alexander Kasser Theater

Enlightening, mystical, compelled by the bleary-eyed madness of religious conviction, the deeply personal and moving testaments to the mysteries of the inner life were embodied magically throughout *Great Britten*. From the American premiere of *Rejoice in the Lamb* to *Illuminations*, the early 20th century music of Benjamin Britten unfolded as a touching four-part series of spiritual devotion and the loftiest of loves.

*Unfinished Business* followed, played by the virtuosic Jason Ridgway, delighting with every step of dance along the andante scales of Mozart's Piano Sonata no. 15. Composed at the end of his life, the sonata gave body to the soulful movements of dancers Elly Braund and James Muller.

The wonderment of *Unfinished Business* played out as a unification of musical and choreographic forms. During the piece, the Alexander Kasser Theater stage was alit with the painterly visions of Alston at his finest, having matured with a special grace after 20 years with a fiercely independent company, choreographing nearly forty dance works. In fact, Alston formed the UK's first independent dance group, Strider, in 1972, just four years after choreographing his first oeuvre.

The second American premiere of the evening, *Hölderlin Fragments*, bared the masculine religiosity of Western Europe towards a light beyond the opaque veils of truth. The words of Canadian poet Leonard Cohen spring to mind, "There is a crack in everything / That's how the light gets in". The echoes of Hölderlin can surely be heard in their most subtle of traces, resounding as in the words of the third song in the cycle put to music by Britten, *Socrates and Alcibiades*: "He who has pondered the most profound thoughts loves what is most alive."

The very last image of *Hölderlin Fragments* mesmerized, with the talented Ihsaan de Banya leading the five other dancers with his opened palm upheld, facing outwards. The double meaning of the image presaged the final piece of the evening, *Illuminations*, which chronicled the flight of Rimbaud beyond the continental divides of Europe.

One is left wondering what a different world today would be if the hemispheres had been so joined under more creative circumstances than the economic and military histories of the past two centuries. *Illuminations* unraveled the recurrent themes into the wide-eyed night, as the French symbolist poets Rimbaud (performed fascinatingly by dancer Liam Riddick), and Verlaine (by dancer Nicholas Bodych), twisted and writhed under the religious and gender oppressions of continental Europe.

Transitioning from *Hölderlin Fragments*, to *Illuminations*, the double meaning in the visual concept of "fragment" was revealed artfully. As by cracks, and so by lights, the fragments of artistic expression performed during *Great Britten* stirred the audience to enjoyment.

The American Contemporary Music Ensemble quickened to the vocal dramatization of Nicholas Phan, who exhibited all the tragic mastery of a true performing artist. Alston, as a seasoned visionary, exhibited his immensely passionate choreography as among the most apt means to recover bygone historical and cultural remnants, or fragments, as through the divine imagination of art.

November, 2014

## THE LOOK OF FEELING at Steps Beyond

In a quaint studio theater at 74th Street and Broadway, Steps Beyond hosted a legendary affair, likened to the historic backdrop that inspired *The Look of Feeling*. Gaudy uptown apartments spilled light into the stripped down set as artistic director Bradley Shelver greeted guests with palms clasped, smiling genuinely. The intimate air was as welcoming as a friend hosting new guests.

The familial and neighborly mood recurred throughout the evening as Francesca Harper whisked across the floor after an unusual introduction. Hope Clarke opened the show with an ending. And truly, it is the ending of a life that spawned the performance, as none other than the mother of Harper, the late dance pioneer Denise Jefferson.

Clarke began her career in *West Side Story* and has since moved between theater and television, with all of the animated grace of her authentic bravura. A Tony Award winner, she is a true heroine, not only of African-American arts, but for women everywhere.

Harper enigmatically inherited the stage, not only in the shadow of Clarke, but also of her mother. Originally a one-woman show, the duo was charming and spellbinding in their delicate artistries. Harper filled some of the grandest shoes that New York dance culture has ever fashioned, and with all of the studied grace of a natural born performer.

From the White House to Harlem, Harper has danced her way through American history. *The Look of Feeling* exhibited this history as running through her veins, recounting the acquisition of the Jefferson name during the slave-era at the Monticello. She then moved to Coffeenville, Mississippi, prior to joining the Great Migration north to New York, though not without a colorful interlude in Paris among the expats of the Harlem Renaissance. "Magnifique!" she intoned, and with marvelous beauty.

Harper embodied her ancestry with all of the shockingly human strength of a full-hearted woman. Jefferson brought her daughter up on her own, while ascending in the vibrant arts paradise of New York City in the '70s. In 1974, Alvin Ailey hired Jefferson at his prestigious American Dance Theater, where she soon became Ms. J to a student body numbering 3,500. During the post-show artist talk, Shelver remembered her emotionally. "She made artists," he said, to tearful applause.

November, 2014

## THE SOUL OF FLAMENCO at Walt Whitman Theatre

Before anyone spoke, before song and the invention of instruments, there was movement. From the ground up, the human form awoke to the sound of the heart. From that moment until today, performance arts have flourished.

In this way, *The Soul of Flamenco* began, a diversely brilliant program from the company, Flamenco Vivo. Ángel Muñoz, also a choreographer, kicked the floor underneath a spotlight before a teeming crowd at the Walt Whitman Theatre stage of the Brooklyn Center for the Performing Arts.

The flamenco dance is not an exhibition of lovers. It is an act of defiance in the face of authority. There are also comic touches, and characterful exuberance. The dancers, such as the breathtaking Charo Espino, flaunted the wholeness of the human form as dignified and inspired.

Roma culture, wherefrom the flamenco arts are rooted, has endured hateful stereotypes in Spain, and across Europe. Americans alike stigmatize the roving gypsy as a bohemian thief. The reality is contrary to such myths, and each stamp of mesmerizing footwork choreographed by Carlota Santana exhibited this struggle for space, as for artistic freedom.

*Dance Magazine* named Santana "The Keeper of Flamenco". Clearly, she has not gone without due recognition for her humanizing artistry, having also received La Cruz de la Orden al Merito Civil from the King and Government of Spain for her lifelong dedication to flamenco.

The virtuosity of Santana spoke through her ability to harmonize contemporary dance with the informal, family-oriented traditions of authentic Roma culture. As such, the highly choreographed *Mujeres*, unraveled with improvisatory lightness in *Las Fiestas*. Further, *Música Flamenca* and *Fin De Fiesta* showcased the power of the music alone.

At the core of the performances, Flamenco Vivo, New York's most beloved, and longstanding flamenco company, presented eight-year-old Maria López center stage as the entire company clapped to encourage the future of flamenco, alive and fresh as ever.

November, 2014

## DOUG VARONE AND DANCERS at Joyce Theater

In the heart of the wildly characterful Chelsea neighborhood of Manhattan, the Joyce Theater marquee entrances with a retro ambiance. Opening in 1982, the Joyce Theater has come to represent the magnanimous foundations of modern performing arts in New York. None so embodies this history as authentically as choreographer and dancer Doug Varone.

For the December run of Doug Varone and Dancers at the Joyce, Varone himself graced the stage after an eight-year hiatus to perform *The Fabulist*. The evening also featured the company's newest work, *Dome*, set to the Pulitzer Prize-winning score by Christopher Rouse, and began with *Castles*, which is considered a masterpiece by dance critic Tobi Tobias.

Under the worldly high of the *Waltz Suite, Opus 110* by Prokofiev, seasoned dancer Eddie Taketa said *Castles* evoked a sense of fantasy. The dancers waded amid spectacular bodily emanations of relationship and conflict. At times humorous, and not without a strong dramatic pull, *Castles* featured six movements of dancers in complementary shows of artistic harmony, gathering evolution, and narrative flow.

The program was carried by two immensely emotive duets, with Hollis Bartlett and Alex Springer enacting a male rivalry of physical domination and gentle submission, while Hsiao-Jou Tang and Eddie Taketa inspired a mental conflagration of spiritual camaraderie. The full company stepped out onto the stage for three of the six movements in *Castles*, proving their united strength under such a masterful choreographic direction.

Highly anticipated, *The Fabulist* moved through David Lang's solemn although brilliant 2013 composition "Death Speaks". Like bravery genuflecting, Varone's performance captivated through every movement under the powerful lighting designs of Ben Stanton. *The Fabulist* led the well-attended audience to listen with pin-drop repose, as Varone confronted the depths of age, and mortality with a powerfully honest performance.

The world premiere of *Dome* concluded the evening, juxtaposing starkly with *Castles*. Whereas *Castles* captured the fantastic romance of interconnection and collectivism, *Dome* celebrated the chaotic perplexity of universal wisdom as it is expressed and envisioned by the modern artist. The "Trombone Concerto" by Rouse is a genre-defying work of epic proportions, confounding the traditional nuances of music towards an ultra-modern revitalization of form.

Only through Varone's time-honored confidence and multidisciplinary appreciation could the evening's performances have been so finely tuned with respect to the music and showcased dancers. With such legendary company dancers as Eddie Taketa looking forward to retirement, Doug Varone and Dancers will remain steadfast as a preeminent modern dance company on the world stage.

Clearly, Varone's choreographic integrity lasts, giving space and time for dancers and audience alike to engage in each performance anew. At the Joyce, New York drank in the transformative fruits of a living dance master, whose unmediated expressions revealed Varone as never before so whole, as *The Fabulist*, as Doug Varone and Dancers, and as himself.

December, 2014

## BLACK SWAN at The Ailey Citigroup Theater

American Dance Theater is one of the most ingenious innovations of New York and African-American arts. Through a glass façade, downstairs from the larger-than-life iconic photograph of Alvin Ailey, choreographer Iquail Shaheed opened his arms to a warm audience at Ailey Citigroup Theater on the evening of Valentine's Day.

Brimming with emotion, Shaheed expressed the inner personal challenges he overcame to present *Black Swan* by Dance Iquail. With his heart full of a dramatic love for the legacy of Alvin Ailey, and the future of dance as a catalyst for social change, he introduced a surprise.

A youth dance group from New Jersey opened onstage with a special verve, captivating the audience applause as the brightest of faces beamed, their bodies shaking and twisting to an upbeat pulse.

Then, gravity sunk in. The voice of Nina Simone spelled sheer power over the soundscape. Dancers Khalia Campbell, Coral Dolphin, Adama Ideozu, Alicia Lendgren, Amy Lattimore, Ari Mayzick, and Allison McDonald vitalized one of the most diversely expressive dance performances on the stage today, arguably ever.

What is more is the absolute relevancy. As Nina Simone deemed, her voice sailing fast through the potent acoustical reverberations of the hall, the artist reflects their times.

No work of American dance has so honestly and directly reflected the times than that of *Black Swan*. Iquail Shaheed choreographed the harsh complexities of racism today, while celebrating the history and presence of the Black ballerina. Interracial relations were explored through the visionary strength of dance to grapple at the core of social strife.

Vignettes moved from Black Lives Matter spoken word, as dancers crossed paths with gender-dissolving sexual liberation. Many scenes were hard to watch, simply because they were painfully true. One solo piece moved in response to a screen flashing the worst of racial slurs. Later, a dancer applied white-skin cream, all the more tragic for her impeccable beauty. Yet all were eclipsed by the emergence of a dancer in the nude, falling into death.

Above the ritualized, African-inspired calls to move, and become anew, Nina Simone spoke of the repatriation of the African-American people to come into

their own, with respect for the unparalleled brilliance of African heritage in perpetuity.

American society is the very ground where untold stories of heart-wrenching despair are told from the ongoing African diaspora. Yet, on such streets as Alvin Ailey Place, in the final movement of *Black Swan*, when the entire stage abounded with the movement of so many ebullient dancers, Dance Iquail showed how all people remember, share common ground and heal.

February, 2015



## HAVANA RAKATAN at City Center

Without missing a beat, Havana Rakatan exploded onto the Midtown soundscape with a supercharged magnificence.

Straight out of the Cuban capital, *Turquino* struck the first chord, a 9-piece band led by singer and bassist Michel Antonio Gonzales Pacheco. Drawn from his humble origins as a fisherman in Colima, musical authenticity rang sharp through the hall, nearly full to the brim.

Then, fourteen dancers lit up the stage with all the fervent strength of Cuban arts. As one Cuban artist vocalized in the midst of the pre-show discussion panel, the socialist economics of Cuba demand that all Cuban artists are career artists from the start.

*Act One* opened with a charming, freewheeling mood, as dancers evoked daily life in the hot, lush days and nights of modern Cuba. They lounged and mused to the unmistakably awesome musical backdrop.

Then, history began. *Havana Rakatan* is the story of Cuba in a dance, carried by the deft tones, and full rhythms of its music. The second piece, Afro-Flamenco, enjoined the Spanish culture, embodied in a flamenco dancer, with the original African migrants.

At the cusp of tradition the story then followed a *guajiro* (rural folk) couple as they moved, and ever so stylishly, through the bodies of the dancers, from the countryside to Havana. The dramatic bravura of *Havana Rakatan*, choreographed by Nilda Guerra, presented theatrical, narrative dance at its finest.

The profoundly beautiful voice of Dayme Arocena Uribarri came down from the *Turquino* bandstand to sell mani (peanuts), in full street vendor regalia, as the first sights of the big city for the traveling *guajiro* couple. There, the urbane and the pastoral came to a head in an exuberant fight scene, all with an edgy, honest humor.

The second act danced, sang and played through the cultural movements of Havana since the era known as Golden Havana, the 1940s until today. From Mambo, Bolero, *guaracha* (popular music), cha-cha-cha, Rumba, to Salsa, the performers delighted with an absolutely flawless re-creation of the changing times.

With seamless introductions of cultural modernization, one of the percussionists in *Turquino* could be seen triggering an electronic drum pad. In another instance, a solo male dancer exhibited a masterful modern dance set as his character closed down a club.

At City Center, *Havana Rakatan* brought a capacity theater to its feet, all dancing and cheering with the luscious moods of Cuban nights. Walking into and out of the hall, dance lovers gazed at "Transitions: Contemporary Cuban and Cuban-American Art", an exhibition including one poignant mixed media painting by Leslie Sardinias, *Diaspora*.

As one of the most captivating diaspora narratives in the globe, with particular significance in relation to American society, the Cuban culture has yet to write many more chapters. *Havana Rakatan* is sure to be a major player in the writing of that history.

February, 2015

## BELLADONNA at 92Y

The animate mastery of Adam Barruch thrilled and silenced audiences at the 92Y Harkness Dance Festival.

Set to the macabre vision of Nathaniel Hawthorne, dancer Chelsea Bonosky dreamed life into the literary creation of *Rappacini's Daughter*, Beatrice, who dances through a star-crossed love affair with a man named Giovanni.

Hawthorne's singular prose is full of movement. The tangled, venous human psychology of the story could not have found a better choreographer in Adam Barruch, who himself danced alongside Bonosky. From the first step onstage, Barruch's choreographic voice impressed with his unparalleled originality.

Sharp movements sprung into the dim lighting, as from under the garden thicket wherein the poisons of human invention lie still, and foreboding.

Sparsely staged, with nothing more than a desk, book, water tank, and herbs, the mood was austere, and fittingly so. Barruch is a young master of modern dance. The dramatic captivation of a mere duet has never been so strong than in *Belladonna*, which was created in the lush island environs of Martha's Vineyard.

Raised on rare vegetal poisons, the character of Beatrice exemplifies man's grappling with the raw power of knowledge and applied science, as a perennial double-edged sword. Barruch's choreography changed hands with complex creative intensity through the artist's physical interactions onstage.

Bonosky turned out a triumphant performance, powerful in her confident poise, although symbolizing the subjection of a deathly patriarchal will, as Barruch's character wallowed in the heart-rending touch of love against a body condemned.

By the close of the dance, many in the audience were silenced, while others vocalized genuine exhilaration. From *Silent Spring* to *Rappacini's Daughter*, *Belladonna* is a magical achievement, heralding an ongoing crisis between man and nature, as between man and woman.

February, 2015

## EVIDENCE at The Secret Theater

Juan Michael Porter II introduced *Evidence: the baldwin suite* with a truly majestic eloquence, his face radiant with pride as he intoned the name James Baldwin.

Baldwin carried the weight of the people's voice with a facility only known to such as was his extraordinary genius. Indeed, the literature of Baldwin was espoused with all due respect, and admiration, at The Secret Theater, a special off-the-beaten-track venue in Queens.

To open, composer and drummer William Hooker rocked the stage with mighty and entranced rhythms on his drum set. From a family of preachers, and knowing full well of Baldwin as a preacher, Hooker took to the drums as a way to transcend the bounds of the church, and to penetrate more deeply into the heart of an egalitarian society.

Choreographer Juan Michael Porter II danced alongside the stunning Jinah Parker, moving through inner conflicts that swelled and released at the energetic duality of their pairing.

Musicians Matt Lavelle, Tor Snyder, and Jesse Henry held down smooth, pulsing textures to the gargantuan sound of Hooker. His solos resounded to the steps of Porter, all the more dramatic as the floorboards shook to the beat.

The pure percussive energies invoked an African-American spirit, a call to the harmonization of the body through a sound, a movement, and finally a story. Ar'B.R.A.F exchanged stylish and heartfelt raps to passages from Baldwin stories read by Hooker, also a poet in his own right. The entire show, while still "in-progress" according to Porter, explored an impressive diversity of artistic dedications to Baldwin.

At the end of the performance, the musicians and dancers sat down for an intimate discussion with the audience, who were surprisingly spare in number. From the March on Washington to Occupy Wall Street, from Black Lives Matter to *Evidence: the baldwin suite*, the dance of history continues to reveal a character common to all humanity, yet concealed behind the veils of race and class, now as dramatic and demanding as ever.

February, 2015

## FLAGSTAD at Scandinavia House

On the first evening of *Flagstad: Triumph and Tragedy*, Scandinavia House warmed in the presence of Norwegian actress Nina Bendiksen.

Victor Borge Hall, a cozy theater nestled in the inimitable charm of Nordic heritage, is fitted neatly beneath Grand Central Station along Park Avenue. Adorned in a nightie, Flagstad walked through her bedroom.

The vintage scenography, and the candor of Bendiksen's authentic Norwegian accent, spoke serenely, and directly, into the hearts of the audience. Among those seated, laughing, and applauding throughout the play, was none other than Liv Ullman, perhaps the greatest Scandinavian actress in film history.

Writer and director Einar Bjørge crafted a masterful drama, shedding light on a taboo figure of 20th century music, whose reputation was cast in the unfathomable shadows of Nazism.

At 40, Kirsten Flagstad, an unknown Wagnerian soprano from Norway, made her 1935 Metropolitan Opera debut. That night propelled her into unforeseen stardom. In the next decade, she would lose nearly everything dear to her, except her fame, yet she was an introvert.

As Bendiksen interjected, Flagstad had not favored Wagner most, for in truth, she adored Beethoven over all. With a bright resolve, and holding more than her own throughout the one-woman-show, Bendiksen carried the tone of a historic voice with a fearless grace.

Flagstad was never personally allegiant to Nazi Germany, nor did she support their occupation of Norway. Nonetheless, her husband was a staunch businessman, who stopped at nothing to prevent a Communist takeover, even if that meant collaborating with Hitler.

Flagstad became a widow in 1946. Meanwhile, she lost the confidence of her country, and during her years performing abroad was unable to return. More, as her fame grew, she was becoming aloof from her daughter, who was living in the U.S.

Filmmaker Ingmar Bergman, one of the prized namesakes of modern Scandinavian culture, had been a partner and father with his muse, Liv Ullman. Unmistakable by her classic visage, she stood up to toast a glass of wine to Bendiksen and Bjørge after the show.

As Ullman raised her glass in the memory of one of the world's greatest operatic voices, she recalled growing up in Scandinavia, where children are taught never to listen to Flagstad, the shunned "Nazi sympathizer".

Effusive with proud emotion, Ullman promised to listen, as all drank in agreement, in the name of a woman whose tragedies speak to all women, yet whose unique triumphs beg the humanistic respect given in the superlative eulogy, *Flagstad: Triumph and Tragedy*.

March, 2015

## EVENT at The Joyce Theater

Merce Cunningham is still one of the most challenging artists the United States has ever produced.

Resurrecting excerpts from fifty years of his iconoclastic repertoire, Robert Swinston, former Cunningham dancer and protégé, presented *Event* with the Centre National de Danse Contemporaine - Angers (CNDC) at The Joyce. Under the flawless artistic arrangement and stage direction of Swinston, *Event* chilled and tingled the spine with an extraordinary verve.

The bannered color schemes of Jackie Matisse (granddaughter to Henri) waved in a soft, dim light, reminiscent of a long-abandoned alleyway or factory. The matchlessly original soundscapes of John King and Gelsey Bell evinced a powerful, unsettling mood.

The commingling of King's medieval instrumentation, *kora* (a stringed gourd traditional to West African music) and viola, manipulated by laptop electronica, mixed masterfully with the experimental vocalizing and precise vibraphone of Bell. Spontaneity could be heard through the heart-rending aural ambiance of the two composers performing live, as eight dancers moved with such intense, choreographic exactness as to create the effect of a living sculpture.

Yet, humanism and the arts were far from the grace of this historic collaboration from Cunningham and Swinston. Most movements exhibited a seemingly inhuman tension, withheld from the emotional warmth of relationship.

The demonstrative complexity of the choreography posed concepts suggestive of the overburdening power of machines and their effect on human movement, and thus all of life.

As dancers moved, half-human, half-machine, flashes of biological animation escaped the predominant oppression of all-physical, mechanistic technique, a contemporary reflection on art as technology, technology as art.

*Event* ended abruptly, with the audience gasping for breath under the sheer weight of the drama, as such a direct, albeit purely artful, statement as the long night of the industrial age broke into the dawn of intelligent machines.

March, 2015

## PAUL TAYLOR DANCE COMPANY at Lincoln Center

To capture the American idiom through an art form demands brazen courage, and a rare will dedicated to a lifetime of unapologetic originality. Paul Taylor is one of the few artists alive to tell the tale under a spotlight of unparalleled renown.

While the shadow of most choreographers runs deep in the presence of the dancers, markedly apparent onstage, Taylor is a master of creative freedom. If the late American dance pioneer Denise Jefferson made artists, Paul Taylor makes artists free.

At the gala performance of the Paul Taylor Dance Company at Lincoln Center, the largely black-tie audience blithely seated themselves after cocktails, a good fifteen minutes past the scheduled opening.

A mere seven rows from the orchestra sat the patron himself, quite unassumingly (and as a matter of fact, immediately to the left of yours truly). Yes. The 2,586-seat, five-ringed, gold-ceilinged theater is named after the very wealthiest resident of New York.

On to the show...

Company B eased and swayed with all the catchy lovability of gold standards, sung gorgeously through vintage recordings of The Andrews Sisters. Dancer Francisco Graciano exhibited a virtuosic talent for the charm of popular culture at the cusp of its greatest boom.

As the iconic vintage sound of The Andrews Sisters rang clear through the opulent hall, songs such as *Oh Jonny, Oh Jonny, Oh!* and *Boogie Woogie Bugle Boy* were choreographed thematically to the lyric narratives. Dancer Michelle Fleet turned out a stellar solo performance to *I Can Dream, Can't I*, desperate with American idealism.

The naïve, and self-confident values of prewar Americans exuded through Company B, tastefully costumed by Santo Loquasto. The three choreographic works by Taylor were ingeniously curated for the gala performance.

Opening with the relative, and the familiar, *Troilus and Cressida* followed, evoking a satirical disillusionment for romance. The unmistakable American character still shone through the singularly Shakespearian penchant for wild irreverence.



With an absolutely fantastic, gorgeous set by Santo Loquasto, the entire backdrop of the theater displayed a rich antediluvian world, hearkening back to the spritely, and demonic, sylvan escapade.

Dancer Parisa Khobdeh stole the show, as Cressida, in a reduced version of the comic masterpiece reimagined in the exuberant and unpretentious mind of Taylor. Finally, the Orchestra of St. Luke's enlightened the grandiose acoustics with the inimitable harmonies of Bach's Brandenburgs, after the name of the concertos performed.

Depicting the archetypal human form, as in a more classical style, Taylor's choreographic magic was realized boldly in Brandenburgs. Michael Trusnovec triumphed in spare, though sculpted poses, while Khobdeh moved with a stunning grace, distinctly perfect for the lofty solemnity of the air.

March, 2015

## CAVE OF THE HEART at 92nd Street Y

Martha Graham, the first dancer to perform at the White House, who received the United States' highest civilian honor, the Medal of Freedom at the Bicentennial, is peerless in her affirmation of an authentic American lexicon, as through the ineffable beauty of the human body in movement.

English nor any single tongue alone may capture the whole voice of the American people. It is through the visual and performing arts where Americans truly speak their language.

For the Stripped/Dressed theme of this year's Harkness Dance Festival at the 92nd Street Y, the sparkingly eloquent Janet Eilber spoke of Graham's vocabulary, in translation, of course, into the English.

There are three elements to Graham's choreographic language: breath, spine, and fall. At its core, the "unfurling of the spine" is woven throughout the choreography. Prior to the show, members of the Martha Graham Dance Company exhibited the awesome sophistication and humbling discipline behind learning how to speak with the body.

The transition from Stripped to Dressed revealed the mastery behind dancers Peiju Chien-Pott, Ben Schultz, Anne O'Donnell, and Natasha Diamond Walker, who fell, "to rise" as Graham said, and exhaled to inhale. Denuded of European classicism, Graham's choreography impresses honest gravity and the transparency of effort born of an interwar American soul-searching.

The four dancers perform the mythical tragedy of love and betrayal between Medea and Jason, with an artistic poise expressively unique to each creative presence. The set by Isamu Noguchi, and costumes by Martha Graham herself, are impeccably vibrant, fitting perfectly within the marvelous intensity of the archetypal drama.

While *Cave of the Heart* has been the toast of the most impressive stages on Earth, the 92nd Street Y performance provided an intimate evening through which to hear the incomparable nuances of what Graham said through the animate symbols of dance.

March, 2015

## JUILLIARD DANCES REPERTORY at The Peter Jay Sharp Theater

Juilliard Dances Repertory artistic director Lawrence Rhodes fused together an evocative evening, a masterful juxtaposition of opposites, ruminating on the perennial themes of tradition and modernity through dance.

*Dark Meadow*, by the eminent Martha Graham, sparked the performance with an inimitable, if atavistic flourishing. Her awesome vocabulary of bodily movement shone through the fine tunings of adventure and mystery.

*Personifying Ate*, the Greek goddess of delusional mischief and foolhardy ruin, lead dancers Hope Dougherty, Jesse Obremski, Leslie Williams provoked an animation of the indigenous and ancient, as they have transformed and revived through modern art on the world stage.

To the live performance of compositions by Carlos Chavez, as inspired by the native folklore of Mexico, Graham's stunning choreography and costuming proved unmistakable in the virtuosic hands of the Juilliard Dances Repertory.

Then, *BIPED* flipped the ultimate switch. Modernity, in the soul-shattering style of Merce Cunningham, was donned in full regalia. His choreography enticed the audience to the edge of their seats, as the lighting of Aaron Copp energized seventeen dancers.

Virtual projections of the human form splayed numinously before the eyes of the spectators, as the free harmonies of the digital age lay exposed within each breathtaking moment from the neoclassical oeuvre.

Free improvisation pioneer and new music composer Gavin Bryars offered a high, electric ambiance within the jaw-gaping chorus of waving, human forms.

The vision of the Juilliard Dances Repertory, to showcase classic works, has mounted the shoulders of the giants with a provident grace. Truly, there is no other company that so welcomingly envisions the place of young artists at center stage.

March, 2015

## THERE AND HERE at Schimmel Center

She awoke, as in the womb, floating through a numinous, fluid-suffused air. As to thread the very fabric of reality, musician and composer Hideki Kato synthesized textural sonar frequencies.

The lighting dim, a single dancer gravitated upwards, as a body submerged. *There and Here* drew the audience in ever so coolly under the masterful eye of choreographer Takehiro Ueyama, also one of eleven dancers performing.

As Kato intoned the drum kit to a medley of synthesizers, elements of Tokyo noise music intermingled with the Japanese-inspired movements in *Take*, Ueyama's stunning artistic direction.

Loosely based on the philosophies most popularly likened to Tibetan Buddhism, namely, the inter-being state of "bardo" (a kind of non-Western purgatory), *There and Here* instilled a neo-spiritual "Liberation Through Movement".

(The Tibetan Book of the Dead, literally "Bardo Thodol" for example, a guide for the dead through the "bardo" state, is translated as "Liberation through Hearing in the Intermediate State".)

The dancers animated bodily movements to the very extent of muscular potential, at once chaotic and uninhibited, then absolutely at peace. Finally, the soulful narrative led the audience on to imagine how universal truths are also true in the beyond.

As the dancers merged, the wisdom of bodily extinction and individuality became united. As on earth, so in death, and throughout the bardo state in between, togetherness incites independence, freedom, and the embodiment of all that is beautiful.

Or, could it be, that we are in the bardo state already, now?

April, 2015

## SHORE at New York Live Arts

In spring, people return from the wintered isolation of their respective, familial nuclei and return to form one whole organism, made up of all the parts that sustain a community.

*SHORE* is the ambitious five-event macrocosm programmed by the traditional Alaskan Yup'ik congregation of individual and communal spirits during one of the rawest legs of the solar round.

Emily Johnson, who conceived, choreographed and wrote *SHORE*, stood up to the polar cold front on the basketball court of PS11 minutes before her NY premiere.

She began: "Long before this land was New York, it was Lenapehoking." Johnson reached deeply within her core and, in a fresh bout of genuine emotion, told a creation myth of the Native land as of her own body, born of a primeval tree, musing and searching in all authenticity through her own Yup'ik heritage.

The dance began in the street with the purest form of song, one repeated note gliding through the crepuscular air. A singer led the procession slowly, as to turn the clock about face, back to the endurance of more ancient days.

The audience merged with the dance company following the original course of Minetta Creek, once part of the preindustrial landscape. Some say the creek still bubbles up along its old course at unsuspecting intersections from Chelsea to Greenwich Village.

A music box resounded lightly behind the eyes of all on the serenest of walks, moving from PS11 to NY Live Arts with eyes affixed on the urban night, transformed into the all but bygone Lenapehoking.

With thirty-five performers onstage, and two choirs accompanying three principal dancers, *SHORE* swept the audience away to a mythical land where the oceans are peopled by the breathing sound of waves.

Aretha Aoki danced to ecstatic, wildly evocative choreography juxtaposed against the solemn poise of Emily Johnson and Krista Langberg, who sat with intensely sorrowful faces, immobilized.

As in the agony of remembering genocide, displacement, and assimilation, Johnson and Langberg then woke to dance and catalyze the breaking of a cultural amnesia, and not only in remembrance of indigenous

ecologies. *SHORE* poignantly shows how all share this ongoing tragedy of absence, whether by denial, forgetfulness, or manipulation.

No artist could tell the story of *SHORE* better than one who speaks with the body, and Johnson has proved to engage in the multidisciplinary storytelling arts masterfully, and transcendently.

Until the final note, the full Emily Johnson/Catalyst Dance Company continued singing offstage following the end of the stage performance, to send the theatre-goers off into the windy, spring chill with the undying warmth of a communal embrace.

April, 2015

## THE FLOATONES at La MaMa

It was a sold-out show. That's saying a lot. The Floatones were last seen at La MaMa twenty years ago. La crème of New York theatergoers, thespians, directors, playwrights and respective crew members endured the untimely passing of Jim Neu five years ago. He was the challenging, shameless voice of reason for late 20th century experimental downtown theater.

And the crowd mostly represented those who knew the Neu heyday when it was...new. Yes, it still is! Neu is still as new as he always...is. This truth could be heard, as the loudest laughter cackled brilliantly from the youngest persons in the audience. La MaMa is over fifty, and looks as fresh as a 2015 spring chicken. Nothing of the over-the-hill, motivational makeover blasé could be seen. Set, lighting, costume, the reproduction was retro-reenacted punctiliously.

The actors doubled as vocalists, and tripled as dancers, and quadrupled as themselves, rocking the showboat with light speed theatrical ingenuity. All of the favorite existential pomp of Jim Neu's dialectical voice swung left hooks, home runs and little seats over the beach.

This original comedy is one for the books, if only there was a story. It's theater, as only theater could be, at its most authentic, modern, and real, all-too-real. Musing on themes of personhood, and togetherness, this is a dramatic anthem that continues to resound into the 21st century.

*The Floatones* play a song, and sing an act of urban solitude set against the artist collective's inspirational ebullience. Neu's in the spirit of such philosophically rich celluloid tragicomedies as David O. Russel's *I Heart Huckabees* and Woody Allen's anything, or even darker literary treatments in the vein, such as Chuck Palahniuk's *Fight Club* or Saul Bellow's *Herzog*.

Yet, as nothing else, *The Floatones* carried their tune gorgeously, and humanly, before the spotlight flickered over the first scene until the very last nonverbal joke. The cosmic joke, that is, the one that never ends, and always begins, like some stubborn mule plodding along, lost somewhere on the cracked cobblestone alleyways of the borough.

(That's Neu, now forever late, as we bask in his immortally staged glories without him, sadly, though not sparing the uncontrollable laughter he so warmly gave to us all.)

May, 2015

## CHERYLYN LAVAGNINO DANCE at Danspace

Cherylyn Lavagnino's choreography is an audacious blend of signatures, absolutely strong in her guidance of the body to fruition through movement and stillness.

She postures her dancers with an elegant gift, hearkening to the great namesakes of modern American dance: Graham, Cunningham, Taylor. Yet, her style is all her own, beatifically glorified in the unadorned hall of St. Marks Church-In-The-Bowery.

Nestled quaintly within the spring East Village hubbub, a modest showing gathered to drink in the magnificent inspirations of Lavagnino as she spun four choreographic tales from Czechoslovakia to Vietnam, interspersed with all of the artful introspection of the form at its creative height, depth and maturity.

The intimacy with which her works touch the musical compositions set to the dances is like a welcome shade in the midst of a roaring blaze, as the intensity with which the dancers evoke her visions.

From the modernist, or one could say, post-modernist, purely artistic creation, *Snapshots*, to *Nadeje*, which was informed by modern history, therein lies the creative genius, when myth and memory merge ever so fluidly onstage.

Violinist Jane Chung, and pianist Mohamed Shams flooded the aural perspective on the opening night of the performance, as they shone exquisitely, and masterfully, through Leoš Janáček's *Violin Sonáta* for violin and piano for *Nadeje*.

Fine costuming by Christopher Metzger featured the dancers exhibiting the deft intelligence, and enlightened spirits of the Czechoslovakian Velvet revolutionaries who staged one of the world's only successful, completely peaceful uprisings to oust a national government, and a Communist one no less.

Lavagnino's art carried the air of freedom as it was idealized, and enacted, by the Czech youth who went on to democratically elect an artist as their leader, the dissident playwright Vaclav Havel.

More, the phantasmagorical monuments of painting known as the Slavic Epic swept through the choreography with subtly layered motifs, as Lavagnino's sensitive depiction poeticized the significance of collectivized movement, as a dance, in the struggle for social liberation.



Returning to the relatively abstract, *Will* was set to an original score by Jane Chung, which she composed specially for the Cherylyn Lavagnino Dance Company, and performed live. Her sonorous moods were pure evocations of harmony and space, and the relationship they share, as in music, so in dance, and together, as something even greater.

Finally, *Ru* charmed, as truly the most heartfelt example of choreographic fulfillment. *Ru - a refugee's story*, provoked an enchanting homage to the traditional dress of Vietnamese women, known as áo dài, a flowing, pellucid garment fitted tightly against the hips, and open to the thigh, accompanied by loose-fitting pants.

Lavagnino is a storyteller of moving forms in the way she sculpts gender dynamics, to the empowerment of each and every dancer in opening their unique gifts within the company round.

May, 2015

## STREET SINGER at The OUT NYC Hotel

"No!" she sings. The first note sailed, as from the ruddy heart of the Seine to the mood indigo of the Hudson. "I regret nothing!"

In her words, *Non Je ne Regret Rien!*

From the infamy of Pigalle, to the ostentation of Broadway, choreographer and dancer Pascal Rioult threw a munificent 100th birth year celebration for France's national diva.

*STREET SINGER - Celebrating the Life of Edith Piaf* premiered to the world with all of the air of her gaining posthumous glory.

From the derelict streets of Paris, the petite, nearly blinded Édith, entered the world with the surname Gassion. Orphaned, and raised in a brothel, she first opened her legendary voice on the street. Decades later, the world would call her Sparrow, or Piaf.

Rioult formerly danced with Martha Graham, and so staged a hearteningly charged chemistry with Broadway star Christine Andreas.

Andreas has an uncanny resemblance to Piaf, who she evoked with a masterful grace. The act of singing from the toes is a rare gift, especially with such shoes to fill. Any other voice is but a far cry from the triumphant power and authentic gravity that was Piaf's peerless, self-made art.

The highfalutin cabaret décor dangled out in front of the anachronistically-minded audience at The OUT NYC Hotel. All were transported to nostalgia-land, where a song can change actors into their muses, and onlookers into the eyes of a bygone era.

Senior citizens and uptown hipsters alike reminisced together, of a time when to see Piaf at her NYC premiere in 1947 cost less than half the price of a beer sold at the luxury venue, a couple blocks from Times Square.

Yet, for those who could see through the limelight, there, the honesty of Andreas stilled every heart sensitive enough to hear in her voice the sound of the Sparrow. She held the stage with all the feminine strength of her enlightened homage.

The beauty of Piaf is that she spread her survivalist streetwise sense into the hellholes of the Second World War. From the bordellos of her youth, to the thick

of Nazi prostitution, she never shed her absolutely French spirit of resistance and liberation.

She saved well over a hundred prisoners of war by her ingeniously staged wiles. These numerous and incredibly courageous acts enshrined her reputation with the best of Europe's artists who the Nazis spared.

Many artists marked by such talent went on to secretly join resistance movements, such as the famed Greek-Jewish Rembetika singer Roza Eskenazi, also given an avian nickname, Sweet Canary.

The youthful sensuality of Rioult's choreography bore significant juxtaposition against the more classic repose of his and Andreas' presences onstage. The dancers exhibited the carnal, though soulful passions of life born as a star-crossed Parisian ascending to the heights of prominence in the golden age of the crooner.

Her story, as played, danced, sung, and kissed through *Street Singer* is awash in the deep, tragic and wonderfully magical romance of the Sparrow, in cherished memory.

As from above, she intoned through her timeless masterpiece *La Vie en Rose*:

*When you press me to your heart  
I'm in a world apart  
A world where roses bloom*

May, 2015

## FLAMENCO VIVO at BAM

Flamenco Vivo celebrated the inaugural performance of flamenco at BAM with high fashion, and dramatic ingenuity.

After 32 years, Flamenco Vivo is a true national treasure, boasting the longest continuous run as an American-Spanish dance company. The legendary co-founder and artistic director, Carlota Santana, greeted the audience, first in Spanish, all smiles.

The wondrous spectacle, titled *Angeles / Almas*, delivered an authentic melange of tradition to bridge cultures and epochs. Opening with *A Solas*, once specially choreographed for the company's 30th year, the style of soleá por bulerías begins with heartfelt repose, and ends on a light-spirited high note.

After a gentle and grandiose welcome, *Música* breathed a warm cante (song) from the background, as the musicians took center stage to embody old Andalucía, the intercultural forge that merged Iberian, Semitic, and African soundscapes into the voice of the Romany people.

In the wake of Andalucía, which fomented during the nearly thousand-year history of Spain as a Muslim country more likened to North Africa and the Middle East than modern Europe, the Castilian era then led to Latin and Caribbean influences.

*De Milonga* charged into the spongy hearts of the near-packed house with Afro-Latino sounds, as dancers flew "round-trip" through the *Bailes de Ida y Vuelta*, fusing Argentinian folklore in the *vidalita*, with the Galician *farruca* mode of northern Spain.

Truly, the exhaustive intermingling of cultures and histories has their finest and fullest expressions through the performance arts of Andalucía, long a global marketplace of the mind, where the heart of the world is sheltered by strong roots, and where the soul is free to travel beyond home to discover life anew.

At the close of the first half of Santana's exuberant direction, the already well-astonished spectators braced for one of the oldest flamenco forms, the tragic *Seguiriya*, set to a *martinete* rhythm, in homage to the complex and unsung life of manual labor.

As per her unparalleled artistry and dynamism, Santana alters the staging in an about-face that takes the audience from the theater to the intimate interiors of a Roma community in southern Spain. For the company's fall season performance

last year, she masterfully evoked the informal beauty of Roma street life at Brooklyn College.

The second half of *Angeles / Almas* went even further in towards an increasingly intimate portrayal of the heart of flamenco. The introspective sentiments of the flamenco artist became the highlight of the stage at the sharp hand of lighting designer Kia Rogers.

Musical director, and lead guitarist Gaspar Rodríguez, followed the intermission with a world premiere inspired by his full-length solo work, *Angel: Del Blanco y Negro*. Solos, duets, and ensemble direction and choreography stunned with incredible precision from each stamp of the heel to pluck of the string and inflection of the voice. Irresistible *olés* could be heard from performers and audience alike as the company illustrated an intuitive unison of deeply inspired sensual soundscapes.

What are the private dramas and passions of the contemporary flamenco artist? Angel Muñoz acted with an immensely authentic poise as he sat under the spotlight in the depths of contemplation. Dancers Antonio Hidalgo and Isaac Tovar accompanied Muñoz under cascading spotlights, embodying the fragile flicker and appreciable prowess of intergenerational continuity in the high tradition of the international flamenco world. Their impeccable artistry met a proud justice to the voice of a marginalized people.

Muñoz charmed with an enviable charisma that left not a few ladies gasping and fanning themselves with libidinous delight. Yet, the limelight could not have been whisked away so suddenly as the incomparable Charo Espino fluttered a magnanimous love for the enlightened magic of the art of flamenco.

As none other, Espino stole the show and animated the warmest and brightest of moods, a whole body of laughter and glorious Spanish womanhood to turn up even the most furrowed of New York's workaday brows.

One of the absolutely breathtaking features of *Angeles / Almas* is the seamless contemporary integration of wind instruments, as intoned at the virtuosity of Diego Villegas, whose flute, soprano saxophone and harmonica did more than justice to the rhythmic and melodic complexity in the superb compositions of Rodríguez.

Finally, the flamenco party ends with an invitation, as singer Felix De Lola waved the audience offstage to join in the continuity of after-performance antics, as relished during the Fin De Fiesta jam session dance-off por Bulerías.

As every unique culture and people around the planet grapple with ongoing assimilations into modern uniformities, it is such spirited communities as the flamenco artists of the Roma communities of Spain, who, in their uniquely bold and charming ways, continue to embrace the continuity of traditional beauty with all the love and strength exuded in such creative masterworks as gifted to us all by Carlota Santana.

May, 2015

## AL SON SON at Tribeca Performing Arts Center

Ever seen the real Roma emerge from the homegrown flamenco world of Spain? It's the kind of harmonic and choreographic precision that leaves a theater breathless, with countless eyes in a daze trying to follow each step of a dancer, pluck of a guitarist and intonation of a singer.

Not only is the local virtuosic artistry, as it is well known in Spain, untouchable to so many aspirants unable to devote their entire lives to the niche discipline of flamenco as a form of music and dance, but there is also the essential foundation of belonging to a family, a people.

Roma people speak a unique language, Calo, and share a common history. Still today, Romani communities remain one of the least-respected minorities in the world. Too many are fated to disaffected youth, the economically marginalized and the socially stigmatized.

Yet, the Roma culture, like every unassimilated culture, is a source of inspiration for its people, and its young people especially, to rise up and contribute beauty and life to their community, as to the greater society.

The fact that the contemporary flamenco arts are well received by audiences around the world is a nod, not only to the impeccable continuity of artistic traditions livened by world-class performers, but also to recognizing the struggle of a people to survive.

At the core of this experience of Roma culture is the preservation of the family, where the roots of tradition run deepest. It is no wonder that audiences are stunned and moved when a flamenco concert ends with an open invitation.

The music is for all, and the invitation only affirms the respect Roma people deserve as part of the shared, equal citizenry all people should rightfully enjoy within their respective homes, whether in Spain, England, or India.

Sonia Olla and Ismael Fernández are a truly thrilling duo. With the soothing cadence of Fernández, and the earth-shattering footwork of Olla, they fused to create a force of nature unparalleled within the communal round of what is a traditionally welcoming New York flamenco scene.

Together they have inspired audiences not simply to return to see the art in top form again and again, but to their continuing delight. They have moved the public to don themselves in full flamenco regalia, to dance and clap to the rhythms of *olé!*

Al Son Son brought together some twenty student dancers who studied intensively for three months prior to the show. They clacked their heels and snapped their fingers in unison, showing off floral dresses and suave suits with a lithe sincerity.

"The entire flamenco community turned out to give their support, so the feeling was really good," Judy Myers wrote just after the show.

Myers is a writer of film and flamenco. Her special weakness for flamenco is due to her ventures as a dancer and singer. She also sings in a large ensemble called the New York Andalus Ensemble, a lush musical tapestry performing traditional Hebrew, Arabic and Spanish songs of Andalusia.

Flamenco was born in Andalusia, a region in southern Spain, around the time of the Inquisition, when Spain shed its thousand-year rule as a Muslim country, and Jews were forced to either flee or convert to Christianity. One wonders how the crypto-Jewish culture, whose members continued to be an integral part of the social fabric of medieval Spain, may have contributed to flamenco.

"The flamenco community completely fell apart when Fazil's closed, so last night was like a breath of fresh air," wrote Myers, referring to the still sorely missed premier NYC flamenco community haunt that closed in 2008.

"Ismael, Bola, and Sonia are truly amazing. They really exemplify why family is so important in flamenco tradition," Myers added. "I broke out in goose bumps when Ismael and Bola sang together. It was astonishing that Sonia was able to get such musicality in her footwork, while dancing on marley rather than a wood floor. And what she was able to get out of her students was truly amazing."

It was clear to spectators how above and beyond Ismael and his son Bola carried their stage presence, just as they carry the tradition itself. Together with Sonia, the famed Fernández family spirit brilliantly demonstrated the inclusiveness and openness of the flamenco arts community, and how gaining interest from around the world only strengthens its source in the Roma people of Spain.

Ultimately, there's nothing in the performing arts quite like flamenco to cause hilarity. The comedic edge, especially delivered so tastefully by Ismael, really exhibited the resilient character of the Roma people, which in this way can be compared with Jewish humor.



Enduring histories of survival have hardened Roma and Jewish cultures alike. Although many pieces in *Al Son Son* dove into the depths of the heart, to emerge prideful and colored with the profundity of tradition in a tragic song, the air at Tribeca Performing Arts Center was light.

As is true for Jewish people, that the Roma have survived into the present despite historically unfavorable conditions in Europe is partly due to their ability to laugh at themselves despite it all.

June, 2015

## DÁLAVA at The Ironworks

Over a hundred years ago, in the land once known as Czechoslovakia, a Moravian biologist named Dr. Vladimír Úlehla walked the cemeteries and fields of Strážnice. He composed folk songs, enchanted by a world between the wings of grey doves and the hooves of the hussar's horse.

His great-granddaughter stood proudly onstage at The Ironworks, along the downtown east side waterfront of Vancouver to sing her ancestral heart out. Late 19th century vintage architecture commingled with a tasteful collection of ambient art.

Dálava, the recent, well-acclaimed collection of music arranged by Julia Úlehla and Aram Bajakian, is set to the haunting lyrics of Úlehla's esteemed forebear. Together, as a six-piece ensemble, their soundscapes intrigued the atavistic imagination.

Bajakian is a world-class powerhouse, absolutely smoking on three guitars, from the ultra-modern noise / experimental electric to the folkloric cool of acoustic fingerpicking. At center stage, the husband-and-wife duo stole the heart of the Vancouver International Jazz Festival.

Úlehla began each song with a translation from the Czech — words written with the understanding that songs are intimately woven through the particular place on earth from which they emerge. Songs are just like organisms, Dr. Úlehla would determine with his ear for ethnomusicology. Songs are adaptable, living.

Dálava exudes a reverence for the creative potency of ecological awareness. From the western edge of the Carpathian mountains, where the lyrics were scratched out of the Central European landscape, to the gargantuan madhouse of New York City, where Bajakian and Úlehla source their musical rise, the Coast Salish territories of Canada received the performance of an animate song cycle that thrives, renewed in the lush Pacific air.

The harmonic charm of Úlehla's voice dazzled all present, in contradistinction with Bajakian's wild magnificence. Accompanying with an especially entrancing quality, Peggy Lee's cello breathed masterfully through her unique, often abstract, touches. Dr. Úlehla inhabited a world rising from the black earth of mortality, where childhood is a feathery gift lost at a fair, and where love is "never stable, like water between the banks."

June, 2015

## GOGO PENGUIN at The Ironworks

The enviable and rare distinction of selling out a ticketed show at the Vancouver Jazz Festival is awarded to a trio that premiered their band in Canada the night before they stepped beneath The Ironworks spotlight.

Down the street, the 18,000 person-capacity Roger's Arena jumped with FIFA fans. In another direction, Erykah Badu sang for her thousands of lovers.

GoGo Penguin is fresher than salmon caught at sea. Their sound, especially impeccable from the studio, is unbelievably fine-tuned, synchronous. Every song is a delectable auditory feast.

With incisive execution, they have honed a style likened to the melodic masterworks of Medeski, Martin and Wood, and the Avishai Cohen Trio.

They've already joined the crew, so to speak, on the high ground of the jazz domain, as fans await three new albums to be released on the Blue Note label.

Interestingly sparse on improvisation, GoGo Penguin is a practice in compositional integrity. While much of contemporary jazz prides itself in arrangements sounding absolutely improvisatory, GoGo Penguin embraces artifice, and plays with it.

Often admiringly perceived as reflecting electronica-saturated pop music culture, they groove polyrhythms overtop signature EDM beats, while adding the tasteful intelligence and physical skill required to perform this way acoustically.

As rock eclipsed folk, and hip hop jazz, such acts as GoGo Penguin embody the transcendent mergence of what is simply heard today in music.

Jazz has an organic potency, a flexible nature that is transformative. For that reason, GoGo Penguin has not only appeared like a radiant blaze on the musical horizon, but has also gained a proud listenership.

June, 2015

## THE STANLEY CLARKE BAND at The Vogue

"I am Louis Armstrong," said the man under the spotlight at center stage. "No! You're the great Stanley Clarke!" a festival-goer called out from the audience. Clarke is one of the few still ticking who has spent the better part of the century among the pantheon of jazz gods and goddesses.

And at 63, he is as comfortable as ever on his regal throne, overlooking world tours and global audiophiles. Having recorded classic albums and shared stage presence with the likes of Chick Corea, Paul McCartney, Sonny Rollins, and Aretha Franklin, among an incredible plethora of outstanding names, Clarke is in his element in 2015. On tour with a spring-loaded, explosive quartet of young guns, Clarke's lead drives the kaleidoscopic frequencies into warp speed. His fingers glide along the bass with the exacting, and delicate mastery of a sound surgeon, playing with the heartstrings ever so penetratingly.

He played in honor of a friend who passed away. His musical eulogy was upbeat, moved by blissful memories of their Brazilian haunts, resonating with those wide-eyed peaks of life never so appreciated more than in trust. And he's remained true to his origins. He was once a twenty-year-old bassist who rose to the plate alongside some of the most formidable heavy-hitters in music with the jazz-rock fusion supergroup, Return to Forever.

The Stanley Clarke band is now a hive of raging talent, twenty-something prodigies abounding with uncontrollable jazz prowess. Georgian pianist Beka Gochiashvili emblazoned his aural body determinedly into those lofty sonic realms where the high ones lay in eternal repose. On a luxurious drum kit, Michael Mitchell provoked the revolutionary earth of stone to fall away at the earthquake rumbles of cataclysmic, paradigm-shift rhythms. The world has seen many of the founders of what is today known and loved as jazz music recede into mortal shade. One week before the Vancouver International Jazz Festival began, the world lost Ornette Coleman.

"Sound is to people, what light is to the sun," said Coleman, who freed jazz. Stanley Clarke is one living legend embodying the original character of the liberated jazz musician. There is something in the sound of great contemporary jazz that has simply shed every last pretense and sounds improvised, free. Thanks to the spiritual incandescence of The Stanley Clarke Band, jazz continues to carry the sound of freedom to succeeding generations throughout the seven continents.

June, 2015

## OKA at Fortune Sound Club

The symbol of the sun, a perfect yellow disc, shone brilliantly onstage, over red, for the spirit of the land, and black, for Aboriginal Peoples. Likely the only act at the Vancouver International Jazz Festival to vocally pay respects to the "traditional custodians of the land," OKA front man Stu Boga Fergie (aka DidgeriduStu) donned his Australian aboriginal flag t-shirt with proud solidarity on Coast Salish territory.

Together with drummer Julian Bel-Bachir, Fergie proved to a captive audience how the life of the heart is a beat, a thump: a groove. From toes to locks, the Fortune Sound Club moved, entranced, as OKA dug in deep up from the subterranean bowels of one great big lavish thanks, in all profound sincerity to the pale blue Mother.

On the day of the show, OKA released their latest album, "The Grassy Knoll," meaning the secret place where the family gathers on the land. Fortune Sound Club adopted the "knoll" soul. From the hard-edged streets of Downtown East Side Vancouver's Chinatown, against the fly-swarmed, bloodstained streets running amuck with the pangs of addiction and all forms of homeless suffering, the floorboards at Fortune Sound Club boomed with a healing force as OKA sounded off on love, friendship, land and family.

Listen to the Yidaki (more commonly known as the didgeridoo), says Stu, who breathes through his ancestral heritage among the Yolngu peoples of the Northern Territory. Mixed over a grandiose wall of electronica bass-led beats, his fiery hip-hop clutch on Yidaki is as hot as the midsummer sand of the Western Desert.

The Yidaki, he says, connects the listener to "country" by which he means, "the spirit of the land". In this way, he opened the sound to speak, in all humility, with respect to the First Nations people present. Many a song went out to them, and everyone cheered. Then the rumble quaked again, spilling over into the spirit like medicine through the blood-brain barrier.

He sang a lullaby for his daughter in his traditional language, and together with OKA blending the Reggae sounds and vibes of Coolum Beach, gathered in the most gravity-defying fun yet heard from the festival soundscape.

June, 2015

## THE BAD PLUS JOSHUA REDMAN at The Vogue

It's that awake-and-thinking style of jazz that has become the peerless sonic pulse in the brainwaves of audiophiles around the globe. Unmistakable by name, The Bad Plus has galvanized the musical horizon, armed with nothing more than honest-to-goodness originality. Joshua Redman is the cherry on top.

Fresh, like a sound you can bite into and feel nourished. Nothing of the canned tack and carcinogen-laced aspartame maraschino, Redman's tenor is a coruscating scintillation on the theme of yes.

As from a lofty peak, listeners can still hear the sweet spirituality of the tenor gods long ascended. If Coltrane had only come down from his ecstatic high of overtone harmonies and bellowing abstraction, his sound may have found a home reincarnated alongside Redman.

After tasteful jazz remixes that run the gamut of known music, from electronica to classical, punk to progressive, The Bad Plus is digging deep into the eternal questions of jazz. Pianist Ethan Iverson plays like the mind, drummer David King like the body, and bassist Reid Anderson the heart. Redman is the soul.

June, 2015

## SNARKY PUPPY at The Vogue

If the first casualty of war is truth, the first casualty of capitalism is music. Snarky Puppy is a reminder to the American (and thus, global) consciousness that in a culture homogenizing music faster than milk, there are still authentic explosions of human ingenuity in the midst of the seemingly endless mires of tasteless musical capitalism.

They do it all. Like a surfer paddling beyond the invigorating break of post-rock in the first decade of the 21st century, the musical culture of this decade can now be said to be clear. Snarky Puppy is the pure sound revelation of the 2010s.

And, as speechlessly indefinable, yet uncategorized, and simply beyond words as Snarky Puppy is, their immeasurable success is incontestable, and continues to swell. What neo-genre concepts are fitting? One wonders at listening, their jaw aching, unable to shut. Post-jazz? No. Perhaps, it's just honest.

They groove as a symphonic poem, building over rock suspension bridges, falling with the blues, diving through ska airs, and flying through big band panoramas. They become visionary with improvisatory jazz reflections, and crash into a funk gorge with Latin and electronica-inspired percussion.

Finally, they'll come up for a breath, the life essence of a party that is the apex of Western civilization, inhaling the deeply diverse traditions of American music, and exhaling fresh, raw, original compositions. Snarky Puppy has mastered the art of that musical breathing, all of the timeless dynamics of volume, rhythm and harmony to sustain innumerable listeners.

The Vogue is Vancouver's most beloved venue. As the Vancouver International Jazz Festival turned thirty, Snarky Puppy graced the heart of West Coast Canadian culture with a most powerful oeuvre of novel authenticity.

Thirty is also about the number of band members in Snarky Puppy. While only seven showed up to provoke Vancouver to sing (and even end one of their songs in a clever role-reversal of spectators and artists), their sonic unity is as multifariously splendid and enormously embracing as the wide avenues and dense thoroughfares of the Brooklyn streets, where Snarky Puppy calls home.

Bandleader and bassist Michael League shared the stage with select "pups" Chris Bullock on tenor saxophone, Nate Werth on percussion, Bob Lanzetti on guitar, Mike Maher on trumpet and flugelhorn, Cory Henry on keyboards, and new "pup" drummer Larnell Lewis.

They are all virtuosos, both mega vibrant soloists and impeccable team players. In the tradition of all noteworthy artistic creation, every last individual shone through the collective and instrumental soundscape with inimitable personality.

Truly, jazz is the triumph of American music. It has stood the test of time, especially in metropolitan and festival cultures, where much of rock and roll has aged to the radio fuzz of oldie-but-goodie hits.

From its inception, jazz has implied fusion. In this respect, Snarky Puppy remains true to the roots of jazz, embracing and transcending the entire gamut of sounds along the contemporary musical spectrum. Their songs are danceable, and, at the same time, will leave an audience paralyzed with astonishment.

There is a mysterious, ecstatic quality to the tone of the jazz greats who ascended with the greater cultural expression of the day and led social openness to new heights by the sound of an instrument.

It is in those moments of listenable genius that cause a brain to trigger the emotion of bliss, the spark of genuine laughter. That vibe is the key to sound power in the age of jazz. Snarky Puppy has proven one of the most trusted locksmiths of the modern heart, that byzantine fortress of conundrums and passions, wherefrom people are begging to be let out, to sing and dance for freedom's sake.

June, 2015



## MISFIT BLUES at Firehall Arts Centre

The uncanny and ingenious artistic resemblance of human relationships, Misfit Blues performs the tragicomic complex of relative mental states, the interplay of caustic vagaries, and invites onlookers to peek into a womb of loving solidarity.

Choreographer and dancer Paul-André Fortier is a true national treasure. Together with his accomplice, dancer Robin Poitras, they enlighten the meaning of onstage chemistry. Misfit Blues is a wildly intoxicating ride through the incomprehensible abstractions and piercing truths of two people experiencing themselves as a unity.

Opening the 27th year of Canada's longest-running dance festival, Dancing on the Edge welcomed Misfit Blues with the warmest of smiles. Its legendary reputé did not disappoint, as audiences were tossed from laughter one minute to the solemn gravity of witnessing a bitter love rivalry in the next.

Misfit Blues embodied the metaphor of dancing on the edge, so aptly fit for the festival opener. In life, everyone straddles the edge of his or her sense of self in order to reach out and truly touch the heart of another. And that, uniquely, is the artist's gift.

Fortier pushed and pulled at the hearts of a nearly full Firehall Arts Centre, a lovely venue nestled in the heart of Vancouver's controversial downtown east side. Flies buzzed in the open, humid air, as people filed in to their seats to gaze at the sparsely set stage. A mute ring could be heard as Fortier and Poitras walked onstage.

Robin Poitras performs with superlative dynamism; her stunning grace persuades even the stoniest of minds to bloom with wonder, and emotion. Vocalizing made-up speech and unbridled evocations, Fortier lunged against the boundaries of the dance form and entered into a theatrical treatment on the relationship of two idiosyncratic characters.

What began ambiguously etched in tight-knit choreography then spilled and cavorted with spontaneity and humor toward a breathtaking finish, bound to leave all in attendance with a warm heart, and a genuine smile. For some dance lovers, Fortier's artistic honesty may also trigger that too-close-to-home feeling. He's hit the nail on the head with this one.

July, 2015

## MOVE at Vancouver Playhouse

Preeminent dance companies of New York, London, and Winnipeg all collaborated to celebrate the tenth birthday of Move: the company with a world premiere collection of works by company choreographer Joshua Beamish.

Together with the Martha Graham Dance Company, the Royal Ballet of London, and the Royal Winnipeg Ballet, Beamish has solidified his place in the stars as a vital proponent of classical modern dance in Canada, and around the world.

After opening with a solo piece that he performed by himself, Beamish went from tights-and-slippers to suit-and-tie and greeted the 668-seat Vancouver Playhouse, the city's prime venue for highbrow performing arts imported from all over the world.

Over music from Yo-Yo Ma, David Lang, Shostakovich, and Bach, as well as Olafur Arnalds and Nils Frahm, Beamish created a world-class collection comprised of one solo piece followed by four duets. The program featured three Canadian premieres (*Adoration*, *Burrow*, and *Stay*), and one world premiere (*The Other People in Your Party*).

The duet is one of the most beloved forms of dance. There is nothing quite like the dynamic interplay of two bodies, with its reminiscent chemistry, especially touching as a foreground to the serene adagio tempo.

Beamish has a bright, original style, with traces of late greats Pina Bausch, as in the first duet of the evening, *Pierced*, with her mad repetitious drama, and Merce Cunningham, as in the world premiere piece, *The Other People In Your Party*, with his informal quirk.

After ten assiduous years, Move: the company, has proved itself to be one of Canada's most respected arts establishments, following in the footsteps of the greats and carving out a path to a special future, towards the optimistic transcendence of national and artistic divides.

As an increasingly prominent leader in dance, Beamish is only further tightening the ropes of classical and modern dance technique for new generations of international artists to ascend to the heights of new precipices and wider horizons.

July, 2015

## EDGE SERIES at Firehall Arts Centre

Vancouver's Downtown East Side (DTES) is one of the most blaring sacrifice zones of class conflict in the Western world. Along the East Hastings streetscape nightmares of addiction, insanity, and indigence spill and course like opiate-infused blood through the vomit-stained streets. For the average urban wanderer and lifelong resident alike, compassion and empathy are waylaid by depression and anxiety.

Square in the eye of the storm is none other than the quaint, amusing dance studio and theatre, the lovely Firehall Arts Centre. Over the course of eight evenings, Canada's leading contemporary dance festival, Dancing on the Edge, showcased fifteen performances.

In Vancouver, hundreds of dance lovers, if not thousands, have been captivated by the degree of awe-inspiring talent from emerging and seasoned artists, also applauding the incredible efforts of the arts community at large.

Highlights abounded, though there were certain performances that pierced the veil of wonderment, and exhibited sheer beauty of the body and mind as one spirit. Special performances not only made the audience gawk with pleasure, irresistibly seduced into another world of the physical imagination, they were also full with enough magical moments to make people think differently, tantalized by the ecstatic grace of the human body in flight.

Yet, the seducer is not immune to seduction. Such was true for Naomi Brand, recipient of the prestigious Lieutenant Governor of Alberta Emerging Artist Award, as she found herself relocating to Vancouver. Her choreography for *Re:play*, featuring dancers Walter Kubanek and Hilary Maxwell, had a deep resonance for those given to contemplating metaphors of love, gender and relationship.

Impressively, Kubanek is a strong classical pianist as well. The delicate harmonic currents of Chopin's Nocturne op. 9 no. 1, oceanic in grandeur and atmospheric in its magnificence, were heard from above, as Maxwell and Kubanek inspired each other with the gravity of their supporting and releasing embraces.

*Re:play* is an exercise in mutual partnership, and literally, of a relationship that not only thinks, but also acts outside of the box. The entire piece was set inside a box, quite too small for the two of them, yet, somehow, they were able to demonstrate how even when tightly confined, love is expressible, and as diverse as the visions of Brand.

A night passed. The DTES is a cesspool of mind-numbing horror. As the sun sinks below the North Shore Mountains, where the filthy rich light their sprawling mansions, the eyes of pimps, pushers, users, and sex workers open like the mythic, nocturnal gape of werewolves and vampires, seeming figments of the adolescent mind.

A woman stumbles in soiled clothes, mouth half-open in a drunken curse, her belly swollen with unborn life. Passersby wonder, what is the fate of her child? Here, tragedy mounts like an unstoppable deluge. Another woman leans outside of a flophouse, smoking deliriously, while a blonde, unwashed young man on a bicycle prods her with guilt. She's at a loss for words, and much more, in a place where exploiting the female body is one of the only means of survival.

*Femmes Fatales* by Meredith Kalamán is exactly poignant in this respect. Performed by an all-female cast, Teghan Fedor, Kate Franklin, and Kalamán herself, the choreography offered insight into the inner life of a woman in Western society. Over the last six decades, Canada has suffered an epidemic of missing and murdered women, who, as reflected in the prison system as well, are disproportionately represented by a greater sum of Aboriginal women.

Kalamán voiced not only the ongoing, unsolved tragedies in Canada, but also those committed throughout North America and Europe. As the recipient of the 2015 Chrystal Dance Prize, she is at the top of her art, and is using her prestige for social justice. Gender socialization is a source of bitterness, as women continue to be targeted, exploited and disregarded.

Women have ever sought refuge in customary domestication and patriarchal hierarchies that only stultify their individuality and natural-born freedoms with systemic oppressions. Ultimately, the societies that purport to exhibit the height of democratic egalitarianism society perpetually facilitate the murder of not only the female body, but also the soul of womanhood.

A day passed. A new dancer emerged out of the womb of night. His body, blank with chalk, quivered with inhuman intensity in the dim light. As under the curse of a hallucinogenic intoxication, his eyes burned with a flood of visceral agony for what felt like an eternity and was, in fact, the passage of a few very deliberately paced minutes.

Choreographer Jay Hirabayashi crafted *Oxygen* with the hellish delight of a quixotic visionary in love, with mystic gravity of simply being alive. To breathe in this world of lost humanity is one of the most gripping of affirmations for the modern soul. Set to the mind-swallowing sonic charge of "no wave" music by

the American experimental rock band Swans, *Oxygen* went places where dance so rarely goes.

Dancer Billy Marchenski put out a death-defying performance. His body transformed with the boggling elasticity of the very air, becoming nothing more than the chemistry of molecular movement. At one point, as he turned his back to the audience, his musculature and fat quavered in the spotlight. As he shook rapturously, moving shapes and gesturing faces could be seen in the contours of his skin.

A night, and a day passed. The condemned hotels of DTES creak with long-defunct neon signage. Chinatown butts its aging head up from the south, and Gastown rears its haughty gentrification from the west. That the hotel signs remain unlit by night makes the neighborhood look even more desolate.

At the Firehall Arts Centre, *The Mars Hotel* is opening. A vagrant jazz musician saunters into the hall, late, as the audience stares at a closed, red curtain. He invites us in, where youth runs wild like the bygone Buffalo, and love is as combustible as Chinese New Year in Gastown.

Originally a piece of flash fiction written by Vancouver writer, P.W. Bridgman, *The Mars Hotel* is right inspiration for a sharp, cutting treatment of love in the 21st century. Going a bit off the beaten page, from the fiction of Bridgman to the choreography of Ziyian Kwan and dramaturge of Maiko Yamamoto, dancer Noam Gagnon walked into the audience, dragged his gay lover onstage, and kissed him in the spotlight with a fiery, chemical passion.

Composer and cellist Peggy Lee devised a noise extravaganza of the heart, splayed to the end of all knowing and certainty, luring the audience to travel beyond the realm of mere contentment, to where love lives. It's a place called *The Mars Hotel*, and outside one can hear the sonic boom of engines revving to the masterful exactness of Aram Bajakian's unparalleled electric guitar.

Ziyian Kwan, also one of the two principal dancers was, at one point, adorned in nothing but a stylish trench coat and tight black underwear, as she rammed a leaf blower into an enormous white beach balloon, reading the word, "Love" in bold. The modernity, and the honesty of the dance, led the audience to reimagine the concept of Love.

And the dancers asked, as they threw their hearts out into the open air for all to see, and feel the common release. Then, the dancers took whatever semblance

of shame and repression may exist among the society present and blasted it to the stars by the raw creative energy of the performance.

Truly, Love is a concept that has been raised to the heights of theology. Like an exploration vessel in the tempest-tossed waves of secularism, true art calls into question every last preconceived dogma.

So, as the subjectivity of divinity, of god as within, has gradually come into social acceptance following the cultural and spiritual revolutions of the Sixties, there may be yet a revolution of love brewing in the heart of each and every last individual of today.

Simply, as a man once said, I am God, and shook the foundations of religion, so the masses may soon live with the idea that I am Love, and free love of its possessive objectivity once and for all.

September, 2015

## KOKORO at Wreck Beach

Butoh is a sacred modern art. Originally spawned of postwar Japan, Butoh has since invigorated the world to a new style of movement. Kokoro dances Butoh in the nude. From the lower mainland of British Columbia to the world, this Dancing on the Edge Festival surely lives up to its name.

The Butoh style of dance is, in effect, a radical form of knowledge, or way of knowing the world from the edges of human consciousness. A dancer is a visionary storyteller, the prime mover of animate life, and the voice of the body. Dance, or simply conscious movement, sets a specific ontological tone within any given environment.

Like a traveler falling through a cascade of mirrored reflections, the dancer takes the first step onto the ground of being. As such, Kokoro Dance performed their annual, hour-long celebration of Butoh at the famously, “clothing-optional” Wreck Beach.

Balancing over sand and stone, driftwood and puddles, Kokoro's Butoh dancers stretched their nude bodies beneath the reverent glamor of midday sun. As a small audience gathered, the horizon shone with faint stretches of verdant mountains saddled up lush against the Pacific shoreline. Many wore only a hat or backpack, standing amid felled cedars under the sheer solar brilliance intensified by pale ultramarine.

The waves lapped, as over twenty ashen bodies began eviscerating the human form with all of the awkward satire, uncomfortable tension true to the art. Butoh is sacred because it reveals the spirituality of the human experience. It expresses the estrangement of the spirit of consciousness from the body.

Much of human life is defined by this inner conflict of wonder: Why am I this? Butoh glorifies, elaborates, and dramatizes the experience of asking this question.

Tonguing, retching, and grasping into the empty air for a semblance of meaning, to get even the slightest closure on the mysteries of being, the sand-rasped, exposed skin of the dancers embodied the tragic beauty, the lonely insanity of human life on Earth.

They acted out the movements of birds, and beasts, waded out to sea, and returned to land with choreographic ceremony, every movement a symbol of ecstatic yearning and lost wondering. A devoted, small crowd of onlookers was

enticed by the ethereal beauty of the naked mass of human flesh, open, vulnerable, grotesque, and stunning.

It was a curious sight. The dancers displayed an archetypal form, in unison, of the essential collective act of dancing, inspired by an idea, a feeling, a belief, a question, a truth. Wild and primordial free spirits met with the vicarious character of history, that ubiquitous spectator, the objectifying audience of intellectual bifurcation: the public.

Yet, in this performance, it was not the audience that seemed normal, as they ambled quaintly along the beach, staring at the unfixed performance, sometimes moving toward the grouped nudes, sometimes evading their collective swaying.

And the dancers enacted this truth effusively as they broke form and were possessed by a sardonic laughter before individual spectators of their respective choosing. Their roving eyes locked with the indifferent and the zealous alike, and laughed brazenly in their faces.

Kokoro Dance has revolutionized choreographic art in this respect, calling forth the most authentic cravings of eternal movement as held deep within the heart of all. After all is said and done, the human being is nothing more than an imagined flicker, an instantaneous reflection in a waving world of mystery and charm.

September, 2015



## WEAVER WOMAN at Scotiabank Dance Centre

For fear of falling into the Eurocentric trap of appreciating East Asian literature through an Anglophone lens, what must be said first is that Korean author O Chŏnghŭi (also spelled O Jeonghui) is an incomparable visionary of the heart. Admitting a relatively provincial reading, though with all due respect, and in the spirit of utmost regard, she is the Virginia Woolf of Korea. An anti-establishment strength of feminism, she provokes her audience to reimagine womanhood as an empowerment of individualism, freedom, and humanity.

Her short story, *Chingnyŏ*, also known as *Weaver Woman*, almost begins with an uncanny similarity to the way in which Woolf's life tragically ended. *Weaver Woman* opens with the drawing power of a river, which becomes central to the fate of the female protagonist of the story.

Actress Maki Yi recites *Chingnyŏ*, speaking in verbatim passages from the world-renowned translation by Miseli Jeon. Costume and set design by Ines Ortner is a wonder work of draped fabrics and breathable cloth. Yi is first adorned in the heavy dress of the woman worker, only to shed her outer garments for the dress befitting her feminine beauty, alone, for herself.

Masterful Japanese watercolor paintings by Etsu Essence Inoue projected onto the stage background and into the glowing eyes of the audience, who enjoyed the tantalizing exploration of a foreign culture that resonates deeply with the people and culture of Vancouver. *Chingnyŏ* is an old story.

Originally, it was told in China, though is known throughout Japan as a famous folktale, and is also popular in Korea. For this reason, the artistic director of TomoeArts, Colleen Lanki, produced *Weaver Woman*. TomoeArts is a dance-theatre company that supports traditional and contemporary Japanese arts, whose proponents have spent a considerable number of years studying traditional forms of Japanese dance.

Finally, the music of *Weaver Woman* proved impeccable, as the very pulse and lifeblood of the performance. Composer, singer, and erhu (Chinese fiddle) player, Lan Tung, grasped the spirit of the story through her evocative voice. She sang folkloric melodies through impeccable sound techniques on one of the most beautiful, traditional bowed instruments of the world. Fellow musicians, cellist Peggy Lee, and orchestral percussionist Jonathan Bernard created the atmosphere of gravity, in which the audience could sink and be swept away with the current of the entrancing river that called forth the *Weaver Woman*.

September, 2015

## NINEEIGHT at Firehall Arts Centre

98. Seventeen years ago, Hong Kong became independent. "DEAR HK," a projector blinked to a visceral thump, as the pulsing paroxysm lingered (HK = Hong Kong). Dancers Michelle Lui, Alex Tam, and Milton Lim shook spasmodically under stroboscopic shadows.

Then, the background streamed in visual poetics. The word "CHINESE" repeated to the shape of the English flag, as bureaucratic national documents were eviscerated with instantaneous gravity. "MOTHERLAND" the projection flashed, "??". Sirens wailed to a fever pitch until a blank, white noise rang, piercing the aural spheres.

And then silence. Blinding light. The intensity of independence shrunk to the comic trio who mastered the dramaturgic brilliance of Stephen Chow. If China is the People's Republic, Chow is the People's Laughter.

Hong Kong humor, especially in the filmic tradition of Chow, is absurdist. *NINEEIGHT* does hilarious justice to this tradition. The wee "beautiful girl" staves off two young fighting men with nothing more than a motionless martial arts pose. Falling to the ground exaggeratedly, Tam and Lim shouted, "Lang loi!" (literally, beautiful girl).

*NINEEIGHT* is a play about the complicated psychology of a people who are talented onscreen, and who can smilingly welcome tourists with the best of them. Though, within the society, there is madness, rage, violence, trauma, and confusion.

From 1998 to the "Umbrella Revolution," Hong Kong is still a point of contestation among Asian people who are still very much in the thick of struggling against two oppressively dominant cultural systems: British and Chinese.

Lee Su-Feh of Battery Opera mentored choreographer Natalie Tin Yin Gan for this especially poignant thrill-ride into the heart of Hong Kong's youth, as defenders of an autonomous country, and as representative of a people on edge. Luckily, their robust sense of humor will likely sustain them far beyond the threats of the present age.

September, 2015

## VANCOUVER FOLK MUSIC FESTIVAL at Jericho Beach Park

Folk people are the People's People. Folk signify kith, kin, family, ancestry, and flesh and blood.

Besieged by ungodly wealth, the Vancouver Folk Music Festival called forth the remnants of the Folk and the saga of their revolutionary culture in the Americas. Supertankers amassed in the swirling tides of English Bay. The weight of the global fossil fuel economy bobbed in the shimmering Pacific like a pandemic of eyesores. From the south, yuppie academes and metaphysical nudists looked on from the ivory towers and overpriced cafes of Kitsilano.

To the east, Point Grey was a frenzy of furrowed brows, as millionaire residents stared at bejeweled wristwatches while the 11 p.m. festival curfew approached. The glaring chandeliers of West Vancouver mansions lit across the bay, with conservatives still wondering, for the last thirty-eight years, why the billowing of marijuana smoke and the sounds of the banjo hadn't yet dissipated.

Down by the water, young women greeted festival-goers, soliciting donations to support homeless victims of sexual abuse for the local women's shelter. They reminded Canadians, and visitors alike, of the appalling statistics, corroborated by the national government, showing that half of all women in Canada experience sexual abuse.

Sobered music lovers walked into the sand forests of Jericho Beach, where seven stages furnished the rare, oceanic ecology. Not a water bottle could be found, as the festival expressly banned the ubiquitous polymer commodity. An astute waste management team hovered over rubbish bins, with a discerning eye for compostable and recyclable waste.

Grant Lawrence, main stage host and CBC bon vivant, agreed that Vancouver, and truly all cities across the globe, should employ a similar task force to clear the way toward a cleaner world.

Outdoor festivals are a practice in spontaneous, communal solidarity. In an exceedingly individualistic society, everything is suddenly shared, from the human waste accumulating in the stands of port-a-potties lined like rows of hardened servicemen, to the smell of body odor from attractive dancers, while the music is in full swing. It's unavoidable, and all part of the fun.

Such a phenomenon, crossing the boundaries of society, culture, and ecology can best be described in the concept of the "Temporary Autonomous Zone" (TAZ), espoused by the anarchist thinker Peter Lamborn Wilson, aka

Hakim Bey. In ancient days, such as in the festival round of the Pharaohs of Egypt, celebrations musical and ritualistic overlapped, intertwined and merged throughout the solar year.

In the microcosmic experiment of Jericho Beach, dedicated solely to live folk music, the people returned to life for three days. Meanwhile, an unsympathetic periphery cast icy shadows of power, exploitation and capital. In one of the most progressive examples of arts sponsorship in Canada, where so much of cultural production is corporatized, the festival teamed up with eight different trade unions to host its reputedly superlative lineup of socially conscious artists.

Unlike the belligerently destructive capacities of national economic interest, and the classist privatization of wealth, the festival also sustains intergenerational community. Margaret Gallagher, the evening emcee and host of the longest running program on CBC radio, noticed how many past volunteers have handed down the volunteer shirt to their eager children.

For so many parallel reasons, folk music is integral to the cultural horizon of the planet. The music of the People, known most succinctly as folk music, is not only a mirror to reflect on the deepest and commonest of human yearnings and remembrances. The sound of folk music is also a window toward lands far and wide that have nourished and cultivated the diversity of human life on earth.

In this way, the Vancouver-based world music troupe Ivan Tucakov & Tambura Rasa began one of the first concerts of the festival. Tukacov, an acclaimed local guitarist and singer, looked out over the densely forested beachfront and patiently watched as a strong gust blew over the faces of infants, elders, and everyone in between, of all faiths, origins and characters.

He began to play a song from afar, beyond the continental shore to the east, across the Atlantic Ocean, where a wind once blew through the window of a curious youth and inspired Portugal to sing.

The Pacific mountain winds were then suffused in the lung power of flautist and saxophonist Colin Maskell, whose intricately precise dynamism artfully pronounced the rhythmic harmonies of the Mediterranean. Flamenco dancer Maria Avila and percussionist Robin Layne both swung to the flow dancing exuberantly onstage with an irresistible charm.

The Iberian wisdom of the troubadours has found a firm footing on the sandy West Coast soil of British Columbia. In fact, the Spanish influence runs deep in the shoreline of Vancouver, going back over two hundred years. The Musqueam people, descendants of the only local First Nation whose reservation is situated

within Vancouver, once peacefully welcomed a fleet from Madrid. With matchless New World hospitality, they laid duck down on the earth for the weary European voyagers.

New World vibrations shook the very earth as Brazilian *forro* accordion resonated with a vigorous lust for new music that can only be found from the likes of Brooklyn, where the band Matuto calls home.

Recently back from West Africa, where the US government sent them as musical ambassadors, Matuto performed part of the recording that followed, "African Suite." Matuto is Brazilian for "country boy," which, in the region where *forro* originates, essentially means, Afro-Brazilian.

Blending original music with Brazilian bluegrass and Ivory Coast inspirations, Matuto exhibited an impressive technical virtuosity and harmonic lyricism, as co-founder Clay Ross's electric guitar dazzled alongside Rob Curto's accordion magic. The core energies of American musical power, spiced with a bucolic Brazilian fusion, fix a classic taste in the subtle hands of stellar musicians, who simply rocked under the intercontinental atmosphere, calming the seaside winds to an astonishing stillness.

Northerly, along the Atlantic coast, from the Brazilian island of Recife, through the birthplace of jazz in the bayou of New Orleans, and into the Mississippi, the festival led on to St. Louis. The "Mound City" of pre-Columbian legend is home to a sterling pantheon of American cultural icons, such as Josephine Baker, Chuck Berry and Scott Joplin, to name only a few.

LaFarge has since become another name on the starry horizon. Curiously, the surname LaFarge speaks to the earliest roots in the contemporary popularization of folk music in America. A man now mostly unknown, Peter LaFarge, signed with Columbia Records to be the face of popular American folk music. That was before Bob Dylan.

Today, the song, "The Ballad of Ira Hayes," lastingly attributed to the voice of Johnny Cash, is one of the only remaining legacies of Peter LaFarge. His music, largely recorded with Folkways, stood up for the dignity of Native people. Arguably, as explored in the fascinating literary treatment, "A Heartbeat and A Guitar" by Antonino D'Ambrosio, modern folk music is based on a testament to the Native struggle.

Pokey LaFarge, on the other hand, graced one of the stages at the Vancouver Folk Music Festival with the sheer brightness of homegrown Americana jazz. His

lyrics cut deep, hitting the bone and striking the nerve, only to feel for a pulse with the saccharine warmth of a voice authentic to "The Big Muddy".

About LaFarge stood one of the hottest bands on the map, an absolute treasure trove of instrumental gems. The caliber of musicianship proved the most exacting in comparison with others who had shared the stage that day, as everyone in view rose to stomp and sway to the beat.

As far as the opening day of the festival, Pokey LaFarge stole the show, exuding all of the vibrant charms of early jazz, the smoking jacket style, and whisky snifter ease. Of special note were the fiery temptress, Chloe Feoranzo on clarinet and saxophone, and the ginger young'un, TJ Muller, on trumpet and vocals.

The first evening of main stage closers began with the sultry Mama Kin. She was one of three siblings performing at the festival, demonstrating how the family tradition is universal throughout the audience volunteers and performers alike. She opened for UK songwriting legend Richard Thompson, whose name makes the old-timers drool with memories of an age when folk music reigned.

The rain-soaked French kisses and listless Amsterdam strolls punctuated his mean-driven guitar with all the punchy strength of anglophone roots in the acoustic folk tradition. Thompson is a man whose songs have the prestige of having been covered by Dylan himself, and from that solid ground he performed the only solo main stage act.

Going from solo singer-songwriter to the Melbourne Ska Orchestra is perhaps one of the most contrasting dynamics in the history of concert arrangement. It's not every group that gets to fly a horn bandstand across the greatest of oceans, not to mention an authentic Trinidadian steel drum virtuoso.

The Melbourne Ska Orchestra challenged the very definition of stage presence. They were as amusing musically as they were theatrically. Hilariously led by the percussive genius of Nicky Bomba, also spearheading another festival favorite, Bustamento, the Melbourne Ska Orchestra is, to use the Australian turn of phrase, "heaps" of fun.

When a saxophonist took a romantic solo, Bomba was there to cool him off. When the soloist hit the ground running with a hot rhythm, he made him sweat behind a moving microphone. When the horn section introduced a phrasing, Bomba instigated a test of volumes between the crowded field of voices and the amplified reeds and brass.

At the flick of his wrist, everyone froze as he called out the various embarrassing moments among all, who then were released to the needful laughter and dancing of a people who had waited a year for that night. Finally, when least expected, Bomba threw everyone offstage and kept the energy on the up and up with nothing but a simple drum kit and two sticks, which soon struck almost every audible surface in sight, and without missing a beat, of course.

The first full festival day began slower. Sunbaked sands glistened before the shaded spruce and cedar. Families moved in atop the tinder dry straw grass covered in a mosaic of blankets as colorfully diverse as Canada. The weekend would prove a summery perfection of the coastal skies, under which people sank into the gloriously swimmable liquid azure.

At a morning workshop, Turkish oud and the stunningly textural voice of Ismail Fencioglu mingled with Hungarian tamburas, West African koras and Midwestern banjos. The lovely musicality of Söndörgö, Sousou and Maher Cissoko, and The Lowest Pair, all played in harmony, and to the time of the global heartbeat. Songs emerged from jams, and vice versa, presenting to the audience that uniqueness lives within diversity.

Somewhere in the cornering thicket, a Celtic band breathed into bagpipes and tweaked violin, guitar and bass strings. Breabach soon began with a hauntingly exquisite chorus of jigs, gradually exploring the respective heritages of the band. Speaking to the audience in the husky Scottish accent, Megan Henderson introduced the band, all songwriters and multi-instrumentalists.

The lilt and step of Gaelic airs danced in the inner ear with a bittersweet majesty, as guitarist Ewan Robertson spoke of the postwar period in Scotland before singing out a poem by the Orcadian writer Edwin Muir. The song, about the desperate economic migration of jobless Scots, many who eventually settled in Canada, pointed to the inherent endurance of folk music in an age of globalization.

The land is a perennial inspiration for folk songwriters, and for all people. Rural heritage is integral to understanding the folk traditions of all people and places, albeit more often than not today hidden beneath opaque layers of metropolitan urbanization. Vancouver itself is home to an indigenous folk tradition masked by a shameful and ongoing legacy of genocide.

As part of the Vancouver Folk Music Festival, Henry Charles, one of only six remaining Musqueam speakers living today, gives a First Nations history walking tour together with ecologist Celia Brauer. This is one of the most fascinating

aspects of the festival, as it gives local flavor to the truths of folk heritage in music, as in life.

Over eight hundred years ago, the descendants of Henry Charles built a longhouse made of cedar trees that would dwarf the largest girth in today's preserved forests. He is a direct descendant of a famed warrior, who fought the Spanish in the late 18th century.

Conservation biology specialist Celia Brauer spoke about how his descendants would not recognize today's vegetation, as so much of the plant life has since been imported.

Blackberries from India compete for sunlight among herbivorous dinosaur food, as Brauer reminded the walkers that the ecology is part of the greater community, equally as important as the human family. Charles corroborated university-sanctioned historical evidence with the oral storytelling of his immediate bloodline. He ended by singing a song and beating a skinhead frame drum for the First Nations veterans of WWII.

The presence of Henry Charles, and the nature of his stories, is enough to send the body shivering with awe and remorse. That there are only six speakers left among the First People of the land, where one of the most successful of Western cities sits, demonstrating, arguably, as among the starkest of examples, the continuing genocide at hand, as perpetrated by the socioeconomic inheritances of Western Europe. The destruction of the earliest folk music, heritage and life of Canada is palpable when Charles speaks in Musqueam.

As the salmon and forests of the Coast Salish First Nations remain salable before the maladaptive effects of capitalist exploitation, so the folk musician reiterates time and time again the importance of appreciating live music, and of supporting living artists. Perceptive, awake festival-goers who have a mind for local history and social justice are led to wonder how the commercialization of popular music has misappropriated folk music towards what, in postcolonial studies, is known as ethnocide.

Such was the plea of Quebecer Cécile Doo-Kingue before the final concert of the festival, featuring Angélique Kidjo. On an afternoon so hot that sunstroke warned in the balmy air, only so heavy as where ocean meets forest, Doo-Kingue performed her exclusive show with a scintillating rush of soul.

She plays a mean blues guitar, a humbly strong artist with a penchant for doing justice to not only the musical traditions of Montreal and New York, where she was born, but also of Cameroon, where her ancestors lived to create her. Her



latest album, "Bloodstained Vodka" is a tribute to the international LGBTQI+ community.

Her lyrics resonate with proud self-love. At one point during her concert, while in mid-song, she slapped her ass to the beat, reminding her audience that it's okay to appreciate the backside every now and again, if not at all times. Such displays really tap into the public spirit of uninhibited ribaldry and sexual playfulness. Otherwise, why is music played, if not to express at least some raw emotion?

Across the festival ground, the blistering sun poured out a heat wave in the languor of a dizzying late afternoon. The past twenty-four hours had been a glut of music, where piercing feedback and booming bass roiled the gut and weakened the ears. Entrenched walls of sound increase in volume from one stage to the next over the ecologically acoustical wetlands and fields of Jericho Beach Park.

Despite the chaotic flurry of tones in the effusive dissonance, such performers as Sousou & Maher Cissoko effortlessly transcended all sense of a divided ground. The People felt, danced and sang united under the wings of the loving husband-wife duo. Singing in Mandinko, Wolof, Swedish, French and English, Sousou & Maher Cissoko are also exceptional proponents of the *kora* instrument, a stringed gourd from West Africa.

The *kora* is traditional to oral storytelling of the West African folk musician, who would also serve as historian and genealogist. They are known as the *jali*, or griot, though today, since popularizing the instrument and its music, they are often now referred to simply as "artists". Aspiring to live up to the musical family tradition, Maher fled his father's home in Senegal, soon finding his footing as a musician in Mali and Germany.

It was back in Senegal where the pair first played *kora* together. The sight of two koras played by a man and a woman is as rare a sight as any on the contemporary scene where world and folk music share space. Together with the vivacious Samba Ndokh on percussion, accompanied by a bassist and drummer from Sweden, they sang, "I love you," in a foreign, African tongue, as the crowd danced euphorically. The Cissoko's stole the heart of the festival.

When it comes to stolen hearts, though, no one does it better than Basia Bulat. Her stage presence is golden, literally, as she skipped in front of the animated masses adorned in a glittering, sun-hued cape. Festival host, CBC radio personality, author and musician Grant Lawrence introduced Bulat as a fan, confessing that he has followed her since she released her first EP.

She shook the ground with all of the effervescent elegance of Joni Mitchell, making Canadians swell with pride at having cultivated such a young bearer of the brightest folk flame. Her lyrics alerted listeners not to fall into the tall shadows of her heart. As she stood on high, expressly grateful, her voice rang out through the exquisitely twilit horizon, a bath of colors suffused by her tastefully synthesized vocal frequencies.

While hailing from Portland, Blind Pilot is forever indebted to Vancouver, where they first played. Over a decade after the core duo strapped on instruments to their bikes and hit the trail up the West Coast into Musqueam territory, they are back, this time with a lush backdrop of eclectic accompanists and vocal harmonists. As humble as they are intelligent, to experience Blind Pilot is to let the serene pleasures and wise graces of life along the Raincoast sink in ever so gently.

The last line of their main stage show, written by vocalist and guitarist Israel Nebeker, struck deftly, straight to the marrow. "The only line that's true is the one you're from," Nebeker sang in the song, "The Red Thread", a direct hit against the nerve of folk tradition. This essence, so eloquently and memorably captured by Nebeker, speaks to how folk culture provides the solidest and most time-honored of foundations on which free individuals stand to affirm originality and independence, that fate is not written.

It is the art of popular song to, as Buffy Saint-Marie says, instill the effect of a 400-page book in three minutes of music. Whether listening purely for the instrumental musicality, or the immediate influence of live music on a crowd of people, folk music is more than anything a sonic vessel of stories, proverbs, expressions, and, at times, poems.

Yet in the midst of the heavy sonic gravity as is given to main stage headliners who crash the Vancouver Folk Music Festival, poetry is often lost in the total expulsion of volume and rhythm. In this way, Trampled by Turtles redefined a rhythm band, playing what can only be described as speed bluegrass.

Banjoes, guitars, and mandolins were strummed and picked at such velocities as to border on absurdity. And this happened to be just what the doctor ordered. As the band passed around a bottle of whisky, Saturday evening concluded with hardcore folk virtuosity guided by the edgy lyrics of lead guitarist and vocalist Dave Simonett.

Folk musicians are lyricists, instrumentalists and composers. They are also most often steeped in ethnomusicology and serve the public as guideposts, signaling

towards places remote and uncharted, yet that hold some of the more vital musical heritages that the planet has to offer a weary traveller of the soul. And then there are the folk musicians who are not only just a guide. Few are also a source of incontestable authenticity.

Bassekou Kouyaté & Ngoni Ba fit the bill absolutely. They are as promising a family band as any the world has seen, and that is saying a lot. After even a brief listen, any hearing person knows this is true. The ebullient standing ovation they received under the searing blaze of early evening at the last day of the festival was testament enough.

The wife of Kouyaté, Amy Sacko, calls forth that wholesome kind of sustained vocal majesty as can only be rightly embodied from the breast of a strong, firmly footed woman. She is made of earth and light, and her presence is matriarchal, exuberant and artistic, holding her own as the daughter of a legendary Malian singer.

The *ngoni* is an unassuming instrument, appearing to the unknowing eye as nothing more than a makeshift craftwork of Africana obscurity. Six strings tightened atop goatskin pulled over a calabash isn't exactly a guitar player's greatest fantasy. That being said, to play like Kouyaté is as fantastical as to aspire for the genius of Hendrix.

Tastefully pedaled flanging overwhelmed the heights of musical possibilities in the Western ear, as Kouyaté plucked the *ngoni* with ecstatic sophistication. He is a true master of the instrument, a voice unparalleled in his art. Alongside two bass *ngonis* and another in his range, Kouyaté humored the audience, offering anyone his young nephew, an impeccable talking drum player, for the purchase of two CDs.

The recording, titled *Ngoni Ba*, literally meaning "Ngoni Power", not only upholds seven hundred years of Malian folk music. The group has also brought a renewed focus to women's issues, civil war, and a host of significant inspirations likened to any artist of the People, that cultural revolutionary known as the folk musician.

Folk history runs deeper through the land than the mainstream. As such, folk music slows the pace of history, diversifies its telling, and ultimately allows listeners to appreciate the nuanced character, and enduring vitality of diverse peoples, regions and times. It has been said by the great Nina Simone that the artist reflects the times.

In that sense, folk artists reflect alternate times, out-of-the-way places, and distinct peoples. Especially in the modern day, due to the prevailing homogeneous uniformity of Western nationalism, to be distinct is all the more important to the common struggle to be recognized, and so is crucial in the very real and volatile fight to preserve the original spirit of democracy, equality, independence and freedom.

As the West continues to purport the conveyance and securing of these founding constitutional values around the world, often by means of military control and debt-burdening industrialization, the need to maintain and strengthen the reflexive distinctions of folk culture becomes all the more pertinent.

And then there are incomparable bands that fit almost no category, folk or otherwise, because they are, in fact, one of the most exact reflections of the people today. The evocatively stylish five-piece band from New York, known simply as Lucius, is the unsettled cry of the masses, heard as clearly as a piercing ray of starlight through the stormy cloudburst of now.

The vintage visages of lead singers Jess Wolfe and Holly Laessig were seen on the cover of *The Georgia Straight* weekly on almost every street corner in Vancouver as the festival ensued. And once heard at Jericho Beach, practically everyone agreed, they deserve all the recognition. Pop, commercial, futuristic, they are an amoral instance of modernism, hearkening to the jet-setting era of the fifties, and beyond.

Over sixty acts from fifteen countries as far-flung as the Eastern Cape of South Africa culminated in Angélique Kidjo. Her fame precedes her. She shares the preeminence of Mama Africa, Miriam Makeba, one of only two African women to win a Grammy. In 2008, she won the award for her album, *Djin Djin*.

When she sang Makeba's beloved "Malaika," the nerves of innumerable ears peaked with spine-tingling wonder. Here, all felt, is an original voice of the People, as all people, speaking in the folk dimension born of West Africa. The inimitable strength of her voice has emerged into the world as pure sound from the root base of humanity to the loftiest treetop aspirations known to the earliest of human eyes.

In terms of earning awards, Kidjo has been showered with welcome praise, winning a second Grammy this year for her 2014 album, *Eve*, dedicated to her mother, and which led her to record the music of women across the continent of Africa. At the awards ceremony in February, Kidjo dedicated her success to the women of Africa.

Kidjo is also an adamantly outspoken activist, speaking with a lucid intelligence about everything from climate change to the Ebola outbreak. Before festival-goers in Vancouver slipped away under cover of processional lantern light, she sang and danced with all of the gargantuan love that pours from her music, unmediated by way of her Beninese soul.

She echoes the words of African music superstar Fela Kuti, who asserted that music is a weapon. And she wields her power with the might of history, speaking out against the night with words as clear as the midsummer Pacific sky. Women bear the brunt of wars, she said, with a voice so strong as to make anyone understand why the United Nations would honor her humanitarianism. And yet, she continued, they are not called to the negotiation table when truces are finally won.

There are many reasons why folk music festivals, such as held in Vancouver, are essential for popular solidarity. One of the most obvious is to demonstrate respect for the creative spirit of women in the performing arts, and not only as entertainers. As true to the roots of every folk music tradition, the musician is a storyteller, an indignant historian who has foregone unattainable objectivity in the name of social justice.

Too often, voices are silenced by the unquestioning, unlivable quotidian conformity of the day. The folk musician is as human as anyone, a man equal to all men, a woman not superior to any woman, a child without special privileges. Folk music harmonizes the voice of all people at once, leading a way, through as yet unheard music, to the succeeding generations who will sing, play and dance eternal truths into life, and altogether in the unbroken continuity so gloriously exhibited by the folk artists of today.

September, 2015

## CALGARY FOLK FEST at Prince's Island Park

A funnel cloud split the sky in a terrifying twist of darkening wind from above as the Calgary Folk Festival began under a shower of cold rain that swept over the prairie river valley. In the foothills of the Rocky Mountains, the Bow River embraces the city of Calgary in power and steam, all emptying into dry air under the unfathomably vast Alberta horizons.

To the south, the high plains roll as lofty and wind-whipped as any dune spreading across the Sahara Desert. The dramatic landscape encompasses the largest First Nations reservation in Canada, the Blood Reserve. They are part of the Blackfoot Confederacy, the traditional stewards of the region.

To the east lies a dinosaur haunt of cactus-laden hoodoos.

To the north a boreal forest as important ecologically as the Amazon rainforest is now desecrated by what Greenpeace calls the most destructive industrial project on Earth. This place is today referred to as the Athabasca tar sands, where the second largest oil reserve on Earth can be seen from space.

To the west, the high altitudes of the American continent's spine stands, jutting, unparalleled.

In certain First Nations mythologies, the Earth and the human soul are made of equal parts direction (south, north, west, east), quality (emotional, mental, physical, spiritual), and color (red, white, black, yellow).

In many interpretations, these attributes also represent four ways of seeing the people of Earth, as Native American, European, African, and Asian.

The Calgary Folk Festival is a meeting ground for the four peoples of the Medicine Wheel, as it is known and revered on traditional Blackfoot territory, where circular cairns of stone can be seen above human fossils dating back 12,000 years. Locals and travelers sang, played, danced and harmonized with the riverine soil and impassioned spirits of the globe, resounding from the furthest point of every direction.

From the south, Bombino, the nomadic Tuareg country of Niger, opened the festival as the first main stage act of the festival, a most welcome call to summer. His rhythmic lyricism and cool guitar stung popped over electric vibes, calming and enlivening to the pulsing beat.

Like the mad rush of the mountain-cold Bow River, his presence steadily guided listeners downstream, to imagine, while at peace, the strength it takes to overcome war and exile through music. In fact, he fled an armed uprising,

Niger has forbidden Tuareg people to play guitar since 2007. In Africa, a musical instrument has become a symbol of resistance, as illegal as a gun. Bombino exudes the power of musical liberation and radical independence, both personal and cultural in every downbeat strum.

Canadian country guitar then waylaid the hundreds of attendant festival-goers strewn about the dank island grass. Calgary's own J.J. Shiplett surprised with homegrown tradition, as he gave people something to believe in with heavy-hearted laments that drove and rocked folk lovers with just the right nerve.

From the north, the Blackfoot Medicine Wheel turned to invite DakhaBrakha, a self-proclaimed exploration of EthnoChao that have lit up the 21st century airwaves like none other. Tribal drumming reinforces piercing vocal harmonies as the artists perform on accordion, cello and percussion that commingle with everything from abstract wilderness sounds to deft Ukrainian rap.

The Ukrainian flag flew high from the dancing pit as DakhaBrakha transported the wild children of their Eastern European brethren with music so original that it feels like it has a mind of its own. Now far-flung throughout the globe, the Ukrainian diaspora is well-steeped in life on the Alberta prairies, where they have thrived for generations, never forgetting the sounds of home.

Transcending all sense of direction, simply grooving to the celebratory feel of Friday night festival frequencies, Kid Koala's Vinyl Vaudeville stunned with a reinterpretation of contemporary folk culture. Nostalgic gravity brought all ears to their toes as Koala spun on nothing but good old-fashioned vinyl.

Yet, his show would not be merely a staged museum exhibit of antiquated musical modes. Halfway through his set, the Kid leapt offstage and controlled the turntables remotely, partying hard amid the crowd as his vaudeville dancers surfed the upraised hands. Like at any rabble-rousing fiesta, hilarity ensued.

As from deep within the cavernous recesses of earth, like the mortal wailing of a miner dreaming of light, Colin Stetson burned up the soundscape with stroboscopic woodwind electronica. One-of-a-kind, daring and masterful, Stetson brewed up a strong batch of experimental saxophone to lure folk music listeners to harmonize with pure, solo sound creation.

The power in his breath and ingenuity in his fingers invigorates the musical horizon, picking up from where Coltrane left off at his last and most radical of moods, and where Peter Brötzmann once angered the jazz lounge. Stetson has innovated a range of new ways to compose and perform saxophone. At times, what's even better is the look on the faces of his mesmerized following.

Fame is an illusion. If this is true, there is no better illusionist than the famous, the celebrity, and the iconized. Esperanza Spalding has transcended all sense of fame. She is a breathtakingly gorgeous young woman whose voice is a revelation of modern jazz, resonating with the names Ella Fitzgerald, Billie Holiday, and Sara Vaughn. That she doubles on stand-up and electric bass, and is a technical and soulful virtuoso on the instrument, has stunned the nation and the world.

In an unclear turn of events, she was billed to perform at the 2015 Calgary Folk Festival, though not as a headliner. Many in the crowd remain convicted that the young woman singing and playing bass onstage at 8:55PM on Saturday night was Esperanza Spalding. The program was misleading, as festival-goers read Spalding's bio, though most did not question what exactly "Esperanza Spalding Presents" meant.

Esperanza Spalding did not appear to perform at the 2015 Calgary Folk Festival, at least not as herself. Without alluding to the fact too blatantly, Spalding has simply stated that Emily's D+Evolution, the name of the artist who performed, is her take on reimagining herself and her art.

Has Spalding identified so intimately with her art that she has presented herself as another young African-American woman who sings jazz and plays a mean bass as simply furthering her art, despite her?

Or, is this all a conscious ruse instigated by someone whose fame is beyond comprehension for the vast majority, that Emily's D+Evolution is meant to obscure her fame so that one day she may return to the stage as more of an unknown artist again?

Whatever the truth may be, Emily's D+Evolution is a world-class project, featuring some exceptional artists, including the bassist and singer upfront who projected her voice with the same awe-inspiring beauty and harmonic versatility as Spalding. In the meantime, many fans are left scratching their heads amid the countrified airs of the folk music scene.

Then, there is Buffy Saint-Marie. The people, the folk--they know who she is, and still, after over sixty years, everyone stands motionless, listening, because



she is here. And she is as she always was. Yet, at the 2015 Calgary Folk Festival she sounded larger than life. With all of contemporary folk music history behind her, and with the life force of the present, everyone could see how gracefully, and potently, she pressed all of that revolutionary energy onward for the betterment of the future.

She sang the ingenious love song, "Until It's Time For You To Go," noting how much it has been covered by the most revered of names in folk music, as well as in uncountable symphonies and films. Her words are so true they sting.

"Bury My Heart At Wounded Knee" caught on fire with lyrics that truly gave weight to her conviction that a four-minute pop song can capture the substance of a four hundred page book.

Her protest music, as in "Universal Soldier," continues to steal the hearts and minds of succeeding generations who remember back and see how far society has come and how important folk music has been and continues to be along the way toward collective fulfillment.

That her words, her voice, and her music shake people to their core is not only a testament to the fact that a formidably commanding band performs them powered by her exceptional drummer Michel Bruyere, it is because people need to hear her words more than ever. Perpetual war in this age of terrorism, and injustices against people upholding authentic folk traditions are outstanding, unaddressed, but sometimes, somewhere their rhythms still resound.

Every year there is change. New seasons revolve, and expose the obscured and repressed, whether by the light of the summer sun or the chill darkness of the winter night. Newborns learn to feel, smile and spit on the warm ground from the womb to the bosom of a young mother.

"We Are Circling," sang Buffy Saint-Marie, calling hundreds of people camped on an island in the middle of the prairies to join her. "We are singing, singing our hearts off / This is family / This is unity / This is celebration / This is sacred!" she invoked, her arms spread out to invite the spirit of all within her glorified heart.

She told a story of how she learned the song from a hippie community in northern California. And as festival-goers gazed upon her, a living history from the era of as yet matchless cultural evolution, Canadians were proud to call her a compatriot. More, the multigenerational children of hippies once again felt they could express the love, freedom and togetherness that once conceived them.

September, 2015

## THE EVER AFTER at Simon Fraser University

Looking back thirty years ago, the world appears to have been a very different place. Soviet Russia continued to perplex the foundations of Western civilization from behind the Iron Curtain, and apartheid South Africa would not see a political resolution for another ten years.

In the Guatemalan countryside of the 1980s, rape and murder, perpetrated by the local government, would eventually lead indigenous women to stand witness against their former head of state for crimes of genocide. In 2013, former de facto president and military dictator, Efraín Ríos Montt, had his case thrown out, overturned in Guatemala's highest court. Never before in the world had a head of state been tried for committing genocide in a domestic court.

The past is not past. That was the solemn understanding of three of Canada's bright, literary treasures, Padma Viswanathan, Jaspreet Singh and Devyani Saltzman, as they facilitated the well-attended event, "The Ever After," at Simon Fraser University's Goldcorp Centre for the Arts. (Incidentally, Goldcorp is implicated in unjust mining practices in Guatemala.)

The two Indian-Canadian authors shared conversation, readings, and insights under the spotlight, ultimately defaming the Canadian political system for its callous impunity in the wake of genocide and terrorism in India. "The Ever After" was taken from the title of Padma Viswanathan's latest book, "The Ever After of Ashwin Rao".

Viswanathan is as humble as she is intelligent, prompting cerebral expressions that are deft and sharp. She has been celebrated with some of the most prestigious literary awards, and yet is steadfast, still in her thoughtful presence. Her book begins as a question of the spiritual seeker, whose emotional turbulence leads him to embrace formal religion as a way to cope with trauma. In the case of her character Ashwin Rao, his trauma is losing family members to the India Air bombing of 1985.

In terms of Canadian-Indian socio-political relations, the India Air bombing has a very revealing relationship with the anti-Sikh pogroms that occurred in 1984, a year earlier. Whereas the India Air bombing was a blatant terrorist attack, easily condemned and politicized by both the Canadian and Indian officialdom, the 1984 pogroms could not be subject to such a simplistic political exploitation. In effect, remembering the trauma became part of a national amnesia in India, and was lost to subconscious neglect in Canadian-Indian relations.

The nation-state is invested and so controls what people remember, and what people forget. Singh reminded the audience of this painful truth, comprised largely of the Indian-Canadian community who attended the event as part of the fifth annual Indian Summer Festival. Wearing multiple hats in the writing of his book, "Helium", he has balanced gracefully along the subtle differences of documentary and fiction writing.

Soon after the Israelis fought the terror of a broken ceasefire in Lebanon, and independence mounted against the Indonesian occupation of East Timor, there was genocide in India. On April 16, 2015, the California State Assembly ruled the anti-Sikh pogroms as genocide. Viswanathan emphasized this repeatedly as a hallmark of progress, with respect to the efficacy of the international community. Meanwhile, in Canada, *The Globe and Mail* refused to print an editorial by Singh, recalling the countrywide trauma as a survivor who, as a teenager, took refuge on the streets of Delhi with a family neighbor. Singh is Canadian. While *The New York Times* was ready to run his story, the premier Canadian newspaper would not publish his piece. "A real chill went through my spine," Singh said, recalling the bizarre memorial following the Air India bombing, when the leader of the Indian National Congress party, Rajiv Gandhi arrived to Canada, at the invitation of the then Prime Minister Brian Mulroney, to lay a wreath for the victims.

Only months previously, the Congress party had conducted state-sanctioned genocide against the Sikh population of India in order to win a landslide political victory. Singh spoke with a charged eloquence, reinforcing his points with an authentic gravity. The gang rapes and mob violence wounded the nation as a whole, he said, not just the victims. "I don't know what happened," Singh said. "It's not become past yet."

Viswanathan and Singh are not only contemporary masters of the art of fiction. They are also, like so many legendary writers of the past, profound humanists. In "Helium" and "The Ever After of Ashwin Rao", both authors represent how their vocation to truth and justice lives in the medium of composed storytelling. Their books hoist up the flag of the heart and imbue the human spirit with intelligence, reflection and the spirited appreciation for life.

Their stories, both in their literary fiction and from their lived experience, prompt the public to remember not only how certain important historical events are fixed in time, but how they still boil in the social consciousness. Their stories ask all people, whether in India, Canada, Guatemala, Palestine, East Timor, or anywhere, to remember the sanity, curiosity and perseverance that has characterized all surviving peoples throughout the ages.

September, 2015

## LOVE'S LABOUR'S LOST at Bard on the Beach

British Columbia is still British in more ways than one. Along the scenic walkway to Vanier Park, fans of The Bard sidle past the sail-strewn glittering façades overlooking False Creek and the craft beer mecca of Granville Island.

The Himalayan blackberry, introduced to the land by way of English colonialism in India, now overflows onto the path of island waterways and parkland flora. Nonnative, invasive, and delectable, the blackberry is abundantly wild for the picking beneath the art deco style Burrard Bridge. An awe-inspiring Coast Salish totem shadows the dense thickets of nourishing edibles.

The indigenous sculptural aesthetic invites seductively, with arms outstretched skyward. As False Creek opens out into the epic mountain sweeps of the English Bay horizon, a small group practices the Hawaiian sport of stand up paddle surfing against a lustrous cascade of oceanic azure.

Neatly arrayed against this iconic opulence of West Coast naturalism, the Bard on the Beach festival site is an unambiguous stand of red-and-white striped tents, exhibiting the national colors that exude a welcoming seasonal landmark visible from the beachfronts and harbor line. At Bard on the Beach, three Shakespearean plays, and an original Canadian play set to Shakespeare's life in the dramatic turn of the 16th century, are punctuated by two outdoor concerts with the Vancouver Symphony Orchestra.

*Love's Labour's Lost*, published in 1598, is one of Shakespeare's earliest works. W.H. Auden, who adapted the play for his 1973 musical adaptation, called the formative work "precious". And truly, *Love's Labour's Lost* is a piece of drama written by a young man, albeit one gifted by a peerless literary genius, grappling with the conflicts of interest that love and individualism breed in the post-adolescent forge of life.

Like Auden, director Daryl Cloran portrays an Americanized Shakespeare, given to the speakeasy morals of Prohibition-era Chicago. The year is 1926, and the classic verve is irresistible.

Cole Porter, cigarette smoke and whisky sniffers are rife on the scene as actors greet festival-goers with blithe, in-character fun. The air is a bounty of frivolous lust for life, when to be young was also to be roaring in a decade of spendthrift dreams. Revivifying all of the painfully authentic mockery of cabaret life, "Second-Hand Rose," played by actress Luisa Jojic, sings a song of indigent charm.

The outstanding costume designer, Rebekka Sørensen-Kjelstrup, arranged all of the sequins, feathers, furs of the flapper dresses and floating chiffon, the Sacque suits, bowlers and fedoras, and even handmade headdresses. Like nothing else, the fashion expressed the vainglorious era when privileged and deluded Americans felt like the entire nation was in its 20s.

The multitalented and gregarious troupe spiritedly intoned all of the favorite theatrical graces known to Elizabethan London, as well as to 1920s America and contemporary life in Canada alike. The artful fusion of epochal airs was masterfully executed.

The theatre, they say, was only one of three cornerstones in the life of the people in the bygone days of preindustrial London. The pub and the brothel were the other two. The joke of Shakespeare's comedy is that three young men would stand up to the moral degradation of their times and devote themselves to nothing but study.

The ascetic challenge of the three men, which has been cause for mirth through the ages, is the common groundwork to a lifelong of travails in the art of love. Perchance all men feel such yearning, whether at the termination of adolescence in their physical prime, or at the beginning of professional advancement.

The question is one of priority. Whether to pursue meaning, or beauty, that is the question. In so many plays of so many words, Shakespeare echoes through the heart chambers of historic memory, how human beauty causes men to question their claims on the green, wild earth, and to wonder if there are other points to life than merely to fulfill a presupposed moral destiny.

Yet, in the court of Navarre, Ferdinand, "The King," and his fellow gangsters, Berowne and Dumain, determine to renounce women and other earthly pleasures once and for all! They will live in books, and books alone. Books, however, lead some to poetry. And poetry, to love.

Private confession leads to public shame. And then there is endearing Don Armato, the quavering Italian socialite with a penchant for a quick tug on the heartstrings. To his own surprise, none other than the indecorous bawd of "Second-Hand" Rosaline strings him right up, and causes him to choke, breathless with passion.

His unapologetic wiles are an instant crowd hit against the dramatic tension of the youthful, scholarly abstention. And in a twist of wits, when Princess,

Katherine and Boyet show up at Navarre, they are not so easily as subject to the temptations of men as their opposites had assumed.

Love itself becomes the ultimate test of devotion. While Armato is quick to take up a three-year resolution with his new lover, the men of Navarre are suddenly reticent, and the women equally conflicted to be with men who had so easily cast off their personal commitments just to be with them.

Shakespearian language is a semantic exercise in punctuation. In the titular words of his early comedy, the young playwright points to the one of the commonest of conundrums experienced by romantic lovers. Only true love is effortless, he proclaims to a properly humorous effect. Love arises when all of its labours are lost. Whether it is a love for brotherhood, study, or for a life partner, that selfless simplicity is, paradoxically, one of the most exasperating of realizations.

Opening with song, and closing to the sweet tune of Twenties nostalgia, musical director Ben Elliott warmed the packed house with the warmest collection of standards, such as Fats Waller's Ain't Misbehavin' and, of course, Let's Do It, Let's Fall In Love. Every musician acted wonderfully alongside the superb cast of true-to-life thespians, as instruments changed hands, and the comedy provoked rolling bellies from adolescent to elder all the same.

September, 2015

## VANCOUVER SYMPHONY ORCHESTRA at Bard on the Beach

Mozart isn't exactly casino music. In 1788, it was. "So you can see how far we've come," said Vancouver Symphony Orchestra conductor Gordon Gerrard, reminding a full house audience of how, at times, historical progress is truly linear.

In an evening dedicated to Mozart, that unfathomable prodigy of Western music, the splendorous airs of Vanier Park ascended sky high under a soft dusk light. Solar crepuscules trickled into the outdoor theatre. The evening was set with a lofty ambiance under the illumined jade hue of the North Shore Mountain horizon.

The calm flow of False Creek sped off in the visible expanse behind the tuxedoed performers, a respectable collection of brass, woodwinds, strings and a percussionist. "The Impresario: Overture" led people into the entrancing harmonies of a sound that has captivated the minds of the world for over two hundred years.

The bygone classical era is nostalgic for the modern ear of the 21st century. Listening to Mozart, the public, whether consciously or not, is still swept away by a music that seems to speak, and not only briefly, or in monologue.

The music of Mozart is conversational, an aural discourse of diverse musical traditions performed and heard. His music speaks as in multiple languages, various regional manners, styles and accents. Some statements are profound, others light, though, reflective of the human mind, all are complex and move through a development of pure emotional ideas. Every note speaks from the heart and dances in a dynamic call-and-response between many performers simultaneously.

Clarinet soloist Jeanette Jonquil then stepped onstage, adorned in a sparkling indigo dress. Her performance poured original strength, and heartfelt soul into one of the most admired pieces of music ever written. Mozart's "Clarinet Concerto in A Major" opens with a melancholic depth, though one not lost to the persevering optimism of the artist at work. As the movements changed hands, Jonquil performed the clarinet through its barreling range with a solemn beauty.

Her breath fed into the spiraling scales, as she edged into each tone, descending and ascending, and back, as spontaneous as gravity, and yet with a mindful strength. She intoned all of the classic verve of the clarinetist who achieves a spirited complexion of harmonic rhythms that move and speak with the rushing grace of natural grandeur. Her performance transcended acute

technicality, and as a great performer at the height of her prime, she so elegantly hit that nerve, alleviating the need for lasting art that so stirs masses with the pure passionate intensity for life.

Jonquil's clarinet gave life to what once was edgy music, contemporary, and on the fringes of society, where it could best earn a dying, original artist his dues. Now clearly music of the establishment, the question one must ask in every new context of long-standing compositional music, especially as a lover of classical music, is: How does this music speak to people now?

Does Mozart still speak to the public? Or, is Mozart simply an icon for the public to set among the pantheon of Western culture in order to justify historical progress in the wake of the Industrial Age with quaint memories of a more pastoral Europe? If the unwavering exuberance of Jonquil's virtuosity is any indication, Mozart still stands on firm ground in the heart of ensuing generations, as she performed the entire concerto from memory.

The penultimate symphony of Mozart, "Symphony No. 40 in G minor", concluded the evening. The Vancouver Symphony Orchestra showed vigorous pride for the people and lands that have cultivated their popularity in British Columbia. Throughout, conductor Gordon Gerrard appeared a step ahead of the beat, swaying and dancing to the embedded rhythms like a silent prophet, omniscient amid the ingenious soundscapes.

September, 2015



## MAESTRO AMJAD ALI KHAN & SONS at Orpheum Theatre

There are other paths in this world than the clearest, widest, and well trod. Dominant paradigms are not the only ways to knowledge. That is the message of cultural integrity in the 21st century. The truth about other paths is that they begin from a different place and so have a different perspective on the world. They also lead toward a different future.

Classical Indian music is one rare culture form to have survived into the present with a gaining momentum, despite the scarring influences of Western hegemony in contemporary society, politics, culture and economics. In such places as North America, and Asia alike, where assimilation and integration endanger ancient traditions, the fact that classical Indian music has achieved a continuing stature on the world stage is a testament to its transcendent, ageless strength.

A tradition stemming from over two millennia, Indian classical music is arguably rooted in the eternal. Sourced in the Vedic concept of the *nada brahma*, that the universe is a manifestation of sound energy, Indian classical music is steeped in the echo of creation. In this way, the tradition encompasses all forms of music and spirituality.

So the concert, entitled, “The Strings That Bind Us”, began with the cordial and thrilled introduction of Indian Summer Festival artistic director, Sirish Rao. Special arrangements were made to accommodate attendees observing Ramadan and vegan snacks were gifted to all as the intergenerational, multidisciplinary show commenced. There is a difference between convention and tradition. These words of wisdom are attributed to the living maestro of sarod, a lute-like instrument invented by a direct ancestor of Amjad Ali Khan. The master appeared onstage and received a standing ovation before beginning the first half of the recital in the company of two tabla virtuosos, Abhijit Banerjee and Vineet Vyas.

The Indo-Canadian community showed their immense respect for a man who represents more than fame. He is a preeminent descendant and proponent of a core tradition of Indian civilization. He is the people's living connection to their cultural foundation, where, especially in times of social and personal instability, they can find solace knowing that their spirit is enduring and in many ways deeper than time itself. Although they may not appear to be similar, Western classical music shares certain traits with Indian classical. Firstly, in both settings, the sound of instruments tuning can be heard. The sound of every player in a symphony listening to their respective instruments individually is an experience that defines the inceptive ambiance of seeing an orchestra.

One of the signatures of a classical music performance is the preconcert assembly, in which instruments are tuned and performers practice scales and segments from the compositions. The primer always reminds an audience that the evening will be a performance especially befitting everything from the number of people in the room to humidity, acoustics, all dynamics considered. So, before the recital of “The Strings That Bind Us” began, the 25 five strings of the maestro's sarod tightened and loosened, discordantly and harmoniously into the aural characteristics of the Hindustani sound. Truly, harmony is not found without dissonance, which is not only why tuning is integral to the musical feel, but also to the techniques honed to play the iconic, microtonal harmonies of Indian classical music.

Then, Khan spoke with a barely audible softness in his low, humble tone, demanding every ear to pitch forward and prepare to receive the impeccable subtleties from his effusively disciplined tone. He would play melodies loved by Mahatma Gandhi, he told the audience, a gesture to the ecumenical, transnational unity of popular Indian consciousness, as shared by the brilliance of the spiritual philosophy that has so enlightened the world. One of the pieces he performed in Raag Bahar absolutely mesmerized, lulling his listeners into the profound cosmic breath, the exacting strength of a music aligned to the movement of the spheres and the flight of the soul. Like the foundational jazz traditions of pianist Bill Evans, or in the neo-traditional spirit of trumpeter Wynton Marsalis, Khan's playing strikes at the base of the source.

His sound emerges from thousands of years of life in Mother India, her rainforests, rivers, heavens and mountainous depths. Khan's fretless sarod strings bend with the voice of the blues, provoking earnest compassion for the round of human life as a piece of music, measured and paced by a certain time, and flowing through a nonliteral sonic narrative. Indian classical music has a special capacity to expose the magnetic sophistications of the human intellect as equally as emergent of pure nature as any other form of life. The conversational and impromptu call-and-response in the music is reminiscent of birdsong, with its sequential mimicry of sounds that are as light as play, and bring the audience to laugh at the sheer joy of living.

After a fleeting twenty-minute intermission, audience members filed through the lobby of the opulent architectural magnificence of the Orpheum Theatre, home to the Vancouver Symphony Orchestra, and were graced with a priceless array of chandeliers and exquisite artworks of diverse mediums. While most waited in line for a drink to calm their highly stimulated nerves, Muslim attendees were provided with dates and water to accommodate their nightly Ramadan fast, a symbol of friendship and demonstration of multicultural respect within the diverse Indo-Canadian community.

The sons of Maestro Amjad Ali Khan, Amaan and Ayaan Ali Khan pressed their palms together as they walked beneath the spotlight. The tabla players seated themselves to the right and left of the two brothers. Amaan and Ayaan both exuded a seamless comfort before the hundreds of spectators, as lifelong performers without pretense, who are calling forth a masterfully stunning prowess with respect to their forebears. Their styles are both unique to their own voices, and also in tune, harmoniously, of the same essential ground and spirit as the ancestral sound of the sarod. Everyone who knows jazz has heard of trading fours. Well, anyone who hears Amaan and Ayaan in “The Strings That Bind Us” will most likely be very impressed by the sonic rush of trading nines. And the Khan brothers play madly, with a hot energy likened to the spirit of youth. The eldest brother, Amaan, slides his notes more resonantly in line with the sound of his father, while Ayaan is a heavy-hitter of punchy strikes with the Javva plectrum.

Traditionally, a musician would never play after their guru. Ayaan spoke candidly into the microphone, "Especially not before your father." Indian-Canadian people in the audience laughed brightly, warmed by the presence of a family trio who, in their music, express such an awe-inspiring devotion to their people, the spiritual womb of the culture, and sound of the collective heart of India, whether in diaspora or at home. The Khan Brothers also played a composition by their father, as the Maestro himself sat between them, complimenting his sons as maestros in their own rights before the glowing eyes of innumerable admirers.

To conclude, Vancouver Symphony Orchestra violinist Jeanette Bernal-Singh stood beside the five musicians who beamed in the metallic shimmer of the three reflective sarod fingerboards. Her seductive violin became a revelation of the times, as she descended and ascended with artful adjustments of volume and tone, following the lead of the magnificently massive sound of the three sarod lutes resounding together.

If there is anything to walk away with after listening to “The Strings That Bind Us”, it is that Indian classical music is so holistically expansive as to embrace the relatively young generations of Western classical music. The imposition of the globally dominant paradigm has not diminished the rich musical heritage of the Indian subcontinent in the least. Maestro Amjad Ali Khan and his two sons exemplify how absolutely alive and well Indian classical music is in the modern world, and yet, that there is still very far to go, and all are not just wholeheartedly welcome, but must realize that we all share a common path on the journey of the lifetime of humanity.

October, 2015

## TINARIWEN at The Imperial

There are a few reasons why a nomadic ethnic minority from the Western Sahara became the poster child of world music in the 21st century. In truth, no one can really put their finger on Tinariwen, because they are the living, pure sound of a people, a place, and a time so authentically exotic. To categorize Tinariwen in predefined musical genres is as elusive as believing in a mirage.

Outside the venue, The Imperial, an eclectic grouping of Canadian audiophiles formed a line in the bleeding heart of Vancouver. On the edge of fly-bitten Chinatown, third-world reminiscences of East Hastings besieged local world music lovers, who arrived from all walks of life, albeit representing a privileged class of concertgoers. A shirtless, hard-luck Canadian man peddled clothing in a manner that could have occurred simultaneously in Lagos, Cairo or Timbuktu.

A private venue, furnished with a stunning, modern architectural aesthetic, and all with a dimly lit Chinese air as replicas of the Terracotta Army stood guard on ceiling-high platforms. A smoky indigo blush cast throughout the room as people met, ordered drinks, and waited.

The latest album from the Grammy award-winning troupe, "Emaar", was displayed in vinyl and disc at the venue entrance, along with all of the usual merchandise. Fans anticipated the uncanny rhythmic minimalism of the Sahara, with Tuareg vocal harmonies reverberating against the cool electric spiraling of guitar from one of the humblest musical presences and yet perhaps the most badass of sounds out there today.

Tinariwen walked through the crowd, as one of the people, donned in full Malian folk regalia, the characteristic long-flowing garb from one of the remotest of African landscapes. The iconic visage of founder Ibrahim Ag Alhabib vanished like a mirage before the onlookers, as everyone realized he would be missed.

Led by one of the originals from the 1980s, when Tinariwen first formed, Abdallah Ag Alhousseyni clapped, rapped and plucked the audience into shape, transporting everyone from the volcanic Pacific city to the heart-warming pulse of endless dunes against a cloudless moonlit sky. Everyone sings. The music is communal, and so embodies the strength of a people, as united, listening to one another on the path to collective freedom in music.

Guitarist and singer Elaga Ag Hamid stood in for Alhabib as a centerpiece, as the only one onstage with his headscarf lifted for devout listeners to see just how placid the face of a musician can become when bathed in the echoes of ancestral song.

The type of music known under one of the vaguest of subgenres "world" is rife with contradiction, puzzlement and misappropriation. There are three distinct artists who fit the bill. World musicians are people who either play to a global audience, or perform in non-Western musical styles. Secondly, they are the multigenerational and first-generation immigrants of Western nations who preserve ancestral musical heritage. Then, there are the folk, indigenous and minority peoples of the globe, so few of whom have graced the main stage spotlight of musical culture in the West.

Tinariwen has not only fallen into the latter identity, they have created it for the entire contemporary world. The reflective, long-flowing garb of Tuareg men are topped off with head coverings to shield fragile human skin from the sting of their sandstorm-whipped homelands. Ostentatious clothing in a Western city is contextually dissimilar to the extremely harsh natural environment in which Tuareg people have lived for centuries.

The endless dunes of Mali and Niger are worlds apart from downtown east side Vancouver, where The Imperial saw the celebrated African troupe walk humbly onstage beneath Chinese sculpture. They stood above an upright crowd representing socially diverse, if economically privileged Canadian audiophiles.

Despite having released their first album in 2001, later winning a Grammy and establishing an enviable online presence, so many in the audience had never seen Tinariwen live, a cause for celebration in and of itself. The band has been denied entry into Canada in the past at the discretion of immigration authorities.

Tinariwen formed in exile. In Africa, music is a weapon. The late, great Fela Kuti said as much, and still today this truth rings tragically clear. In Niger, for example, the guitar is outlawed, and Tuareg people are incriminated if they're caught playing one.

The genius of Tinariwen is the African desert blues sound of the electric guitar, the highly listenable blend of minimalist melodies and simple downbeats that create a diverse range, from dance hall vibes to café soundscapes. Richly multilayered vocal harmonies in Tuareg language are echoed by the cool, blithely evocative electric. It's a perfect marriage of Western and African, of indigenous and global.

October, 2015

## BROOKLYN RAGA MASSIVE at Rubin Museum Theater

Opening in Chelsea in 2004, the Rubin Museum of Art has since enlightened worldly art lovers and enriched the masses with a sense of the sacred in the heart of New York.

Truly part of the spiritual landscape of the Big Apple, the Rubin Museum is a treasure trove of Nepalese and Tibetan art from the last millennium, and is also touched by the graces of ingenious artisans from across Asia and the world.

Masks of the storytellers steeped in now obsolete traditions of theater in Japan stand beside the costumed magic of Mongolian shamanism. The wings of the thunderbird from the indigenous Coast Salish peoples from the northwest coast are outstretched above the heavenly mandalas of Buddhist painting.

Every Wednesday, world musicians delight in the acoustical soundscape with rich tapestries of sonic glory from around the world, and India especially.

Two days before Brooklyn Raga Massive made a most welcome appearance at the Rubin Museum Theater below the candlelit café, Anjana Roy, a sitar player from Delhi sparked a most incandescent three hours of harmonic effulgence.

Together with percussionist Polash Gomes on tabla, she sat proudly before the lush cosmic backdrop, furnished with a thousand year old sandstone sculpture of Ganesha from Madhya Pradesh and an 800 year old semiprecious stone inlaid copper stupa from Tibet.

The tradition of women sitar players is profoundly important. One generation from the greatest sitar player known to the West, Ravi Shankar, Anoushka Shankar has delighted New York audiences at Carnegie Hall since she was in her teens. Like Shankar, Anjana Roy is a strong embodiment of the empowering stance of Indian women in the performing arts despite an overwhelming culture of misogynistic patriarchy and male-dominated abuses that women constantly face in the region.

Then there were twenty. Brooklyn Raga Massive broke the record for most musicians onstage at the Rubin Museum Theater. A full house streamed through popcorn-fuming entranceways bedecked with the anatomical medical charts of ancient Buddhist healers.

To perform Terry Riley's proto-minimalist masterpiece, "In C" Brooklyn Raga Massive had everyone from the five boroughs to the steppes of Central Asia

swaying to the repetitive harmonies and circulating rhythms that coursed and interwove like the animate pulse of a human body.

An hour passed. Nearly overwhelmed by a newfound consciousness of the inner momentum that is life at work, "In C" released timeless secrets of creation in the forty hands of Brooklyn Raga Massive. As one, they are a personification of the many-armed Avalokitesvara, god-like through unprecedented musical versatility.

They began with the signature sound of a raga opening with the enchanting lilts and gentle haunts of ancient echoes. Experimental modern composition then seeped in, gradually reverberating throughout the subterranean chamber with a gaining intensity.

The super group features co-founder Camila Celin on sarod, recently nominated for a world music Grammy, among two other women, a violinist and virtuoso of the recorder. Every musician in the truly massive band enfolded and invigorated an incredulous web of arrangements and improvisations.

"In C" cascaded off into the nebulous resounding of Indian tradition led by Hindustani vocals from the inimitable talent of Samarth Nagarkar and Carnatic violin from Arun Ramamurthy. The musicians then all re-assembled under the spiraling museum stairway to jam and dance on jazz standards and world fusion, inspiring art gawkers and wine guzzlers to fly from satori to nirvana up and down five floors of priceless, freely open collections of sacred art.

October, 2015

## TABLE OF SILENCE at Lincoln Center

In my arts criticism, I have sought to maintain an objective voice. As the preeminent American historian Howard Zinn said, "Objectivity is neither possible nor desirable." The fifth annual 9/11 memorial performance of Table of Silence demands a personal perspective:

The first week I attended high school, a friend stopped me in the hallway on the way to our morning class. He said we'd been bombed. My photography teacher soon briefed us. She had always taught us about the benefits of staying sober, and that morning--for many I've imagined--that became a hard lesson to follow.

A fellow student from Norway wore American flag earrings. I'll never forget the sparkling beauty of those earrings hanging from her youthful, naive face.

At home, the news flash played and replayed. I didn't want to see it. I went upstairs to my room, where the nights were a refuge and the days a call to movement. Then, I returned downstairs. Reality had not subsided. There were no dreams to awaken from that day with the relief that it was all made up. No. It was happening.

I spoke with my father on the phone, watching the explosions, the demolished building, and avalanche of opaque dust filling the avenues like a volcanic lahar. "I'll fight! I'll go to war." I said into the phone, my voice trailing off into the silence on the other line. Solemnly, he spoke words that I'll never forget.

"When you see the other guy around the corner, and you have to make the decision to shoot, think about that, if you want to make that decision," he replied, without hesitation in his voice, a presence of peace and wisdom that I cherish to this day.

Like the sound of a father's voice in times of war, Pearl Harbor and 9/11 have been for the nation the maturity of a comparably young nation's welcome into a world that, at times, is unforgivably hostile to human life, and that, for reasons tragically mysterious to most, are often co-opted, justifying acts of hate between people who would otherwise never meet.

Three years later, the American people would see a president re-elected who did not win the popular vote. Perpetual war is upon us. The borders are closing in on everyone, just as the Pentagon employs more people every year than any other institution on the planet.



And yet, in the eye of the storm, there is peace. Here in New York, 9/11 is a cause for peace, art, community, and remembrance. If anything, 9/11, and such invaluable important thinkers as Howard Zinn, teach us that history is not objective. History not only happens, it happens to us--to people.

What history also shows, though, is that we have survived, and we are stronger for remembering, creatively and positively, that it will never happen again.

At the apex of the performance, as 160 dancers swayed and marched, and as ten musicians howled and harmonized in solemn remembrance, the overcast sky above Central Park West opened to illuminate Josie Robertson Plaza.

The moment was pure magic, as onlookers wept wondering if the 2,977 victims of that unforgettable morning, now 14 years ago, parted the clouds themselves, looking down with a heavenly smile of solar effulgence.

“Table of Silence” creator and choreographer Jacquelyn Buglisi crafted a work of deft genius. The dancers first entered the space amorphously to operatic voicing, an allegory in movement of the inception of American life on, what was for the founders of the nation, newfound land. In time, everyone aligned like clockwork into almost militaristic formation, stepping singly to the beat of an orchestral drum.

Choreographed to the tympani beat, Buglisi exhibited the immediate significance of one life at a time. “Table of Silence”, like an act of solemn remembrance, impresses the need for patience, in silence, in order to properly remember, with respect.

The loss of life is incalculable, lifetimes on Earth zeroed to the instantaneity of explosion. The inner clock-like formation of the choreography also speaks to the truth of history, which during catastrophic events such as 9/11 tightens, focuses and grips people, becoming national memory, and finally, integral to everything from identity to politics to myth.

October, 2015

## AMRAM & CO. at Cornelia Street Café

In terms of the origins of contemporary American culture as Americans know, breathe and live it today, authentic is a word rarely seen with such exacting definition than in the presence of David Amram. If America had a monarch, he would not only be Sir David Amram, he would be the palace seer, a magician of sound and word who transcends prophecy to the realm of artful wisdom.

Well into his eighties, his eyes still beam with a voracious appetite for novel improvisation, spontaneous harmony, rhythmic emotion, and that ungraspable mysterious element of beauty that is the lifeblood of the artist at work. He begins by conversing with patrons of the Cornelia Street Café in the subterranean cabaret, a magnanimous night haunt in the proud core of Greenwich Village.

"From Massachusetts," an out-of-towner says as Amram asks of whereabouts to his unending delight, recounting visions of Kerouac, Lowell, and the cottages of New England respite among the troubadours of American poets, painters, myth-makers and ringleaders who vaunted revolution and love through the corridors of the nation for all to hear and remake themselves in the spirit of irreverently proud dreaming.

He then began speaking in his humbly comedic tone to the "Cornelia Street Stadium" as he calls it, a punch in the face to the followers of a swollen pop culture entertainment. The crowded, though cozy turnout of select culturati, furnished the intimate venue, inspiring Amram and each other mutually, with belly laughs and embraceable smiles.

For the first tune, he commenced his nightlong stream of consciousness narrative, beginning, as with most anecdotes, around the block or corner, though certainly not above 14th Street. "St. Thomas," he sang, reminiscent of his time spent with none other than the Charles Mingus.

His own son, Adam Amram, knocked confidently atop a fine conga spell as the entire band swung and gyrated masterfully in the calming Caribbean airs that awakened the freewheeling vibe that Amram so genuinely exuded as only a truly classic American artist could, especially while so at home.

The Cornelia Street Café is a masterpiece of time. They've hosted the epochal changes, and even though they should be charging over a hundred dollars for a croissant, so bellowed the owner bemoaning rent hikes, they are going strong. Amram is a house legend. His presence reminds Americans that the roots and the raw energetic sustenance of the culture are still alive and well, and nourishing as ever.

From the very ground of contemporary American culture, as it was birthed in the great literary womb of the "best minds of my generation" so Howl'ed the people's Beat laureate Allen Ginsberg, Amram played with the old souls who he once hung out beside in the dog days of New York summer heat waves in lower Manhattan before Washington Square Park really assumed its title, becoming square as the neologisms of telecommunication commercialism overtook the original characters of American youth, when to be cool and hip simply meant creative and conscious.

Dizzy Gillespie. Richie Havens. Pete Seeger. Bob Dylan... The priceless string of pearly memories that Amram recounts with astounding clarity in his ripe age is a fascinating bewilderment of iconic American lore. It's like every adolescent fantasy of fame and glory in America come alive in the storytelling of a great, respected elder of the people.

He played his twin whistle jazz arpeggios with characteristic delight, enlightening the ears and expanding the minds of his listeners as he always has done, whether through an instrument, or from the pad of a measured composition. He upholds an innocent trust in the moment, and at the same time a wealth of experience, whether on the Lakota flute, Chinese Hulusi, or any outlandish assemblage of percussion artifacts, even just his surprising improvisatory versatility in scat and rhymed English.

Recently recording his centenary tribute to Woody Guthrie conducting the Colorado Symphony Orchestra, *This Land: Symphonic Variations of a Song* by Woody Guthrie, Amram is a rare crossover of multi-instrumentalist café entertainer and classically trained modern music composer.

And as such genius masterminds as Béla Bartók and Leoš Janáček, Amram drew from the folkloric musical tapestry of the countryside, as well as the uniquely spun verbal textures of city dwellers, reviving Guthrie in his exuberant compositional interpretations.

At the piano, he sang *Pastures of Plenty* with such a heartfelt momentum as only a truly equal colleague at the height of American performance art could evoke. Storytellers, folk and urbane, met in the voices of drunken Kerouac reader John Ventimiglia and poet Frank Messina, whose piece on 9/11 led hearts to baste in the emotional juices of a long-marinating reflection on the unforgettable American tragedy.

Amram & Co. will continue for the season, after the Labor Day opener, once a month, at Cornelia Street Café. In impromptu collaboration with local and

legendary artists from across the American and global landscapes, seascapes and horizons of music and storytelling, Amram is a beacon of pure affirmation, that the people's culture, that gave breath and harmony to the groundswells of youth and beat to the drum of the future will not only never die, it is, in many ways, still to come.

That was the spiritual vision of Kerouac's mythical American wandering, in his poetry and life, that real art, like enlightenment, has no beginning and no end. It's eternal. Creation is.

The revolutionary creative culture of the age, and of this place called America will only grow as old as it feels, which, if Amram is a testament, is still about as unabashedly vital as any dogged youth with delusions of grandeur, agelessness and love.

October, 2015

## LANOTTE+VERSO at LA MAMA

East Fourth Street's cultural district is a wildly fascinating while humbly inspired reintegration of the old and new that makes New York, New York. For the patient flaneur and public amateur, it's a vibrant dreamscape for the 21st century.

Amateur, by its root definition, simply means a lover who pursues passion, beauty, art and life in all of its wonderfully diverse expressions despite professional or financial gain. While amateurs certainly rub shoulders with career artists and profiteering entrepreneurs steeped in the incomparable Manhattan culture market, the beauty of East Fourth Street culture is its continuity with over a hundred years of artistic appreciation.

Outside the 4th Street Photo Gallery, seasoned photographer Alex Harsley stands like a staunch pillar of African-American history told through his impeccably original lens. Inimitable portraits of Mohammed Ali and Miles Davis intermingle with chromatic streetscapes from "All over," as Harsley says, a kind man of few words.

Next door, Pageant Print Shops offer passersby a glimpse into bygone cartographic depictions of every neighborhood in Brooklyn, Manhattan, and truly throughout the globe. A storefront away, at Rivington Guitars, one 1960 Silvertone Model 1448 is displayed with a \$600 price tag that will make any music buff drool.

Across from the New York Theatre Workshop, where thespians and dramatists gather under a drizzling, overcast Sunday breeze, is LA MAMA, a precious experimental theater venue in the heart of the East Fourth Cultural District. On the first floor theater, Carol Mendes & Artists are presenting LANOTTE + VERSO, beginning with an eerie opening. A dancer writhes deliberately in the dim, searching shadows between brick walls. The scene is reminiscent of early 20th century performance art, a constant fixture of the underground arts milieu.

VERSO originates from the Portuguese, meaning, among other definitions, poetry without regular rhythm or rhyme. And truly, the soft touch of Brazilian choreographer Carol Mendes breathes like a stroke of impressionist paint over the now highly modern, Pollock-like texture of the lower Manhattan mindscape.

The company is about female empowerment. They deliver this at the community level, inspiring young women with artistic discipline. In continuity with the early New York veil of female oppression that plagued the obscene, exploitative arts world at the height of the immigrant age--1890s-1920s--Mendes now posits the reclamation of women as strong and creative.

She pulls no punches, though, in her reanimation of the past, as her dancers performed LANOTTE+VERSO with soot-smearred chests, hands and backs, as in the resurrection of the women workers of early Lower East Side Manhattan, before the neighborhood gentrified into its more palatably salable, present nomination as the East Village.

While the choreographer and dancers are not born and raised New Yorkers, they authentically grasped the spirit and ambiance of East Fourth neighborhood history with a lively, upfront stage presence.

When Carol Mendes appeared onstage for intermission, inviting a volunteer to join her, she emphasized the physical difficulties of her artistic discipline. Crowd participation, female nudity, and the dimly lit brick walls of the theater all screamed with the passage of voices gone to time, though not to art.

October, 2015

## NEW CHAMBER BALLETT at City Center Studio 5

Picturesquely unadorned, City Center Studio 5 is a blank canvas wherein minds move bodies, and bodies stir minds. Choreographer Miro Magloire is a soft-spoken German visionary, now an artful resident of New York. New Chamber Ballet, the love child of Magloire is a wellspring of opportunity for American dancers, six of whom graced the studio floor to rehearse steps and posture before Magloire's modest presence, his unmistakable visage light with the smile of a reputable life well-lived. Among his accomplishments are fifty ballets, not to mention a practitioner's ear for musical composition and a pioneering sense of purpose in the international dance community.

The air of confidence is communicable under the soft lighting of the studio, as the choreographer himself greets a late summer audience who show visible appreciation for chamber ballet amid the warp and woof of midtown Manhattan after Thursday's rush hour. A most delicate, precious ambiance fills the studio as red wine and brownies are served, while the dancers and musicians ready themselves for "In The Parlour", the first piece of the evening, set to Mozart's Violin Sonata in E Minor, K. 304. The worldly pianist Melody Fader enlightens Mozart with a most riveting, heartfelt interpretation as dancers Sarah Atkins, Elizabeth Brown, and Holly Curran muse on themes of space, both symbolic, abstract and territorial.

The resurrection of Morton Feldman, through his "Extensions 3" ever so harmoniously fills the background for "Glove", a sparsely set piece costumed by Candice Thompson. Before each new piece, Magloire most relishes in speaking about the musical composition and how that inspired the dance. He paced the evening as charmingly as the feet of the dancers, his very voice an embodiment of the grace of chamber ballet, soothing the urbanized nerves like an aged wine. Fader performed La Mandragore by French composer Tristan Murail with a lofty might, her approach scintillating in its strength and steady in its beauty. After premiering "Gravity", Magloire's final presentation, titled "Friction", is in collaboration with the eccentric New York composer Richard Carrick. There is an irrepressible wonderment to the form of chamber ballet, which amid the grappling violence of daily city life in Manhattan is a welcome invitation into a more breathable air, where silence speaks in music and dancers step lightly towards the inner horizons of such ingenious visions. It is New York, after all. Only a floor above City Center Studio 5, Woody Allen began writing with Mel Brooks. "If those walls could talk," reads the plaque outside the 56th Street entrance. Like the art lovers who share space within the walls of City Center Studios, the walls may simply express a genuine thank you.

October, 2015

## LEGENDS & VISIONARIES at Schimmel Center

The short two-day run of “Legends & Visionaries” by New York Theater Ballet drew a warm showing from the public, apparently enticed by what was a soft opener to the upcoming season of live arts at the Schimmel, a fine venue at Pace University.

Around the corner from the Manhattan side of the Brooklyn Bridge, the Schimmel at Pace nests into a contiguous array of revitalized neighborhoods. Ethnic and American fast food chains fill the bellies of star-struck students and suburbanite parents, peeling back the very stubborn time-honored character that resists the ongoing, and manifold gentrifications throughout New York.

This class confrontation is a dance of peoples, times and places. While not nearly as graceful as the choreography featured by “Legends & Visionaries”, there is a mutual lesson to be had in the present simultaneity of both the gentrification of lower Manhattan and the vision behind New York Theater Ballet.

“Project Lift” is the word on the street. New York Theater Ballet is also a proud charitable organization that educates children from New York's homeless shelters in the self-discipline of classical dance. Invaluable as the “Project” is beautiful, NYTB offers scholarships, mentoring, tutoring, medical care, clothing and even touring opportunities.

In the delicacy of ballet tradition, choreographer Pam Tanowitz mused on themes in Sonata in D Major Opus 28, II Andante by Beethoven, for her piece, *Double Andante*, with all ten dancers from the company in performance on the evening. The wonder behind her choreographic precision was in the slow perfection of timed movement, exuding a kind of language in the form of the human body.

As a flower blooms, people dance. In this way humanity is naturally expressed, and as in beautiful language, this is where relationships form. Tanowitz resurged ballet as a pastoral exercise in harmonizing the human form with the magic beheld in nature.

Merce Cunningham, on the other hand, has electrified the urban mind to a fever pitch with his scintillatingly truthful modern choreographic vocabulary, single-handedly transforming dance in America and the world. For “Legends & Visionaries”, NYTB performed a justifiable rendition of *Cross Currents*, contrasting well with *Double Andante*.



NYTB set *Cross Currents* to *Rhythm Studies for Player Piano*, an intoxicating score utilizing the sort of mixed media approach to 20th century composition that could only be conceived by such as the ingenious, expatriate Conlon Nancarrow. Musically, the piece reflected a well-informed respect to the philosophical context, where the human form is shot through with a viscerally transcendent modernization.

After performing the first two essentially pure dance works, NYTB then spoke to the namesake of "theater ballet" with *There, And Back Again* by Nicolo Fonte and *Three Virgins* and *A Devil* by Agnes de Mille.

*There, And Back Again* is stronger for the wonderfully effective costume design by Sylvia Taalson Nolan, and live musical accompaniment by Michael Scales on piano, and Margarita Krein on violin. Yet, *Three Virgins* and *A Devil* only proved to reveal the immaturity behind the NYTB image.

Although a literary adaptation, from the book by Ramon Reed, and in continuity with over seventy years of tradition in the world of ballet theater, NYTB simply failed to capture the pith of the story beyond a puerile rendering fit for a school field trip matinee.

Meanwhile, the final summer nights of the trendy Seaport District began to fade under the East River façade, where gangster toughs and street kids once waited to jump the unassuming, inebriated drifter.

And in the unseemly fissures between the Lower East Side revival and the gleaming financial district, the namesakes of a gritty Lower Manhattan still writhe in the drinkable air. The ash-smearred walls of the 19th century tenements stare through blackened windows, bespeaking the unlivable horrors that have forever scarred the American conscience.

As for the past four decades, convenience stores blink with garrulous Latin and African-American patrons, where the occasional Caucasian drunkard schemes to pilfer a 40oz, and the teenager lights up a loosie. In such haunts, as in the 24hr delis pockmarked along a trash-strewn, broken sidewalk, the original inspiration for theater lives on despite the gentrified parodies of the arts world.

October, 2015

## ON THE WATERFRONT at Avery Fisher Hall

The glowing fountains at Josie Robertson Plaza plumed with a dazzling vibrancy, welcoming a throng of silvery faces. Among them sauntered an impressionable following, those young and economically diverse New Yorkers who only know the now-infamous House Un-American Activities Committee by rote.

In 1952, filmmaker Elia Kazan named names. As a high-profile artist, suddenly in an impossible position, he could at least continue making pictures. Yet, a conundrum followed. Who would work with him?

Marlon Brando, then at the top of his game, first dissented to work with a rat. In his, and many other eyes, Kazan had ignominiously succumbed to the Red Scare hysteria to the point of incapacitating friends and colleagues in the arts, notably Arthur Miller.

Celebrity composer Leonard Bernstein was among fifty eminent American artists who publicly condemned the flagrant injustices of Senator Joseph McCarthy. As with Brando, the celluloid visions of Kazan proved irresistible for Bernstein.

Bernstein could not help hearing absolutely inspiring, unwritten music in his head after agreeing to view a rough-cut screening of *On the Waterfront*. The soundtrack would become his one and only film score for which he was later snubbed an Oscar.

Special guest and artistic advisor Alec Baldwin opened the evening with an amusing anecdote of his sitting with Keith Richards at a book party, hearing from the classic rock guru of his admiration for alternative cinema. Truly, a modern version of *On the Waterfront* befitting the original would teem with cultural radicalism.

Preceded by such socially conscious hits as *Gentlemen's Agreement*, starring Gregory Peck as a muckraking journalist out to expose anti-Semitism in America, *On the Waterfront* was a knockout in the struggle to recognize the plight of the worker as pit against mobster unions.

Brando poured soul into the seething, frustrated indigence of the average American workingman, iconized in the story of a New Jersey longshoreman. The celebrated lines, "I coulda had class. I coulda been a contender. I coulda been somebody, instead of a bum, which is what I am" still hold water as the agonized voice of the domestic working poor.

Wealth disparity has never been more blaring than today. Occupy Wall Street revealed New York City as a symbol for the nightmare of American capitalism. Ultimately, the narrative scope so masterfully focused by screenwriter Budd Schulberg is about the reconciliation of honest work in what is a murderously corrupted labor market.

In short, human lives have ever been dispensable to the interests of American capitalism, beginning in the slave era, through the height of economic immigration from early 20th century Europe to the current era of neoliberal globalization.

New York Philharmonic conductor David Newman captivated a full house under the classy Lincoln Center ambiance, indulging with daring intensity in the essence of the forty-five minutes of music that Bernstein composed as he mused on themes illustrated by Kazan.

For the world premiere event, The New York Philharmonic were challenged to start almost from scratch, as no orchestral score previously existed of what was basically a short score in sketches.

At times, spoken dialogue drowned in the immense sonic pulse of virtuosic strings and brazen horns. The urban New York sound gyrates with dramatic effect enough to cause the multitudes to swoon simultaneously at the sights of homicide, to abhor the blood-curdling enigmas of organized crime, to witness the exploitations of the worker, and to respect the fight for what is right on the traumatic frontlines of American poverty.

The late cellist Mstislav Rostropovich, who often conducted the twenty-minute Symphonic Suite from *On the Waterfront* that Bernstein premiered with the New York Philharmonic in 1960, said, "This music smells of the United States."

October, 2015

## RON CARTER QUARTET at Regattabar

There's a powerfully resonant, special quality to the lifelong oeuvre of a jazz master, such as in the inimitable example of bassist Ron Carter. In the 1960s, integral to the rhythm sections of Cannonball Adderley and Miles Davis, his artistry may have seemed shadowed by the towering giants of the music that was to give voice to the Great Migration, the most significant movement of peoples in U.S. history.

Such individuals as Ron Carter are more than musicians, they are blaring signposts on the winding paths of history, such as have since reclaimed the proud heritage of African-American people through a signature sound that has become essential to popular culture, down to the meaning of being American.

Ron Carter "wrote the book on walking," said bassist John Patitucci in the July 2015 edition of *Bass Player Magazine*. And from his bookish visage, Carter walks the walk, tuxedoed and grinning from a soft-spoken, humble presence that is the very cool embodiment of a personality authentic to a life lived in jazz.

The Charles Hotel jazz lounge, known as Regattabar, is a classy joint, where Bostonian music buffs treat themselves to stiff mixed drinks, such as the choice selection, "Another Night in Tunisia" named after the now-famed Bobby McFerrin tune.

Well-cropped and eccentric Ivy League students welcome the intelligentsia beneath antique stone archways across the street from Harvard Square. Around the block, another green space dubbed Winthrop is known to have built the first farmer's market in Cambridge. Nearly four hundred years later, residents still sprout up fresh, locally harvested produce in open-air storefronts.

Cambridge is a remarkable exhibition of living history. The city swells calmly with the airs both regal and revolutionary, where technological and literary cultures have merged to academic, histrionic proportions.

After receiving an advanced music education in New York City, Carter has since changed the sonic horizons of the human world with his ingenious jazz compositions, his innovations as a recording artist, and world-touring performer.

Beside his accomplishments as an educator, author, composer and arranger, there is the basic truth that the sound of the acoustic bass would be unrecognizable to the contemporary ear were it not for the jazz music of Carter.

He first became a bandleader in 1961 on the album "Where?", released by Prestige Records. The incomparable visionaries Eric Dolphy and Mal Waldron shared in the muses that moved them together. As Carter explained for his audience warming up to whiskey and coffee in the subtle, early autumn chill at Regattabar, he became a bandleader simply to call his favorite songs.

Astute followers of Boston music heritage remember the early days of Paul's Mall from the Boylston Street of the 1970s, where Carter once fascinated an eternally impressed Massachusetts fan base. Nostalgic eyes still boggle at the sight of the great, bearing photographs and stories from the springboard that once hosted everyone from Bob Marley and Muddy Waters to John Coltrane and Sun Ra, not to mention a candlelit Billy Joel concert during the great Northeast blackout.

Today, Massachusetts is a proud home to the recent Jazz Radio chart-topping, New Bedford-based Whaling City Sound production, Thrasher Dream Trio, where Carter recorded with legendary pianist Kenny Barron, and drummer Gerry Gibbs. The Trio has become prolific.

The Ron Carter Quartet is now animated by the effervescent magic of pianist Renee Rosnes, who so gently minded the harmonic graces, the rhythmic breaks and gravity-defying melodies of the evening. She almost stole the show, if not for the powerfully intoxicating moods of Carter himself.

Her interpretation of "My Funny Valentine" struck speechlessly perfect chords as to leave half the room breathless, choked up by the sheer beauty of creative fruition, that essence of human life that only real art can summon with such universality as in the appreciation of the listening public.

When an acoustic bass string rattles with that immense, vibrant strength, and all in the hands of a master in the art of sound, the seeker is humbled. Carter stretched the musical imagination for his first set, just over an hour, which featured his compositions, "595", "Mr. Bow Tie" (dedicated to his father), and "Seven Steps to Heaven".

At 78 years of age, he leads Latin rhythms and African roots through jazz progressions as complex as they are exquisite. In philosophy, the concept of negative capability could best be apt to describe the character and nature of the sound that Ron Carter exudes onstage. Simply, the idea is about embracing ambiguity and transcending presupposition, which, in the jazz world as led by Carter, would basically translate as improvisation.

October, 2015

## ANTIGONE at BAM

With King Kreon in exile, the birds of Thebes had their fill. The air was bitter with the stench of unburied corpses lying on the battlefield. Two of those peck-eaten bodies were brothers who killed each other for their father's throne.

For Oidipous at Kolonos, Sophokles, that classic dramatist of old Hellas, spills the blood of a royal family with utter profusion. The exile of Kreon follows the suicide of his queen, which is then preceded by fratricidal competition for rule.

The tragic denouement of Sophokle's trilogy, known as the Theban Plays, began with Antigone. In 441 B.C. Sophokles embarked on a terminal literary quest spanning over three decades that would not end until a year after his death, when Oidipous at Kolonos was finally produced.

Literally meaning "before birth," Antigone, under the directorial helm of Dutch visionary Ivo van Hove, is a feast of neo-classical modernity. Beneath the rough-hewn Ionic architecture inside the BAM Harvey Theater on Fulton Street, Antigone spellbound a full house to mythic proportions.

Struck by the starlight of the beloved Parisian doused in Hollywood glitz, full-house audiences flocked to the name, Juliette Binoche. Gainfully respected for her role in European cineaste Krzysztof Kieslowski's Three Colors: Blue, she later became an American icon after Chocolat with Johnny Depp.

Her recent role in the film Clouds of Sils Maria uncannily depicted the life of a famous actress transitioning from film to the stage. Interestingly, the curtains fall on Hove's Antigone as audiences peer above stage at the last scene, a filmed projection highlighting the enviable mien of Binoche.

Antigone is a myth, Binoche asserted, as she sat candidly with New Yorker staff writer Philip Gourevitch for the post-show talk. She emphasized the importance of myth as a way of knowledge, as timeless, transcending history, which is altogether different than intellectualizing political interpretations. Myths are about consciousness and heart, she said, with an earnest tone.

And finally, Antigone, Binoche posited, is about the rebirth of the feminine. The rebellious act of her burying Polyneikes, who perished with his sword raised high against the throne, is also a term of divine respect for the homeland, for the earth. Truly, burial rites are steeped in ecological consciousness, honoring the ground and the inherent forces of nature within every living being.

An especially eloquent woman from the crowd reinforced such themes, where family plays a central role in the tragic circumstances of a woman beholden to filial piety over legislative authority. The tragedy of Kreon is mythical, a universal principle, as in the Greek concept of *kósmos*, where natural law and social rule are in perpetual conflict. Sophokles' tragic treatment of family order, and disorder, is essentially a microcosm for the problems of human and divine intervention in the midst of imposing rule over the greater society.

The tragedy of Antigone is best understood in the translation of her name, "before birth" meaning that hers was a life yet to be. More, she was as distilled into mere idea, never reaching the birth of her life as truly hers.

Antigone was the daughter of an exiled King and a suicidal mother, and sister to fratricidal brothers. She met her fate under the iron fist of state law, of course instituted by her father. Albeit suffused with uninhibited human pride, she sought refuge in the divine order of a burial rite.

By burying her brother ceremonially, according to traditional, pagan Greek respect for the gods, she crossed a fatal line. Honoring the dead, she stepped into her own grave. This, in and of itself, is a perfect metaphor for the very immutability of the tragedy, where the delineation between myth and history becomes clear.

The Greek myth could not have been better conveyed than in the contemporary poetics of translator Ann Carson, who furnished ingenious dialogue to allow the actors' self-confessed linguistic indulgence, and for the public a most welcome, listenable resonance with the everyday tongue.

As in the incomparable voice of the Bard, Hove's direction broods on the peerless spark of Sophokles, a master of the subtlest of horrors, where the slightest tinge of poison stains the edge of a crystal. He's a prophet of mental unease, a purveyor of the essential substance of tragic drama.

The style of Hove is likened to another Dutch director, the iconoclastic filmmaker Lars von Trier, where sparsely set actions only underline the movement of dialogue, often like vocal eruptions out into ether, offering nothing more than the bare, silent tension of the play reduced to an almost alchemical instinct.

Suited modernly, Patrick O'Kane played Kreon like a vehement business-attired CEO at wit's end. In the role of Guard and part of the Chorus, Obi Abili breathed truth into the life of his character, garnering well-deserved laughter amid the mournful hemorrhaging that the main narrative arc stirs.

In fact, Abili briefly mentioned a personal anecdote about incidents following the death of his father in a village in Nigeria, where traditional burial rites became a challenge to the family. Curiously, his role as mediator between Kreon and Antigone mirrored that which he had to assume in his father's village and for the resolve of his family.

The directorial merging of the Greek chorus, and central characters began as a practical choice for Hove, who was forced to tour *Antigone* on a restrictive budget. Yet, this rare revisionary approach to Sophokles, and classical Greek drama as a whole, is sharply engrossing.

In every social order, there are public personas. Celebrities, artists, politicians, etc., are like the actors of antiquity on the stage of life. And then there is the public, or as most were known in ancient days, the mob, embodied in the classical Greek theatrical device of the chorus. In other words, the chorus is the voice of most people, *vox populi*.

A more elevated conceptualization would place the persona as the gods, whose lives are mythical, and who were represented in the characteristic Greek aesthetic of life in movement as dramatic, opposed to the purely spiritual, archetypal immortality of the Egyptian Pharaoh, from where the original inspiration derives.

At the theater, the audience becomes the chorus, the bittersweet, enchanted echoes of the people who are fated to experience life through preconceived dramaturgy. In Hove's *Antigone*, the actors themselves become part-chorus, that is part-audience, enacting the epochal truths which Sophokles himself had conveyed, of the human perspective, especially the actor, as mere witness to the play of life as myth.

Four days before opening night, the Brooklyn Book Festival's "Antigone Interpreted" mused on Sophokles to the extent where classic theater becomes a metaphor and an example of democracy in action. The chorus is the voting public, and the actors the ruling legislature. In comparison with the stoicism of divine intervention, democracy is arguably what makes people human.

"A real democracy should allow its citizens to fulfill religious duties toward family without colliding with the laws of society," wrote Hove in his director's note neatly printed in the BAM playbill. Ancient history echoes into modernity with the perpetual challenge to reconcile the divergence of state secularism in contrast with state religion, still contentious in countries like Greece, Israel, Iran, and other state cultures with a dominant religious paradigm.



Bonnie Honig, scholar of democratic theory, and author of "Antigone, Interrupted", spoke at the Brooklyn Book Festival of Antigone as dissident theater. That the struggle between the characters in the play is unresolved, only silenced by death, is a testament to the classist suppression of women who were disallowed the right to mourn in ancient Greece.

Today, this struggle continues globally, and in America, for example, in the politicization and ignorance that ensues in the wake of the ongoing Black Lives Matter movement. There are innumerable examples of how this issue of respectful burial remains a crucial source of reflection for everyone in the world today. From the perpetrators of the Charlie Hebdo shooting, to the victims of Malaysia Airlines Flight 17, respecting the dead should transcend every prevailing political quandary.

Yet, as in the play of Antigone, and in the ageless myth from which the story was drawn, this is not the case. Those rare individuals self-motivated to the task of burying, or ceremonially recognizing the spiritual passage of the demoralized dead often do so at great political, and personal risk.

Antigone is ultimately about justice. There are some who will knowingly face death before the unforgiving will of the state for what they believe is right, even if that belief is simply to perform a ritual, to continue a tradition, to hold a ceremony. As in the prehistory of humanity, mourning is a memorial act.

When the state controls memory, people are disempowered, quickly vulnerable to ignorance and illusion. Memory, like myth, is also a way to knowledge. By ritualizing the burial of her insurgent brother, the grieving Antigone ceases to differentiate between his death and death itself.

In the midst of so much death, her act is human, because she knowingly embraces mortality. The myth of Antigone teaches how the foundation of humanism originates from the ceremonial recognition of death. If the quality of the questions raised from the public within the neoclassical-styled Harvey Theater is any indication, the passage of twenty-five hundred years has not in the least dulled the popular fascination for such universal perplexities.

The cautionary tale of a woman who confronts an untimely mortal fate because she honors the dead is of perennial importance to every culture. The myth of memory as tradition holds the most tragic, and therefore most potent elements of human life.

October, 2015

## SATELLITE COLLECTIVE at BAM

She is the young woman counting rhythms silently, whispering mysteriously and distantly on the metro ride home after work. He is the young man moving to a different rhythm behind the cashier, his head bobbing like a life raft on the high seas, far from land. They are the emerging artists, the millennial, contemporary, twenty-something generation of up-and-coming thinkers, movers, shakers, dreamers, drifters and lovers.

They are known as the Satellite Collective. Like the name, they encompass the globe and shine a light. While the young, recently launched presence above and throughout the arts world may be faint amid so many countless fixtures of essentially eternal stars, it is so bright and close to home.

The Collective is a stellar amalgam of thirty impeccably creative minds, as ingenious as diverse, covering everything from architecture to choreography, film to poetry. Recently, the project "Telephone" skyrocketed the Collective to a sprawling global movement spanning forty-two countries.

Since 2010, the Collective has mounted ballets, music, film, dance, song, spoken word, and even a literary magazine, *Transmission*. "Song by song / I scatter my birds / away from the fogs of smoke / They say these are ordinary clouds in the sky" reads the poem "Baghdad in Detroit" published in *Transmission* by Iraqi poet Dunya Mikhail, now living in the United States.

For the opening of the Collective's evening at BAM Fisher, a most delicate, and quietly inspired solo instrumental for cello titled "Water" released the crowd of the daily neologism into a universe more nebulous and free, holding a strength and balance, like water coursing through a life-giving stream.

Barefoot poet Stelth Ulvang, bespectacled and unshaven, mused from a firmly clasped, well-worn notebook, and drew the audience in to hear a voice wondering, lifted and gaining on the racing mind of today's youth, with lightly poignant wisdom and fine poetic taste. He then sauntered upstairs, a true poet and intellect of sound, to sit in on orchestral percussion.

Under the skillful eye of choreographer Devin Alberda, dancer Michaela Mann brewed a euphoric blend of noetic triumph, one doused with a glorious array of internalized beauty. Individuate ruminated on the bodily themes of oneness, the humbling stretch of the mind to be truly alone in bittersweet union with all.

In "A Pair of Ideal Landscapes", filmmaker Lora Robertson graced BAM with a singular magic, set to a munificent score by Richie Green and played by six

fantastic musicians of piano, violin and mezzo-soprano voice. Choreographer Esmé Boyce danced with Christopher Ralph in the foreground of Kit McDaniel within celluloid, exuding the live artistry of multimedia, cross-disciplinary wonder only known to the imagination of the contemporary artist.

The film, “Edie Leaves Twice”, rekindled liberation from the machine-addled human life pitted between ecological disaster and personal exodus. With a heart-rending story by Kevin Draper, and set to a brilliant score by Ellis Ludwig-Leone, director Lora Robertson stunned with a dreamlike fantasy.

From Berlin to New York, “Walls Are Here To Fall” exhibited dancers Rena Butler, Isaies Santamaria, Gage Self, and Elena Valls. They are virtuosic in emotional range, encompassing the choreographic forms of Manuel Vignoulle with a raging gravity. The haunting composition by Nick Jaina, performed by the house Satellite Ensemble, took the heart of the modern urbanite by storm, and gave it back, thumping with a renewed, wild pulse, and hunger, for life beyond the wall.

October, 2015

## GOODBYE GAULEY MOUNTAIN at Abron Arts Center

In 2013, the book "Days of Destruction, Days of Revolt" was published under the genre, Crime. For his research, author and Pulitzer Prize-winning, Occupy Wall Street Journal newspaperman Chris Hedges walked the sacrifice zones of West Virginia. He chronicled the brutally honest, grassroots American reality of people versus capitalism in hard-bitten, fastidious prose while listening to multigenerational landowners and land defenders like Larry Gibson.

According to Gibson, who had preserved fifty acres of precious West Virginian land from the devastating extractive industry of coal companies, the still unspeakable national loss of 9/11 pales in comparison (despite the inability to truly compare human deaths) to the deleterious effects of coal emissions.

In America alone, twenty-four thousand people die every year due to the immediate impacts of the infamously loathed industry that Upton Sinclair defamed almost a century ago as "King Coal". That's not counting over half a million premature births, and birth defects afflicting newborns. Gibson's testimonies hit home with an unnerving reminder: Coal kills.

"Goodbye Gauley Mountain" is the love child of couple Beth Stephens, the beloved UC-Santa Cruz professor and world-renowned interdisciplinary performance artist, and Annie Sprinkle, a charming former sex worker who earned her name peeing on masturbating men in porno flicks.

The community showed up at the old Georgian Revival-style theater in downtown Manhattan now known as the Abron Arts Center. This classic venue at the foot of the Williamsburg Bridge has seen the likes of everyone from George Burns to Martha Graham to Dizzy Gillespie. The building hasn't changed much since 1915, and was once graced with the onsite directorial presence of none other than Orson Welles, not an easy act to follow for a cute couple from foggy Frisco.

Stephens's early teacher and her best student sat in the cozy, underground screening room with the film's Brooklyn-based cinematographer and environmental activist Jordan Freeman. Several others in the audience were well acquainted with the eco-sexual Lover Earth marriage ceremonies that the enchanting couple performs with artists and communities throughout the globe.

(Stephens and Sprinkle are pioneering the concepts, eco-sexual and Lover Earth, the latter which replaces what, to them, is the outmoded notion of Earth as maternal, and instead, opening people up, everywhere, to the apparently glorious experience of making love with nature.)

In high fashion, not a few inches taller each in impressive bootstrap platforms, the adorable pair appeared illustriously justified to open the Queer New York International Arts Festival. Of course, Sprinkle's proud chest hung loose for the audience to gawk in the lighthearted mood, as Stephens began her lecture on eco-sexuality, straight-faced and professorial. They both delighted with sharp wit, candid theatrics, exuding a true American love story so deservedly expressible for the 21st century.

The now well-traveled documentary film, "Goodbye Gauley Mountain", first begun as an experiment in the wild idea-driven mind of Stephens, finally makes its NYC premier at this year's Festival. Since the 2014 release, Stephens has led audiences around the world to visualize the dramatic human struggle in confrontation with mountain top removal (MTR) and extractive coal industry in her humble, backcountry hometown in West Virginia.

Sprinkle lives up to her name, "sprinkling" a most invigorating sexuality through the ecological stream of consciousness of her better half. In the midst of conceptualizing the documentary, the two have forwarded genius prescience.

They are merging the Queer movement, inspired by the city they call home, San Francisco, with the environmental movement. In a word, they've nominated the movement "EcoSexuality" and have even gone so far as to encourage a global membership of card-carrying eco-sexuals.

They have an absolutely delightful sense of humor, and while the subject matter in "Goodbye Gauley Mountain" never ceases to speak to the gravity of the environmental, and really very human travesty at hand, Stephens is as gentle with her audience as a new lover, essentially inviting everyone to see a homeland on American soil that is worth fighting for no matter what.

In fact, only the Amazon rainforest outmatches the biodiversity found in the Appalachian range, which is also the very oldest string of mountains in North America. They even predate the mythical Himalayas and Andes.

What is at stake has arguably been said best in the thick, West Virginian drawl of a mine worker on the job. In the film, a local man says his peace with the coal mining companies, referring to them he refers as the "big man". Speaking in reference to the homegrown poor up against the corporate rich, when the "little man" wishes to gather highly valued American ginseng he's outlawed, while mountaintop removal (MTR) effectively disintegrates any semblance of ginseng growth in the disaster area.

The "big man" steps on the "little man" from every direction, he bemoans, standing around mines that once fatally drowned innumerable black migrants in their own silicone-hardened lungs.

Simultaneously a touching portrait of a queer woman's exploration of her folksy hometown, and a solemn salute to the land defenders of West Virginia, and so, also of the country and the planet, "Goodbye Gauley Mountain" is a must-see gem in the burgeoning eco-sexual movement.

Stephens and Sprinkle are equally vibrant and charmingly quirky. More, they are extremely humble leaders toward what seems the perfect, and finally, quite human solution to effectively and lastingly overhaul environmentally destructive and socially obsolete ways of living and loving. Eco-sexuality is the fresh, positively orgasmic, and very renewable worldview of the future.

They've even crystallized eco-sexuality into twenty-five matrimonial vows, the last of which reads, "Vow to love, honor, and cherish the Earth - until death brings you closer together forever."

November, 2015

## THE JOHN SCOFIELD & JOE LOVANO QUARTET at Blue Note

Jazz education is America's oral history, and the composers of jazz, contemporary and classic, are as the wise, sagely men and women who have carried the sacred knowledge of the people since time immemorial.

From the bayou of New Orleans to the streets of Chicago and the bridges of New York City, the incontrovertible truth stands tall, that the inspirations of African-American culture have endured, with the firmest foothold on American soil. From here, the roots have spread to the ends of the earth.

For this reason, and not this reason alone, jazz remains a steadfast pillar of cultural syncretism, honoring the tapestry of peoples who call America home, like a jazz enthusiast would appreciate a rare, unpredictable harmony.

The incomparable multiform composer and legendary jazz guitarist John Scofield is absolutely exemplary as an artist true to his beliefs. Single-handedly, Scofield disemboweled tradition, remaking the sound of the guitar one delicious, 99-cent New York slice of sonic fusion at a time. Two decades later, he has reunited with a mutually generous benefactor in the business of musical enlightenment, tenor saxophonist and composer Joe Lovano, who has a gargantuan sound. His music asserts the raw exhilaration of a rare master upholding the foundations of urban jazz.

Scofield and Lovano are visionaries in the world of electro-acoustic fusion. Truly, as in the John Scofield and Joe Lovano Quartet, both archetypes demand one another, the iconoclast and traditionalist. And in doing so, they exude the feel-good essence of jazz from root to fruit, the psychedelic experimentalism blooming out and over the noetic masses like a Western wildfire.

Hot off the new release, "Past Present", the Quartet played "Museum" and "Hangover" by Scofield, a cathartic stretch into the noosphere of triumphant, blissful musical wanderlust. Lovano bellowed vociferously in rewind with "Ettenro" (Ornette spelled backwards, his dedication to Coleman) together with drummer Bill Stewart, who shook the foundations of the shrine befitted with abstract, free jazz sound sculptures galore.

Jazz, in the continuous strength of such legendary voices as Scofield and Lovano, proves to remind the listening many why coloring outside of the lines is crucial to the art of living. The untaught lesson, as in improvisational self-discovery, is perhaps the most enduring quality of jazz.

November, 2015

## BRAD MEHLDAU at Zankel Hall

After nearly 300 years, with all of the epochal invention and revolutionary soundscapes to emerge from Western music, Bach is still heard with increasing relevance. Brad Mehldau, known foremost as an improviser, is the first jazz artist to serve as Carnegie Hall's Richard and Barbara Debs Composer's Chair. He has gone further, describing Bach as "radical" even today.

Interestingly, Mehldau is inverting the classical paradigm further, welcoming modern popular composers like Neil Young and Brian Wilson into the fold for his 2015 solo performance at Carnegie Hall. In his jazz recordings, Mehldau has evolved the traditional standard to the tunes of Radiohead, Massive Attack, Nick Drake and other pop artists.

Just when popular appreciation of new music appears to have conformed to catchall entertainment culture, there are surprises. The sold-out Carnegie Hall performance of Brad Mehldau's 2015 world premiere, "Three Pieces After Bach", proves that the public is in for the defining musical challenge of the age.

"There's never been a time when improvisation was given the respect it deserved," said Keith Jarrett at the beginning of the documentary film about him titled *The Art of Improvisation*. "By virtue of the holistic quality...it takes real-time, no editing possible, it takes your nervous system to be on alert for every possible thing in a way that can not be said for any other kind of music."

"I'm essentially an improviser. I learned that by playing classical music," said Jarrett. "We don't know how Bach improvised, and the only reason is we don't have recordings."

Last year, when the great classical pianist Cyprien Katsaris introduced his performance of Bach's Concerto BWV 1054 with the Gyor Philharmonic Orchestra he addressed the audience seated in the Franz Liszt Academy of Music in Budapest.

"As you know, there is a tradition which has been lost among us, classical pianists, which is the improvisation," Katsaris professed. "Liszt was a great improviser, and of course Chopin and before them Mozart, Beethoven, Bach."

Mehldau reaches into the very depths and extremities of his musical self when improvising on Bach's "Well-Tempered Clavier", which is the compositional basis for "Three Pieces After Bach".



Throughout the evening, Mehldau first performed a prelude, or fugue from the Well-Tempered Clavier, before showcasing his original works. In so doing, he demonstrated an immediate relationship between contemporary and Baroque.

Through his impeccable improvisational virtuosity, Mehldau has heroically dared to unlock the modulatory and accidental secrets of The Well-Tempered Clavier. Bach single-handedly extended the range of twelve-tone music, where, for example, every note in the scale could be played uninhibitedly, such as on ancient instruments traditionally played in a pentatonic scale.

Arguments ensue as to whether fixing keyboards to equal temperament has devastated the compositional integrity of the old masters. Without an understanding of music earned by serious study, and selfless practice, the importance of “The Well-Tempered Clavier” is sure to fly overhead. When Bach composed, keyboards were tuned differently. He wrote for various temperaments. Currently, equal temperament has a monopoly on the way Western music is heard.

Listening to Bach with a trained ear, especially one steeped in jazz harmonics, what is most fascinating about his compositions is the timed spacing between notes in a scale, and how the chord progressions demand a stretch of the aural imagination. This was all due to his revolutionary interpretation of keyboard temperament.

While Mehldau is arguably less capable of transporting Bach music to the appreciable character of Glenn Gould, for example, there is certainly no one to parallel his uniquely bridging contemporary improvisation with Baroque composition.

November, 2015

## INDONESIA PUSAKA at Weil Recital Hall

Indonesia Pusaka is a largely Jakarta-based ensemble comprised of eight folk dancers and twelve classical pianists. In Javanese, pusaka means "heritage". For the first-ever performance of Indonesia Pusaka at Carnegie Hall, the riotous Indonesian composer Jaya Suprana sat himself onstage.

Regally adorned in gold-enmeshed robes to mirror the priceless Carnegie Hall décor, the ingenious Indonesian voice of classical music composition turned bellies upside down with laughter.

The Indonesia community showed up with bright faces, speaking the brusque tones of the Bahasa language. Representation from the Consulate General of the Republic of Indonesia encouraged the entire audience to "fall in love with our culture," while expressing the essence of the evening: unity in diversity.

As stagehands rolled out a Steinway & Sons grand piano, Suprana cracked up his adoring kith with all of the lovable informality familiar to Indonesian families. Truly, the best gift of the Indonesia Pusaka Recital is to witness Suprana himself introduce successive compositions for solo piano that illustrate his life's work.

Suprana, nearly in tears for his joy, introduced Viona Natalie Sanjaya, who, at thirteen years of age, has already performed at the Sidney Opera House. She played "Unluk Ayla III" & "XI" in the very rhythmic style of an Indonesian rumba.

The next compositions, "Aforisma" and "Gargaritan", are dedications to Suprana's late teacher, who he respects as highly as his mother. Here, Suprana begins to give voice to Indonesian traditional music, where the pentatonic scales known to Asian folk music and the harmonies of the ancient world replace the 12-tone basis of Western music. At 16, pianist Evelyn Zainal Abidi effused the five-tone scales with an emotional expressionism well beyond her years.

All of the performers are the students of Suprana. "They are my teachers," he told the crowd, noting how they revealed new characteristics and insights into the compositions. So, there he sat, in front of the piano during the entire recital, listening to the interpretations deeply, with eyes firmly closed, genuflecting with all of the mental power of real genius.

Despite the impressive scope of talent and accomplishment from the young students of Suprana, no one inspired such gushing praise as Janice Carissa. She was comparable to Glenn Gould, he said, for her early mastery of Bach. She had already performed the Gould Variations and the Diabelli Variations on Beethoven. Suprana was confident that after completing her current PhD

studies in music, she would become the first pianist to perform all three of the most important solo piano works, culminating with the Handel's Variations on Brahms.

From sentimental songs in the spirit of the lullaby so sweetly known throughout Asia, to virtuosic exercises in comparative classical composition, Suprana is wholly deserving of the "genius" honorific so bestowed on him by the national auspices of his country. Indonesia is his source of life and profoundest of muses, and if the seemingly endless encores and his comic soul were any indication, Suprana opened a fertile pathway for Indonesian music on the world stage forevermore.

November, 2015

## KAUSHIKI CHAKRABORTY'S SAKHI at Zankel Hall

The classical music of India encompasses all of the subtle and blaring complexities of modern life in continuity with millennia of cultural tradition. The rhythmic nuance of vocalization, in unison with ancient instruments, truthfully dramatizes the frenetic synchronism of contemporary street life from Delhi to New York.

Sakhi, the name for classical vocalist Kaushiki Chakraborty's musical troupe, is an ancient word for "friend" in Sanskrit, the language most sacred to Hindus. Sakhi is an important spiritual notion with respect to Hinduism, which understands the absolute sanctity of the cosmic Self.

As propounded by Chakraborty and her fellow musicians, Sakhi also holds special meaning and importance of women in Indian culture. This understanding is increasingly critical not only for the world as a whole, but also for India, where women face daily harassment and all forms of violent sexism.

In this spirit of Sakhi, of friendship, Chakraborty graced the Zankel Hall floor. Robert Browning, the legendary world music advocate from the Lower East Side of the 1970s, presented the first tour of Kaushiki Chakraborty's Sakhi, which began performing in January 2015, and has now delighted audiences at Carnegie Hall.

Chakraborty, a rare proponent of the Gwalior and Patiala traditions, has received high nods from the likes of Anoushka Shankar, who first played Carnegie Hall at 18 years of age. Chakraborty sings with a musical genius beyond her years, Shankar affirms. Her beautifully rich tone is all the more impressive for her impeccable mastery of the technicalities of Indian classical music.

*Naman*, the opening piece of the evening, is an invocation to Ganesha, the elephant-headed god known as the "friendly one," whose power to dispel obstacles is especially auspicious for women treading the path to individual freedom, glorified by the beauty of her cultural heritage.

"Percussion is balance," Chakraborty said to begin the second piece *Samanjasya*. To her right sat Mahima Upadhyay, the only pakhawaj player in the state of Bihar, and the youngest musician performing in Sakhi. In the 400-year tradition of her specific pakhawaj discipline, Upadhyay is a trailblazer.

Debopriya Chatterjee introduced Radharang, an ode to the spring festival Holi, also known as the festival of colors. The Indian festival round ritualizes

mythological storytelling, such as in Holi, when Krishna seduces Radha. In the spirit of feminism, Sakhi centered the role of Radha in musical dramatization.

For *Radharang*, Talwalkar also played a cajon, arranged with the tabla to back the percussive vocalization and fineries of dancer Bhakti Deshpande, whose steps surged with a neo-soul feel.

*Hansini*, a dialogue in rhythm, bridges Hindustani and Carnatic musical styles. Chakraborty taught how Indian classical percussion is syllabic, as heard in the sargams, also known as vocables. Rhythm is language, she said.

From an illustrious family of musicians, violinist Nandini Shankar related how the Navratri festival in India concurred with Sakhi's first tour. During this festival, Hindus perform offerings to the mother-goddess, known as Durga Puja. In the spirit of devotion to Durga, an empowerment to all women, Sakhi offered the piece, *Rudrani*.

As Chakraborty calmly professed, the traditional models of femininity in Indian culture, such as goddess, wife, lover, mother, sister, and daughter simply do not represent the whole character of a woman. What is most greatly needed today is simply to regard women as friends. The final piece, *Sakhi*, imparts friendship through music.

Sakhi tells the true story of six Indian women befriending the world through a most inspired, and uplifting music. In every note, beat, word, and movement, Sakhi exudes the immemorial friendship that women bestow to the world, and how that relationship has stood the test of time despite the harshly oppressive patriarchies of India.

"Thanks to all the mothers who helped us to be the Sakhi we are, the individual we are, and who have given us the strength to fulfill all roles," her voice resounded tenderly. "To the divine mother, our mothers, and to all who have encouraged us to be ourselves...a gift of love from Sakhi."

November, 2015

## STEVEN ISSERLIS & ROBERT LEVIN at Isabella Stewart Gardner Museum

In the memory of Isabella Stewart Gardner, Steven Isserlis and Robert Levin proved faultless, performing the first of two all-Beethoven programs at Boston's prestigious Isabella Stewart Gardner Museum.

Opening in 1903, her museum would be "for the education and enjoyment of the public forever," said Gardner. The redistribution of wealth through public education is arguably one of the most important actions on behalf of the ongoing class struggle in America. Gardner herself referred to the hoarders as "squillionaires".

Foremost, classical musicians are heroic for enlivening one of the founding cultural traditions of Western civilization through performance and education. For this reason, British concert cellist Steven Isserlis is doubly valued. Adored by fans who unsurprisingly line up to greet him during his often short-lived American stops per touring season, the bulk of his career has been spent in Europe.

Isserlis, a soloist, chamber musician, educator, author, and broadcaster, has a special talent to impart his love and discipline to young people. Often, his appearances are accompanied by special concerts for children, which he has performed for many years. He held his most recent recital at the 92nd Street Y in New York City.

One of two living cellists featured in Gramophone's Hall of Fame, he performs mostly on a 1726 Stradivarius. This season he will perform a special recital with Beethoven's own cello, last played in public 50 years ago, which, coincidentally, is when Isserlis first began his musical training in Britain.

The selections consisted of the 12 variations on "See the Conquering Hero Comes" from Handel's Judas Maccabeus, Cello Sonata No. 1 in F Major, Op. 5 No. 1, 12 variations on "Ein Mädchen oder Weibchen" from The Magic Flute, Op. 66, Sonata in F Major for Piano and Horn, Op. 17, and Cello Sonata No. 3 in A Major, Op. 69.

Isserlis commanded the genius of an epoch-making dramatist onstage, perceivably enacting the creative moment, as in the mind of Beethoven when he composed. The true performance art of classical music is realized in the ease of Isserlis, who sways with a lofty passion, searching for the originality of the inspiration that gave birth to such incredible music so as to understand how the essential sound is best grasped.

Levin performed with an intuitive mastery glorified by his intensive scholarship as a chaired Harvard professor, world-acclaimed concert pianist and award-winning recording artist.

As he writes for *Min-Ad* a scholarly journal published by the Israel Musicological Society, "...it was Mozart's abilities as improviser that earned him legendary status, outshining even his reputation as the finest pianist of his time."

At one point in the concert, the two impeccable musical souls stopped playing and serendipitously spoke at the same time, mirroring the musical dynamics with laughter. Prompted by three sonatas and variations on Handel and Mozart, Levin and Isserlis performed a lively interpretation of classical music.

November, 2015

## MARTIN HALPERN CHAMBER OPERAS at Shetler Studios

The best part of living in New York is that some of our most radically creative artists are performing. Unadorned creative spaces such as Shetler Studios on West 54th Street in midtown Manhattan host exclusive gatherings, where all of the high pomp of the fine arts strips down in an air of charming modesty.

In this way, composer, librettist, and classics scholar Martin Halpern served as usher, emcee, and conductor for the few New Yorkers fortunate enough to appreciate his latest production of two chamber operas, “The Sculpture” and “The Hour Glass”, drawing freely on the dramaturgy of Yeats and Ibsen to comparable effect, as both chamber operas investigate very similar psychological inquiries.

Published in 1899, in the first English translation of “When We Dead Awaken” by William Archer, Ibsen critiqued the bourgeois commercialization of art as “double-faced”. The duality of art and artist is a crucial point for understanding the chamber opera adaptation by Halpern.

When a person assumes the ego of the artist, such as by inspiration or pride, the art can take control, overpowering and transforming the humanity of the person, just as it does in the eye of the beholder.

“The Sculpture”, based on the Ibsen play does not explore the entire narrative. Instead, Halpern has extracted one dream sequence and exaggerated the dramaturgy. The protagonist, a sculptor named Rubek, dreams in the middle of a particularly weary, drunken night of introspective, artistic conflict. During the dream his model Irene, the woman who he sought to depict in stone, visits him. Her role befits divine intervention as a post-Romantic metaphor for modern conscience.

The dream woman, angel, and subject of the sculptor is played by soprano Alisa Peterson, who made her Carnegie Hall debut in performances of Haydn and John Rutter in 2011. In his 16th appearance in a Halpern chamber opera, baritone Jim Trainor plays the sculptor and theology professor.

Sixty-two years after “A Christmas Carol” first appeared, the Irish poet William Butler Yeats published a similarly themed short play called “The Hour Glass”. Spiritual intervention is the common thread. Whether by a dream figure in “The Hour Glass” and “The Sculpture” or ghosts of time in “A Christmas Carol”, all equally impress a more compassionate worldview in a relatively unyielding male antihero.



From “The Sculpture” to “The Hour Glass”, Peterson shone in the embodiment of two very distinct characters, from the hurt model, to the witty student. Trainor, on the other hand, performed both of his characters to a comparable effect, displaying artist and scholar alike as marred by a conflicted egotism. The thematic music of Halpern, played expertly by pianist Earl Buys, diverged only very subtly between the two chamber operas.

Ibsen, Yeats and Halpern dramatize the polemics of conscience. For an artist, as for a true thinker, good has a wholly unique meaning from strict moral rightness. Artistic and philosophic goodness is more aligned to truth and beauty, and so is at times iconoclastic with respect to the prevailing obedience of status quo morality.

November, 2015

## THE EXALTED at BAM

*The Exalted*, written by the celebrated poet and performer Carl Hancock Rux is told in the spirit of German expressionism, centering on the anarchist German-Jewish writer Carl Einstein, today considered a founding voice in the evolution of seminal modernist art movements. The writings of Einstein influenced Cubism and the European avant-garde artists such as Pablo Picasso, as well as the Berlin caricaturist George Grosz and the French painter Georges Braque.

*The Exalted* dramatizes the significance of Einstein's work on African art. In his literary expressionism, for which he was most proud, he critiqued the conceptual bases for Western culture. Similarly, contemporary dramaturgy has evolved under the pen of Rux, whose post-modern interpretation of German expressionism befits the historical basis for the narrative.

Composer and performer Theo Bleckmann is a kindred spirit. Drawing from his German heritage, he performed Einstein in *The Exalted* with a moving impeccability, elevating the poetic language of Rux with an anarchic sensibility. Together, Rux and Bleckmann are strengthening the marginal zone where new aesthetic movements take hold.

Rux is firmly rooted in the African-American literary tradition that began with Phyllis Wheatley and continued into the 20th century with Langston Hughes and Amiri Baraka. The role he performs in *The Exalted*, and his script, gives voice to the African perspective, further glorifying Einstein as a man who enriched both Western and African culture through his arts criticism.

Einstein, familiar with the cultures of the Herero and Nama people who endured the first genocide of the 20th century in German-occupied Africa, lived one of those typical 20th century lives. The year he published "Negerplastik", a book that would change the way Western culture appreciated art, he volunteered to serve in WWI.

In the following years, he joined a militant anarchist trade union defending the Republican front in Spain. Einstein's example, intellectually and socially, has inspired contemporary neo-expressionism in Rux, whose forthcoming second novel is based on *The Exalted*.

In certain ways, the play is both biographical about Einstein and autobiographical, for without the avant-garde, and without an appreciation for African aesthetics, Carl Hancock Rux and Theo Bleckmann would not be as appreciated for who they are today.

Interestingly, Rux writes about the double-edged power of art to stimulate militarism and encourage peace on an equal footing. The creation of art is a boon and conundrum to the Western intellectual.

In his criticism, especially when drawing from his studies of African sculpture, Einstein asked important questions about aesthetic utilitarianism. His inquiries fortified the avant-garde, Dada, surrealist, and expressionist artists of Europe.

November, 2015

## A CELEBRATION OF PRIMO LEVI at 92Y

Momentous is a strong word, yet not as strong as carbon, the sixth element in the Periodic Table of Elements, inspiring the literary masterpiece known by the "scandalous" title, as its author Primo Levi confesses, "The Periodic Table".

Named in 2006 by the Royal Institution of Great Britain as the best science book ever written, Levi outcompeted Charles Darwin, James Watson, Richard Dawkins, Oliver Sacks and Bertolt Brecht, to name only a few.

The eminent Italian chemist, writer, and Auschwitz survivor began with carbon to tell the story of his life.

Born in 1919 to an extroverted father, less a family man than a bon vivant, who inspired in his son a love for books, Levi went on to devour Mann, Huxley, Sterne, Werfel, Darwin, and Tolstoy. During the racial laws imposed by the prevailing fascist government throughout Italy in 1938, Levi was among the Jews already enrolled at university, which meant he could continue his studies while Jews across the land were disallowed entry into public schools.

In Auschwitz, his Italian identity became all the more apparent beside Yiddish-speaking European Jews, who considered Italians and Greeks as the lowest strata of society, which he explained in his 1997 book of interviews, "The Voice of Memory". In its 300-plus pages, Levi further elucidates the perspective of Italian and Greek Jews, who, he felt, were more accustomed to anti-Semitism, especially in Salonika.

In March of 1944, when the Germans deported the Greek Jews of Ioannina to Auschwitz, disturbing photographs show their stunned confusion. One woman was even smiling. They had no idea where they were going. Until 1913, their community lived under the protection of Ottoman governance, which, however problematically, respected minority religionists such as the Jews, arguably with less violent incursions or systemic oppression than in the pogroms and racism of Christian Europe.

With all due respect to the incomparable nature of Levi's firsthand observation, the Greek Jews were perhaps more naïve than the Italians.

Despite the ethnic nationalism of Jewish identity in the European diaspora, just to identify as a Jew was often a leap in, and of itself, for educated 20th century youth like Levi. Yet, as he said in a 1975 interview with scholar Giorgio de Rienzo, "At Auschwitz, I became a Jew."

It was also during his time in Auschwitz that he conceived the first stirrings for his autobiography. As narrative science, "The Periodic Table" is a book about chemistry, without being a book of chemistry, as he said in a 1985 interview for the BBC only two years before his tragic suicide in his birthplace of Turin.

"It is such an incredible story how carbon can become a living element," Levi said in the interview, his humble and wiry frame like a "string quartet," as Liveright editor-in-chief Robert Weil, who once worked with Levi, remembers.

Finally, after sixteen inveterately fastidious years on the tables of editors and translators, "The Complete Works of Primo Levi" was finally published in September of 2015. Longstanding New Yorker editor and Pulitzer Prize-winning author David Remnick expressed admiration for his colleague, Ann Goldstein, who edited Levi's works with painstaking care.

In the editor's introduction, Goldstein emphasized how important language had become for the Italian chemist in Auschwitz, where the inability to grasp a word could lead to immediate death. Similarly, the "Complete Works" enlighten the lesser known and under-appreciated Levi, who, even in his most obscure writing exudes a most unpretentious pride in this spirit of language as a vessel within which to house the spirit of his people. And such is true for Diaspora Jewry as the People of the Book.

The works of Levi proved a most stimulating translation project, where scientific terms and Italian idioms marched through a byzantine array of laboratory processes and literary syntax. More important, the fourteen books, neatly cased into three volumes, are the laborious result of numerous translators, all who set out to represent the unified, lifelong literary development of a single author.

At The New Yorker Festival, held during the first week of October, Toni Morrison spoke of the racism that minorities like Jews and African-American people often harbor. Morrison went on to speak of the unnoticed accomplishments that her father humbly enjoyed to himself while at work as a welder during WWII. One day he returned home happier than ever for perfecting a seam.

Enduringly, Levi is a man who is foremost remembered in the high honors bestowed on his literary craft. To read his stories is to swallow history itself as a hard lump of disquiet and to embark on a spiritual adventure in scientific thinking. "The Complete Works" prove that Levi is dear to American literature, where he is lauded as a scientist whose spiritual transformation in the grip of Nazi extermination crystallized his rare genius into the heart of a pure artist.

November, 2015

## JOHN IRVING at 92nd Street Y

John Irving is the epitome of the modern American storyteller. His ability to render the passage of time in prose fiction is peerless--a testament to his success as the author of thirteen novels spanning over four decades. His fourteenth novel, "Avenue of Mysteries", named after the street in Mexico City that famously leads pilgrims to the Lady of Guadalupe, is chock-full of that singular knack for dark humor that has made Irving a household name.

The lead character in "Avenue of Mysteries" is a self-described "lowan" named Juan Diego, originally from Oaxaca, Mexico, who experiences the past more vividly than the present. Irving has perfected the art of reader sympathy, drawing seamlessly parallel narratives that link the aging Juan Diego with his traumatic childhood.

The pith of the "Avenue of Mysteries" narrative has basted in Irving's mind since an ill-fated trip to India in the 1990s. Futile efforts to produce a screenplay about child circus performers from the slums of India were resurrected in the form of a novel after multiple visits to Mexico. In Oaxaca, he closely observed children "scavengers," as they are known, for picking through burning heaps of refuse to earn money.

Juan Diego is a scavenger, or as he is known in "Avenue of Mysteries", "a dump kid". Later in life, in a relatively more benign circumstance as a writer in the Midwest, he is overwhelmed by nightmares of his childhood in 1970s Oaxaca.

As Irving explains, at the time when his fictional character scavenged trash, fire restrictions were almost nonexistent in comparison to today. The story begins in the "hellfire" as Irving writes, where Juan Diego finds books, and teaches himself to read.

Irving avoids identifying as an intellectual, even an artist. He is a craftsman, simply fortunate to have had the time and discipline to roll up his sleeves at a writing desk, where he has worked in longhand for an average of eight hours a day for decades on end.

Yet, at once, he has challenged this definition, demonstrating a profound intellectual knowledge of classic literature. He will conversantly reference Thomas Mann, an immortal colleague within the pantheon of the classics, with the type of mental ease known only by writers of Irving's caliber.

What impresses audiences most is how Irving has illustrated human empathy and the grand range of emotion with his characteristic gift. His novels have

unmistakable social undercurrents that speak to personal and collective histories. Juan Diego, in teaching himself to read, learned of the outstanding injustices rent against indigenous Mexicans by religious colonizers. Parallel to the separate phases of his personal life -- the unabated nightmares from his trash-scavenging childhood against his stable American adulthood -- are the histories of Mexico and the Philippines.

Susan Cheever, an outstanding literary historian herself, as well as a close friend of Irving, co-presented the reading, candidly seated with Irving onstage at the 92Y. She noted how Irving, in many ways, picks up where Dickens left off, and even outdoes the legendary Brit with an ingenious literary irony all his own.

To round out the reading, Irving spoke about why he went to the Philippines, which was to see the country through the eyes of Juan Diego. "Avenue of Mysteries" ruminates on the shared and ongoing traumas of global colonization (as in the Spanish occupation of Mexico and the lesser known, yet no less atrocious, American occupation of the Philippines.)

"Avenue of Mysteries" will not disappoint Irving fans and new readers. Readers will recognize certain characters modeled after those in his preceding novels, such as the sister of Juan Diego, Lupe who, in her prophetic nature, is like Owen Meany (A Prayer for Owen Meany), and just like Juan Diego, who happens to be a writer like Ted Cole (A Widow for One Year.)

Irving reminds his readers that Thomas Mann said that repetition is concomitant with saying something worthwhile. While history repeats itself, Irving continues to brave the storms of the emotive imagination to renew the human story. "I know what my job description is," he says, in his sly tone. "I try to make a couple of principal characters sympathetic. And then, I want you to worry about what's going to happen to them, because the worst thing I can imagine will."

November, 2015

## PETER MURPHY at Le Poisson Rouge

In old England, life revolved around the pub, the brothel, and the stage. At times the bar scene feels like all three. That ambiance is in full color with the Stripped tour, the latest from the raging musical iconoclast Peter Murphy.

Back down where early Lower Manhattan Vaudeville spouted immigrant revelry, Murphy rolled up his sleeves in Greenwich Village, shouting at "Italian" bouncers with an Irish brogue. The former Village Gate opened its doors to the greatest names in American music. Twelve years ago, it became Le Poisson Rouge.

As New York's daydreamers perspired in the spring heat, the line formed for the first of three Peter Murphy shows. Two were sold out.

Murphy is a self-named "Sakar Baba" Entertainer in the tradition of the Holy Clown with a voice like an Operatic Dervish. He is the Original Hipster, former lead singer of the post-punk wave in Bauhaus.

In 1980, New Musical Express (NME) infamously printed a review slandering Bauhaus as "Gothick as a Brick".

"It was great," said Murphy, lounging in his parked tour bus after playing New York. "It was like they were saying, 'Who the are these upstarts?'" While authoring a new genre of music may seem impressive to fans, Murphy is not in it for a name.

"Some people come dressed gothic, and they end up surprised with what they hear," Murphy said in between discussing everything from comparative religion to modern dance. "Others who would be amazed were it not for the misleading moniker as a 'gothic' artist. They may not come to the show because of this."

Murphy is an original Poet of the Rose, unafraid to upset the gentry, kicking tables, picking fights, and ribbing his audience, the new American public. Stripped is all about the cannon voice of Murphy and his *illahi* lyrics. (*Illahi* is a Sufi concept of spiritual energy transmission that Murphy advocates with conviction.)

"Flowers. Fawn, shadows mere," sings Murphy, on the title track of LION. "On a puppet horizon / We want that lion on our skin, the best of the set we think, we've gotten."

Accompanied by guitarist John Andrews (Loudboy), and Emilio China on violin and bass, the trio exudes everything from Irish folk to industrial rock, rounded



out with artful electronica. Drawing from his deep well of song cycles, many are recent with his latest album, LION. And then, from Bewlay Brothers to Purple Rain, he gave tribute.

Ultimately, his is the art of the self-made, choreographing as he goes with that unmistakable stage presence, a Smoking Immortal and Drunken Elder of the eternal and nameless school where only few emerge to tell the tale.

May, 2016

## JOHN ZORN at YIVO

One century ago, 200,000 New Yorkers mourned in the streets, representing the best-attended funeral procession in the history of the city to date. This May, the global Jewish community remembered Sholem Aleichem, for his centenarian *yahrzeit* (Yiddish for "death anniversary").

The Center for Jewish History, YIVO Institute for Jewish Research has an impressive archive of rare books in every European language. The West Village theater housed at the Center was just the place for the live performance of the soundtrack to "Sholem Aleichem: Laughing in the Darkness" as a fitting precedent to the May 22 exhibition opening, dedicated to the epoch-defining literature of Aleichem.

American-Jewish jazz composer John Zorn scored the documentary, and later released the music as "Filmworks XX: Sholem Aleichem" with his record label, Tzadik.

Zorn appeared before a delighted crowd, the bespectacled genius in person, to conduct the Masada String Trio, featuring Mark Feldman (violin), Greg Cohen (bass), Erik Friedlander (cello), in collaboration with Robert Burger (accordion) and Carol Emanuel (harp).

The song titles on the "Laughing in the Darkness" soundtrack speak volumes: Luminous Visions, Portable Homeland, Redemption, Wandering Star, and Jewish Revolutionaries are a few of the gems on the twelve-track album.

To begin, Zorn tapped his signature middle finger to thumb for the time of "Shalom, Sholem!" Given the name Solomon Rabinovich at birth, Sholem Aleichem dubbed himself what in Yiddish basically means, "Mr. How-Do-You-Do" as the Yiddish Book Center founder Aaron Lansky explained so eloquently in the film.

Light-footed, and swaying to a harp-led melody, the song "Mamme Loshen" translates to "Mother Tongue", referring to the Yiddish language itself. As opposed to Loshen Kodesh (literally, "sacred language" referring to Hebrew, which was used only for liturgy prior to modern Israel), Yiddish was the lingua franca of the shtetl, those reservation-like Jewish communities in the Pale of Settlement under the turbulent rule of Tsarist Russia.

The music of Zorn is characterized by heavy improvisation, simultaneous polyrhythms, choral syncopations, and crisscrossing arrangements attuned to a mystical solemnity, all timed with upbeat humor.

Melodies popular and intimate break like mythical waves over magical rhythms, conducted by Zorn with all the demanding intellectual nuance of a revolutionary genre-defying artist.

His music speaks in nebulous bodies of pure sound that express the soul of a people's history, evoked in the bow and pluck of strings, and in the palpable cadence of the accordion, calling to life the sounds of the shtetl. And like the shtetl, Zorn himself dresses as one among the people, in homely attire as informal as an East Village street.

His bass-led grooves harmonize to the muses of Sholem Aleichem, calling forth a textured multiverse wherein storytelling breathes anew, where the laughter of the oppressed is heard as percussive as the whoop and whorl of life in the village round.

They say of Sholem that he succored hearts and led minds because he knew where the Jewish people were from and where they were going, and most importantly, that they were on the move.

Zorn recognizes and dramatizes that movement with his singular American-Jewish genius, heard when the harpist recalls the lofty moods of the bygone palace court of Solomon's Temple in Jerusalem, and in the underlying rhythms pressing the listener forward into the sonic modernism of New York jazz-fusion.

The audience leaned into the hour-and-change set, digits bouncing to the beat more quickly than any millennial on a new device, and truly, before the ubiquitous ear candy appeared to modern life, it was precious minds like that of Zorn who heard music everywhere as the foundation and blossoming of daily life from the Yiddish shtetl to the East Village, born of a culture that raises its children with ears firmly held to the Wailing Wall of our storied and unforgettably musical generations, past, present and future.

Sholem Aleichem, Mr. How-Do-You-Do, his very name breathes proverbial Jewish wisdom, as in the saying "Shalom Aleichem" (loosely translated from the Hebrew as, "Hello to you") known esoterically as a greeting for intellectual Jewish minds.

When a learned Jew hears "Shalom Aleichem" it doubles as greeting and a challenge of wits among equals. The response is the characterful rebuttal "Aleichem Shalom" (And to you, Hello).

That's Sholem, a name crafted from the page of the *Dos Yiddishe Folksblatt* (translated as Yiddish People's News-Sheet), in the recurring persona of a literary humorist writing for the popular press. Well, it is true of Sholem Aleichem to have the "Aleichem" at the end of his name, for even the utterance of his name stirs intellectual prompt among Jews.

Music is essentially change, a sensual embodiment of all that is spontaneously beautiful about kinetic potential in the universe of sensation and intuition. And for that reason, Zorn may be justified in his onstage comment that his music for "Laughing in the Darkness" is better than the documentary itself.

Storytelling is not only heard in words, and especially in the tradition of Zorn and in celebration of the American multicultural present, Jewish storytelling is often best when it's simply music to our ears.

Tevye the Dairyman, the principal character of the most famous adaptation from the stories of Aleichem, "Fiddler on the Roof", first on Broadway in 1964, was developed in real-time chronology, in five-year installments that coincided with the age of Tevye and Aleichem himself. His character development stands as a groundbreaking technique by the standards of any literature anywhere, never mind by the proponent of an endangered language.

Aleichem succinctly wrote what Jewish storytelling is essentially about, which is how a person maintains identity, inheriting a difficult history in confrontation with a very confrontational present. He went to America as the most celebrated Yiddish writer after the Kiev pogrom of 1905, following an unsuccessful Russian revolution that ended in terrorizing the Jews.

Initially welcomed as the Jewish Mark Twain, when American audiences saw his ambitious plays, he was nearly run out of town. What was authentic to European Jewry could not be bridged to the absolutely unshackled minds of Jewish-American youth.

What was Jewish culture without persecution and marginalization? Through its effective integration and religious tolerance, America led to a New Enlightenment of questioning Jewish identity more thoroughly than any authoritarian rule in diaspora, and perhaps even more than Judea itself.

Sholem Aleichem died in New York, May 13, 1916. Every neighborhood of the Jewish community united in procession, stopping frequently to eulogize. Downtown and uptown Jews stood side by side. The literary community was out in force. One hundred writers presided over his coffin. Even

the socialist *Jewish Daily Forward* paid respects, despite staunchly refusing to publish his works due to his Zionist bourgeois stature.

Congressmen began to recognize the powerful viability of the Jewish political constituency. The pre-statehood Zionist flag of Israel was flown alongside the American flag. Posthumously, Aleichem was celebrated as an anti-capitalist, Marxist writer for the workers, for his people.

Following in the obsessively artful footsteps of Aleichem, the music of Zorn is a perfect expression of how American Judaism turned about face to embrace not only Aleichem. More importantly, American Jews are now continuously learning to respect European-Jewish heritage in the present. Zorn embodies that quintessential European-Jewish home-wrecker of tradition who up and left generations of family only to become the keeper of tradition in America.

He looks back on a lost world, only unlike the rose-tinted nostalgia of popular culture, such as in the 1971 film version of "Fiddler on the Roof", Zorn composes with all the characterful immediacy and true complexity of the here and now.

June, 2016

## ERWIN SCHULHOFF RETROSPECTIVE at Center for Jewish History

Recently honored as a Lower East Side Community Hero, pianist Mimi Stern-Wolfe walked onstage on the evening of May 25th 2016 at the Center for Jewish History in NYC. She is the founder and artistic director of Downtown Chamber Players and the recipient of the 2015 Clara Lemlich Award.

And she did not speak a word. Her fingers recited history in Tango, Charleston, Waltz, Foxtrot, Blues, Maxixe.

In the 1920s, when Erwin Schulhoff composed jazz, he was the ardently Enlightened Jewish composer and pianist from Prague, the former student of Claude Debussy and Max Reger who could be found out late on the streets of Europe indulging in the latest popular dance music from America. He frequented the most cultured social circles and hottest nightclubs of interwar Europe, from Vienna to Berlin, Paris to Moscow, experimenting uninhibited with nascent avant-garde and Dadaist movements.

From the age of ten, Antonín Dvorák recognized his rare talents as a performer, and in the radically inventive compositions that he crafted throughout his life he exhibits a special, intuitive ear for the artist. Schulhoff is the sound of the enduring European intellectual meeting the unshackled American improviser.

His interplays of harmony and dissonance introduce his listeners to a purely sensual place, where revolution is art and freedom is the performance of creation, spontaneously rising and falling in step with the mood of the immediate.

He composed for the contemporary, and his intercultural fusions embody that common struggle among every generation to renew time, to refresh history and find life, beauty and truth in the present. The artist is uniquely prepared for such a task, the one who surfaces most powerfully in times of struggle.

Stern-Wolfe interpreted his music masterfully, and with an honest understanding of the historic moment in which it was written. Schulhoff is a composer for composers, like a musician's musician, whose works continue to represent the feeling of the times and the places in which they were created. Beyond history, and even art, there is the sound of the way people lived, thought, and expressed that is only known to music.

Interwar Europe was one of the most unfathomably tempestuous times in history, where new paradigms swept through like lightning and thunder, and where people embraced the storms of unknown technologies and unfamiliar

cultures with desperate abandon. The artist had an intensely rich palette, and the people starved for liberated cultural action.

Schulhoff was one of many Europeans who were then remaking a world-on-edge, torn at the seams of tradition by world war, and revealing the fleshy underbelly of materialism through capitalist globalization. To the composer, it was all a minor progression in the key of cultural shell shock. At least it could be made danceable.

And then there was “Bass Nightingale” (1927), his contrabassoon solo, introduced by the distinguished music writer and NYU lecturer, Dr. Michael Beckerman as a composition that could have only resulted from a late night bet among intellectuals competing to create the strangest work.

The piece is a dizzying Escher-like kaleidoscope into a leaky dungeon, the slowed pitch of a sonic boom, an infinitely illusive staircase of scales. The smiling Thomas Sefcovic sauntered across the stage like the last of his endangered species, a real-life contrabassoon soloist, playing out the piece with a jazz-inspired improvisation.

The Downtown Chamber Players exemplified proud gusto with “String Quartet No. 1” (1924), where Marshall Coid and Bradley Bosenbeck bowed with all of the impressive strength of the revolutionary artistry that inspired Schulhoff. Veronica Salas (viola) and Mary Wooten (cello) dreamed up a roaring rhythm section musing on an era when Europe first heard that scintillating chorus of musical passion that we now know as jazz.

With jazz, the modern composer had a popular music that was, in many ways, rivaling the sophistication of classical theory. Schulhoff was one of the leaders of a renaissance in classical composition not seen since Béla Bartók had led the way to comparative musicology with his integration of folk music.

Of course, in America, Gershwin wrote “Rhapsody in Blue” (1924) the same year that Schulhoff wrote his “Piano Sonata No. 1” for German antiwar novelist Thomas Mann. Performed elegantly by Stern-Wolfe, she stood before the audience to reflect the piece’s tragic sound, evoking a military march.

Through his music, Schulhoff confronted the traumas he endured as a wounded veteran of the Austrian Army on the Hungarian and Russian fronts.

While high with a sense of the eternal now, listening to the music of Schulhoff today demands historical imagination. In retrospect, the world he lived in could never have imagined the reach of jazz. So, performing “Hot Sonata” (1930),

saxophonist Marty Ehrlich searched for a living pulse, wailing on dusty notes first heard by a man lost to the concentration camps of Bavaria.

He was not interned by the Nazis because he was Jewish, as Dr. Beckerman told an impatient audience after playing the sounds of women moaning and other concept pieces from Schulhoff during his phase in Socialist Realism.

One year before the Nazis took control of Germany, he scored The Communist Manifesto. Although he successfully petitioned for Soviet citizenship by 1941, he did not make it out of his Czechoslovakian homeland in time.

Like every true intellectual, like all artists free to create, his work proved that he had thought beyond the borders of state control. Yet, Schulhoff went further. He wrote music in solidarity with political rebellion. Deemed a traitorous transgressor for pursuing the cause of art in the spirit of his time, the music of Schulhoff is, in retrospect, as powerful and meaningful as ever.

Beginning in the musical idioms of popular American culture, he demanded the social and cultural liberations of Europe through both extreme abstraction and pragmatic theory. In posterity he continues to teach American audiences just how the need for freedom is universal, and as timeless as the effect of music.

For what is freedom to life, Schulhoff asks in his compositions, if it is not as physical and as rapturous as dancing?

June, 2016



## THE JUDAS KISS at BAM

Fade in. Orgasm. Poem. Fade out.

There is comedy. There is tragedy. And then there is the story of how Oscar Wilde was duped for his lust over an English Lord.

Inside a house in the Piccadilly, a man named Gilbert sits at a piano. He shares company with Ernest, a fellow conversationalist who has just opened a book. They begin to dialogue at length on the nature of objectivity in relation to art, namely in the role of the critic.

*The Critic As Artist* is one of the many classics that Oscar Wilde wrote during the highly salacious affair now depicted as his life. Over a century later, his downfall is attributed to an ongoing social cause to protect human dignity throughout the globe: sexual diversity.

"Every great man nowadays has his disciples, and it is always Judas who writes the biography," Wilde wrote, soon after the opening in *The Critic As Artist*, subtitled, *With Some Remarks Upon The Importance of Doing Nothing*.

The importance of doing nothing is a fitting theme for the first act of *The Judas Kiss*, written by David Hare, directed by Neil Armfield at BAM, and starring Rupert Everett as Oscar Wilde.

Before lights reveal the posh Cadogan Hotel in London, before Lord Alfred Douglas frets over the fate of his famous literary lover, and before Wilde himself appears to embrace betrayal, the show opens with nude room servants embracing in cunnilingus.

Behind closed doors, Wilde is his raucously satirical self, seated indifferently in his room while a charge of imprisonment for gross indecency weighs more heavily than the cream on his lobster dinner. Finally, his decision is becoming of a rebel poet, to do nothing more than shut his eyes and dream away before the inevitability of exile.

Endearingly nicknamed Bosie, the Lord is a symbol of state mockery, physical exploitation and political connivance, streaked with the profound naivety of puerile ambition and inflated pride. Hare writes with a wicked pen, lucid, elegant and imbued with the passion and grace of Wilde as, above all, a peerless voice in literature.

Only the true artist knows the beautiful necessity of failure, having gained mental clarity enough to discern human failings from natural propensity. Through literature, Wilde represented the social urge to humanization as a transformation of the personal intellect in communion with truths only perceived in the depths of solitude and nature, beyond society.

As an expatriate in Naples for the second act of *The Judas Kiss*, Wilde endures historic tragedy and private duplicity through the spiritual force of the creative life. Everett has the presence, the voice, and the manner to create a convincing Wilde deserving of public compassion.

Armfield has directed a strong and vital play that will rival any 21st century entertainment complex while preserving the classic theatrical form of the tragedy. From the orgasm of two lowly workers to the lonesome poetry of an epochal artist, *The Judas Kiss* perfects the art of denouement.

June, 2016

## ROMEO & JULIET at MetOpera

Sir Kenneth MacMillan silenced the Bard to the wordless storytelling of corporeal movement. His three-act *Romeo & Juliet*, remounted at MetOpera, was ennobled by three decades in American Ballet Theatre's repertory. And through ballet, MacMillan begins where Shakespeare left off, in search of what is arguably the highest ideal of the artist: transcendence. "Silence is the artist's ultimate otherworldly gesture," wrote Susan Sontag in her 1969 book *Styles of Radical Will*. "By silence, he frees himself from servile bondage to the world..."

The story of *Romeo & Juliet* is not romance. It is pure tragedy, wrought of a terribly unromantic time in history when youthful Eros was subjugated by blood-born violence, when the grace of sexual pleasure was repressed to empower the inglorious muscle of male aggression. The mortal pride of family honor is the seamy underbelly of what the post-Shakespearian literate world has deemed romance. The narrative essentially bespeaks nothing more than absolute mythological devastation.

It was from the *Pyramus & Thisbe* of Ovid where Shakespeare gleaned his *Romeo & Juliet*. The cemetery of Verona was formerly the wilderness of Babylon, where religious mediation by the friar was once dramatized by the horror of a prowling lion. The creativity of MacMillan was no less tried by the vice of such terminal confrontation. Not only was *Romeo & Juliet* his first three-act ballet, the global reputation of modern Britain as the sower of dramatic genius was on the line. The British *Romeo & Juliet* was prompted by Leonid Lavrosky's 1956 Bolshoi Ballet production at the Royal Opera House, not to mention the 400th anniversary of Shakespeare's birth.

MacMillan proved more than his artistry, he proved his peerless courage in the five months he had to complete his now classically distinguished work. Prior to his taking the helm at the Royal Opera House, Soviet authority derailed Dame Ninette de Valois while Royal Danish Ballet choreographer Frederick Ashton declined the production for fear of competing with Lavrosky's formidable reputation in Britain. Even more intimidating was the fact that Lavrosky worked with Prokofiev himself.

Ormsby Wilkins conducted the iconic score on the theme of "Op. 64, Montagus and Capulets", the "Dance of the Knights" to a rabble-rousing, sword-fighting theatrical extravaganza that bled and roused some fifty dancers. Nicholas Georgiadis resurrected Late Renaissance 16th century Veronese life with tantalizing detail. His eye-boggling costumes and arresting scenes were the pearly decor of the evening in the spirit of artistic forebear Paolo Veronese.

Today, 400 years after the death of the Bard, the MetOpera affirms his afterlife with the MacMillian remount. The choreography is reputedly less technical and more emotional in its dramatic form than other current ABT season productions, *Swan Lake* and *Sleeping Beauty*.

That makes *Romeo & Juliet* all the more popular for the ballet connoisseur and virgin alike. And the plot is more realist than fairy-tale. More political than spiritual, more human than supernatural, MacMillan's *Romeo & Juliet* dances in the emotional ruins of a world where national triumph rules over personal fulfillment, where individuality is assumed as mere egoism and social convention furthers the ignorance that separates man from man, woman from woman, and perhaps most tragically, man from woman.

Shakespeare and MacMillan echo the cry of the people when they are shattered by the divorce of love from youth. And in the art of ballet, within its spatial richness and swift poses, almost as rising from the unconscious, the dancers exhibited the nature of life on Earth where the truths of mortal sexuality are juxtaposed with the enlightening spiritual imagination. Cory Sterns, as Romeo, and Hee Seo, as Juliet, masterfully personified all of the lofty airs and violent intensity of impassioned emotion inflamed by war and hate, succored by intimacy and selflessness. The crowd-pleasing Roman Zhurbin as Tybalt lightened all of the flagrant pride, in humor and solidarity, to his bitter end.

The tragic lovers, *Romeo & Juliet*, are ultimately in search of the freedom that is complete and utter unity, like the eternal heart of the poet finding transcendence in silence, standing on the tip of his toes, whirling with a sweat-whipped brow, to reach beyond the involuntary bondage of life to death, for love. In America, where the notion of a romantic tragedy is entirely laughable to most popular storytelling, MacMillan has gained critical respect likening him to the genius of Picasso. The son of a fallen WWI soldier, his influences from postwar theater define the earthly character of his *Romeo & Juliet*. Reflecting on the choreography of the final scene, Prokofiev himself affirmed the double-suicide for love as utterly transcendent in his ballet.

From *pas de deux* to dragging corpse, MacMillan does not overplay the earnestness of the stylistic dramaturgy so essential to ballet. Yet, he literally choreographed *Romeo & Juliet* to death with all of the awe-inspired beauty that breathes deeper and deeper into the core of the only truth of being alive: that love is all there is to life.

July, 2016

## STEPHEN PETRONIO COMPANY at The Joyce

Some people have many ideas. Then, some ideas have many people. The origin story of modernism, of the contemporary, of the moment in dance, is an idea that has possessed the greatest creative minds in history. The choreographic transition from ballet tradition to free expression led to the renewal of the body, into the life-giving pressure-cook of the mind infused with the blood pump of raw physical rhythm. Being mostly water, the human body is naturally an artwork in motion, fluidly coursing to the skeletal mechanics of creation, by the artistic direction of the one mysterious union of all.

And no one delivers the artist right into the heart of becoming anew through movement, of the human being evolved as dancer, as Stephen Petronio; a true descendant of the living gods who once birthed pure human form in motion. As the first male in the Trisha Brown Company, and after working with Steve Paxton and Anna Halprin, he has evolved the role of the dancer in American society with classic bravery. His very first dance class, Improvisation 101 at Hampshire College featured Steve Paxton as a guest artist, who prepared him to dance for Brown. Later, he found parallel inspiration in the works of Yvonne Rainer, together contributing to the art of nonverbal action, of body language as performance art.

With the first three pieces of the Stephen Petronio Company at The Joyce by Rainer, he opened with "Diagonal" (1963), giving the audience an eye into the confrontation between dancer and director, with those onstage signaling movements themselves spontaneously, while the forms themselves were previously choreographed. The letters and numbers called out by the dancers onstage held the energy of the present momentary now, which is the crux of modernism, and the root philosophy for contemporary dance. The mechanical, labor aesthetic to the piece was reminiscent of Merce Cunningham, and not only spoke to the industrial era from which the foundation of modern art arose, but also of the innate difference in the medium of dance. Choreography is a painting in blood and bone, as a story in emotion and reason, respectively.

"Bloodlines" is a series of programs directed by Petronio for The Joyce, which speaks to contemporary dance as an emotive tradition, of the body as the vehicle for expressing those emotions, felt and released in a single act, in the performance of art. Petronio is presenting that emotional foundation through a particular line of reason, of artistic lineage, that being the self-knowledge of an artist remembering the greatness that continues unbroken from dancer to dancer, choreographer to choreographer, director to director, almost as physical genetics are passed down through a family. Through dance, Petronio is demonstrating a genealogy of contemporary art.

"My technique really is the conscious direction of energy through the body and out into space," Petronio said in a 2014 interview with *Dance Magazine* writer Wendy Perron. "I have taken that fluidity and that somatic reality and extended it out into space. The walls of this room are finite but the walls of your mind aren't."

Timed to celebrate the third decade of the Petronio Company, *Bloodlines* is art history come to life. The emergence of history in the present is often challenging. Such is "Trio A With Flags", originally conceived by Rainer as a protest piece dedicated to her fellow incarcerated artists.

Initially set to silence, Ernesto Breton, Megan Wright and Nicholas Sciscione undressed, and began the steps, covered only by American flags waving over them, tied around the neck. Nationalist symbolism is exposed for its ideological abstraction. As unapproachable as contemporary dance is to many for its often nonrepresentational expression, so the American flag hung from the truly brave dancers as a bizarre fabric, unfit to clothe and even to protect the body.

The chief highlights of the evening were firstly by Nicholas Sciscione, who performed "Excerpt From Goldberg Variations" (1986) by Steve Paxton with a theatrical prowess, a stunning expressivity that lit the stage. He shone as a soloist. The precision of his synchronicity to the Goldberg Variations, BWV 988, Variations 16-23, by J.S. Bach, performed by Glenn Gould, were rivetingly entertaining. He was a force as complex and moving as the music, with all of the dizzying genius, the maddening glory.

"Untitled Touch", the world premiere, reinforced the unspeakable power to the art of Stephen Petronio as a choreographer of the age. He rightly identifies with his art as part of a lineage, as a descendant of greats, heroes, gods.

Such quality is distilled to wonder, to the beauty of a feeling in every moved audience member following with generous eyes and a quickening heart to the movements that he inspires in his company, and in collaboration. The original composition, by Son Lux, who has revolutionized the sound of electronic music through instrumental musicianship, is an example of the creative impetus to renew art to the contemporary through multidisciplinary inspiration. If a new movement springs about in his footsteps, with Petronio as ancestor, that is, in his name, it should be called free perfectionism.

April, 2017

## AIDA at The Metropolitan Opera

There is a fragile eeriness to the opening measures of *Aida* (1871), as the composition by Verdi continues to draw all ears forward, especially as magnetically conducted by Daniele Rustioni during the 1,158th performance of the classic stage production at The Metropolitan Opera.

The initial progression warps time through the pure imagination of its Italian composer, once poised to rehearse orchestras in Milan, Parma, Naples, far from the newly opened Cairo Opera House. Verdi had expressed distaste for from the beginning of his controversial commission for not only the idea of composing to glorify a political event, but for the orientalist allure that Egypt had gained following the Napoleonic invasion.

There is barely a note of appreciation for the dynamic tapestry of Egyptian music, not ancient, not contemporaneous, in the music of *Aida*. Evidently, Verdi finally agreed to compose *Aida*, and for an exorbitant sum, only after the commission was next offered to Wagner.

Ottoman Egypt was all but bankrupted by the extravagance of Ismail the Magnificent, who drowned Turkified Cairenes into a sea of debt in the wake of opening the Suez Canal with his operatic craving. His wish to transform Egypt into a European country was ironically granted. Soon, following the world premiere of *Aida* in Cairo, colonial Britain seized Egypt from the Turks.

By the second minute of *Aida*, the tonal cadence is cinematic, evoking the grandeur of traditional opera, from the root of its heart in the Italian peninsula. And yet, there are secondary hints of ethnomusicological delight in the opening to Act II, hearkening to the temple and parade music of the ancient polytheists of the Nile whose overlapping festival seasons are still clearly pictured on the Pharaonic hieroglyphs engraved into sunlit stone throughout the mythic lands known to modern Egyptians as the Mother of the World.

Acts III and IV have the most precious harmonic resonances in the opera, furthering its musical art at the ingenious hand of Verdi with a profound magical pulse. As the voices of *Aida* reverberate through the universal echoes of indiscriminate human struggle, one that transcends culture and time, language and form, that being the conflict between homeland and love. It is a narrative that speaks to the source of commitment, from the exchange of domestic obligation in the ubiquitous tradition of marriage, to the far-flung romance of the international love story.

And more, *Aida* bleeds with the dream of freedom from slavery. It is a solemn requiem to the double-edged tragedies of war that have severed both victims and perpetrators since time immemorial.

Bulgarian soprano Krassimira Stoyanova enchanted as the Ethiopian slave and princess Aida, passionately exonerating the violence of her lover, the ambitious Egyptian officer Radamès, gracefully sung by Spanish tenor Jorge de León. Stoyanova stood with a powerful feminine presence, animating her role with the invisible spirit of love, as overlooked as the subtleties of the music that Verdi composed to the singular set design spectacle that altered the fate of empires.

Enthroned majestic, Morris Robinson thrilled as the King of Memphis, his sonorous bass voice thundering proudly through sets that have opened eyelids as widely as mouths for over a century.

April, 2017



## MODERN DANCE THEATER ISTANBUL MINI-FEST at Fulya Sanat

A rare event at Fulya Sanat, home of Istanbul State Opera and Ballet's Modern Dance Theater Istanbul (MDTist), is the Mini-Fest, last produced for the stage in 2014, it returned with two technique classes, three workshops, a special show and six performances of new choreography.

From boogie to hip hop, the first day's workshops broke for thirteen first-year dance students from MSGSÜ (Mimar Sinan Güzel Sanatlar Üniversitesi) to perform "Hippies for Sale", a repertoire piece by Gizem Aksu, who designed its concept, choreography and direction. It is based on a group of people who spend their youth in Turkey in the 2010s, and featured music by Hilight Tribe and Berna Efeoglu.

A manifesto accompanied the "Hippies for Sale" notes in the Mini-Fest playbill. It is a call to hug, shake, jump, provoke the hippie within and move to love.

Cem Bilgin led the Boogie and Hip Hop Battle workshops, in collaboration. As a dancer, he works on the outer circle of MDTist, an example of how the Mini-Fest is an opportunity for more people to appreciate the company's creative community as part of a broader whole beyond that of their usual programming.

To dancers and choreographers, the body is an art form. And as is true with every art, it also conjures philosophy, and spirituality.

MDTist company dancer Huri Murphy is a yoga teacher, and total enthusiast of the ancient Hindu practice. She applies its poses for dancers. At 10:30am, to begin the second and last, and fullest day of Mini-Fest, Huri woke a silent crowd of fifteen on the Fulya Sanat stage, which she elegantly converted into a yoga studio, ambient soundscapes and all under soft theater lighting.

By 2:30pm, the number of dancers onstage doubled for the last course of the day. After a composition workshop by MDTist dancer and young choreographer Kamola Rashidova, the company's artistic director Beyhan Murphy walked front and center to lead a technical class. Her appearance was a surprise, as the class was initially scheduled with another teacher.

In 2018, Beyhan celebrated forty years in dance, and she still moves onstage with as much magnetism and power as her dancers, shouting and laughing, and ordering them around with proven knowledge, slapping arms and legs, and moving to the beat with a youthful charm that exudes the London of the 1970s, where she cut her teeth.

Her company, MDTist, is her canvas, full of bright colors and broad strokes. The new choreographers featured at Mini-Fest, as with those across the country, and the entire international dance community, are indebted to her for the twenty three years she's given to modern dance in Turkey.

Then, the stage went pitch dark. "Eko", by Deniz Özeydin began the evening by setting a gloomy, mysterious tone. MDTist dancer Beril Senöz drank in the depths under an existential swarm. A fog machine blasted out clouds, as the seven dancers assumed god-like poise over the unearthly climate. The eighth of his choreographic works, Özeydin's "Eko" had a cyclical narrative that gave its audience chills.

"Rachmaninov -- String Quartet No. 1" is the title of a dance by Kamola Rashidova, specifically set to the effect of musical purism. It has no story, no point, it is simply an expression of her love for Rachmaninov. Originally trained at Tashkent State Higher School of National Dance and Choreography in her native Uzbekistan, she later enrolled at the prestigious PARTS in Brussels before joining MDTist. She danced the first movement of String Quartet No. 1,

"Romance", with Ayhan Karaagaç. Her choreographic talent showed as dancers Buse Ercan and Beril Senöz leapt into the second movement, for "Scherzo", and the mood swung high and suddenly from one dramatic extreme to the other with deftness and grace.

MDTist dancers Buse Ercan and Mert Öztekin performed "6'19" by Ebru Cansiz, a senior ballet dancer in Istanbul State Opera and Ballet, the parent company of MDTist. It's a solemn duet, a meditation on the gravity of trust in the fleeting nature of human relationships, weighed and checked by time: six minutes and nineteen seconds. Artfully deploying floor lights, and costuming the dancers in austere, futuristic garb, she choreographs with a signature aesthetic.

"Tabula Rasa" tested the ground as none other with the only solo work of the evening, choreographed and danced by Gizem Bilgen to the music of Motion Trio's "Silence". Her eight-minute piece began with her under a spotlight, as one "pressed between mysteries," she wrote in her artist's statement. Her modern dance expressed the basic stubbornness of the body in unstoppable repetition, compelling her perpetually onward into dream and experience.

Wildly contemporary, recalling the historic iconoclasm of Balanchines' Agon, or Cunningham's anything, choreographer and dancer Isil Derya Günes has only been with MDTist for a year and she is giving new life to Turkish choreography. To Mendelssohn's String Quartet no.2 op.13 in A minor, she conceptualized and choreographed "Hâl/Status" with a singular wit, characterizing the absurd and

fantastic as she reimagined the body as it moves and falls, as it sounds and acts under the light, and the darkness of the stage. Emre Olcay's performance was especially eye-catching, as he drew communicable emotion from the abstract.

After intermission, "One by One", the sixth and final choreographic work of the evening went onstage for fifty minutes to conclude the festival. Not one minute was wasted. It was a tragicomic tour-de-force choreographed by Evrim Akyay, in a fantastically modern duet with Melissa Ugolini.

They twisted and churned over the nonverbal meaning of relationship: masculine and feminine, you and I, mine and ours. Even their dialogue, seemingly impromptu, was crisp and fast as they wound their bodies up to untangling. They were as irresistible as the laughter that leaked and fumed from the audience as the pair exchanged mixed emotions through each spastic and thrilling movement.

With every workshop, class and performance completely free-of-charge, the MDTist Mini-Fest is a goldmine for seasoned professionals and for the newest faces in dance in Istanbul. More, it opens potential for newcomers to speak in their voice, in the language of the body moving to the latest art of the stage. And it is a welcome community, although close-knit, inclusive, where daughters and mothers teach separate subjects, where newly engaged couples dance as collaborators, and where young families learn the rhythm of each festive step.

June, 2017

## BANDSTAND at Bernard B. Jacobs Theatre

In his earliest memory, my grandfather is four years old. The year is 1919. He is standing atop his tenement building in the Lower East Side of Manhattan, where he watches an army parade. Soldiers are returning from the Great War, and peace on Earth seems possible.

He is too young to be filled with pride. On his way back to the apartment, where his mother is hard at work sewing a garment for her husband's sweatshop, he is saved from falling over a clothesline down onto the ceremony of Allen Street.

"I saved your life," said his uncle Eliasof, a colorful and unpredictable Greek Jew with a frightening grin. And he would remind his nephew that he did save his life to the end of his days, when he hanged himself after losing his wife.

The boy looks up at his immigrant uncle and asks him an unforgettable question. "What is God?" he asks.

"God is Nature," he replies in a serious tone, though not without leaving him with a sly cosmic giggle before patting his nephew on the back and leading him back to the care of his worrisome mother.

"Look what he did today," she tells her husband, who is sick with fatigue after a long day overseeing Yiddish-speaking stitchers in an industrial garment sweatshop on Forsyth Street. He is breathing heavy after an alcoholic bout at the cantina on Rivington Street. His son knows what is next as his father takes his belt off and chases him around the house.

About a decade later, the year the boy became a man at age eighteen according to American law, his father died of liver failure. It was 1934, and the Great Depression moved him west to enroll in the Civilian Conservation Corps. He was a tree-hugging employee of the War Department, clearing trail in the shadow of Mount Rainier.

He sent twenty-five dollars from his thirty-dollar pay every month to his mother in Brooklyn, where she raised his five younger siblings. After his return to New York, he watched as his second-oldest brother enlisted to serve in the Second World War. As first-born, he could not simply stay at home. Another brother joined. Three stars were placed in the window sill of the family home under the Williamsburg Bridge.

In basic training in Virginia, he entered the transportation sector with a company of men mostly from New England, though with one fast friend from Brooklyn.

They were all bound for North Africa, and eventually one of the toughest battles in WWII, at Monte Cassino in Italy. Wounded as he crashed his jeep under Luftwaffe fire, he later made his way into liberated France, where he met a lady.

She took him home. The next morning, her husband arrived. As he always told the story, the married man was so grateful to the American soldier that it was a joyful meeting, and he left the couple to each other.

Finally back on American soil, he would continue to march as a proud veteran for as long as he could walk. And he kept telling his war stories into his last, hundredth year. Many of his first mornings back home from the war, as his wife of over sixty years let out, he took a drink on waking up and went right back to sleep. The war had found its way inside him, and he made futile attempts to drown it like so many of his fellow, traumatized comrades.

He had heard the life of a man drop like a sack of potatoes. He saw men stacked like cords of wood. He witnessed the bombardment of a monastery in a fight of more than ten armies over four battles that nearly took his life. First, only drink softened the unbearable memories. Ultimately, his longevity proved that he could let those painful memories go by expressing them with his characteristic humor through the everyman theater of folkloric storytelling.

Donny Novitski, played by Corey Cott, is the protagonist of "Bandstand." He is a fictional veteran whose story is no less moving than my grandfather's because its believability runs parallel to the real experience of powerlessness in the face of war trauma. From the lightning shocks that clap thunderously over the heads of the combat soldiers and throughout the theatre, to the final, climactic bar of musical send-off, "Bandstand" is an elegiac love letter to veterans everywhere who have borne the brunt of human tragedy since time immemorial.

They sat with the public in the teary-eyed audience, and as the performers cried out to them, gripped to the heights of expressible gratitude, everyone felt the spirit of the nation still returning, not quite yet at home until that greater peace within is won.

Novitski is an unknown musical genius who left the small world of nightclubs in his hometown of Cleveland to serve in the Solomon Islands. One night, he dropped a grenade and it detonated beside his best buddy. As he returns home, he is snubbed out of the regular gigs of his peacetime past. His fight continues as he rallies a band of fresh veterans to pursue a dream of grandeur, to enter a national music contest in New York City.

Through music and lyrics by Richard Oberacker, who makes his Broadway debut with "Bandstand", the veterans find catharsis, a form of therapy even, by playing together in the newly formed band. The idea is best captured by the song, *Breathe*, and Cott sings it with a soothing legato: "And I, breathe through the instrument. Breathe through the end of the phrase. / And as everyone plays. It gets easier." One bandmate, the burly bearded bassist Davy Zlatic, played by Brandon J. Ellis, finds refuge in drink and jokes. He was hit with mustard gas and pepper spray, he laughs, "I'm a seasoned veteran."

"Bandstand" is full of musical gems. *Everything Happens* is a philosophically-rich lament sung by the uplifting and comical Beth Leavel who plays Mrs. June Adams, the mother of the widow to Novitski's late friend. Although she is not a veteran herself, she has been through the darkness of hell without knowing exactly how her husband died until his best friend tells her that it was from his friendly fire. Such stories weigh in authentic. They blast apart the stereotypes of American war heroism.

Laura Osnes is a refreshing voice as the songbird widow Julia Trojan, as she powerfully captures the special dramatic form of the Broadway musical. "This Is Life" encapsulates her relationship with Novitski, a forbidden love complicated by the trauma of mutual loss, of the revolutionary secret that the sacred trusts in life and friendship could be broken by one simple, human mistake. That they end up together is ultimately an aside to the grandiose sound that the band of veterans invigorate for the audience, leaving everyone, including those onstage, in tears that long to fall over the hallowed earth of buried, young souls.

Together with Cott, she sparks all of the classic Broadway chemistry of onstage camp and pomp, as they elegantly grace a spectacular vintage scenic design by David Korn, formerly working with the 2016 Tony Award-winner choreographer Andy Blankenbuehler, whose high style is in full form for "Bandstand", as its acts swing with charged simultaneity, every dance step and lyric pronunciation overlapped and textured to pure theatrical harmony.

In the ultimate scene of "Bandstand," the veterans are confronted with the typical double-bind reality for professional musicians and wounded warriors alike. What at first seems like an ideal opportunity turns out to be just another capitalist profit scheme by and for the wealthy.

They fight back and rebel against the cultural establishment with all of the grit they can muster to cast off the psychological shackles of the postwar hero. Instead of playing the song that won them the national audience, *Love Will Come* and *Find Me Again*, they perform *Welcome Home*, an uncensored and

liberated anthem to returning veterans, originally written as a private poem by Julia Trojan to her beloved war-torn brothers.

It is a sheer break with reason when capital becomes more valuable than life. And it is that ongoing strain on humanity that made my grandfather a factory hand and veteran. After four decades on the assembly line, he finally took college over cash. He read liberally and kept a library open to everyone he met. When he could not read any longer in his late nineties, he told his stories. I was there to hear them, and I think my active listening very well may have extended his life. I still hear his stories, and sometimes even his voice now in certain places, with certain people, in certain moments.

I heard his story once, and emotionally, again in "Bandstand." When storytelling in theater and in any art is meant to heal, to remember in the literal definition of the word as a unitive force towards holistic positivity, the life of its listeners, and of its voice, is sustained.

September, 2017

## SOMEHOW WE END UP HERE, AGAIN at HERE

The migrant, both voluntary and forced, is a recurring motif for dance choreographers who have ever sought to invigorate the traumas of exiled refugees, the discoveries of vagabond travelers and the insights of spiritual voyagers through plays of bodily movement.

At a time when immigrants and artists are at the frontline of social cause, such live theater artworks as *Somehow We End Up Here, Again* directed by Georgina Bates in collaboration with journalist Jihii Jolly and documentarian Diana Diroy have the power to provoke movement, not only from dance artists, but from the greater society in solidarity with those individuals and nations whose movements are politicized.

For twenty-five years, HERE has been a revolutionary site for artists of all disciplines to create hybrid works, with a special concentration in dance theater. Its Soho home on the cusp of Greenwich Village continues to attract a mixed audience of creatives, the writers and visionaries who once graced the streets of lower Manhattan in droves where now corporate America has mostly taken over.

More recently in the last decade, artistic director and HERE co-founder Kristin Marting launched the Sublet Series to better accommodate emerging artists who constantly reinvent HERE as a legendary downtown space where art remains relevant as a vehicle for social integration over cultural assimilation. Her piece of theater titled *Assembled Identity*, premiered at HERE in 2018.

Within the Sublet Series lies the Co-op program, which provides resources and a world-class venue to new, collaborative artists to show work for a short-run. Most of the Co-op productions have a hard social justice bent, such as *Somehow We End Up Here, Again*, exploring the experience of refugee resettlement. It is invaluable for audiences in America to put on the shoes of forced migrants as they find themselves anew. If art is driven by purpose, it is to instill empathy. And the lives of artists, even those who never leave home, run parallel to the 21st century immigrant, as both are tasked to overcome an unrelenting self-searching to find peace amid the chaos of earthly creation.

The choreographer and director of *Somehow We End Up Here, Again* is a diligent and fastidious intellect whose collaborative savvy came together to form a brilliant mosaic of multimedia contributions for her Sublet Series: Co-op production at HERE.

Earlier in the year, she met the playwright of *The (Last) Station* at Planet Connections Festivity, the premier socially-conscious arts festival in New York.



After conversing, it was clear that his band, The Jews of Malta would provide music for *Somehow We End Up Here, Again*. Not only do they have a great name, but out of a relatively lo-fi, underground operation, they kick out a sweet post-rock vibe that evokes comparisons with Do Make Say Think, and filmmaker Jim Jarmusch's experimental rock project, SQÜRL.

"I felt their tone had exactly the right texture for our dance work," Bates explained about The Jews of Malta, a group of sound artists who she saw as kindred to her project to empathize with new immigrants, as they keep a low profile. "Dave Hall, a brilliant musician, also offered his talents to the project and gave two songs, one of which he created for the piece."

"This whole concept of living under the radar was inspired by my personal relationship with my husband's family from Ecuador. I made a solo about this for my audition to get into Tisch [School of the Arts at NYU] for grad school in 2010 and continued by making "Stay where you are (we'll love you from here)," Bates explained.

"The subject matter is dear to my heart and I wanted to express it through dance. I proposed this idea along with including refugee and outcast perspectives for HERE's sublet series, and Jihii [Jolly] and Diana [Diroy] joined me in expanding the stories."

On August 4th, Jihii Jolly published a literary reflection about her collaboration with Bates in a piece she titled, "What happens when you combine dance and journalism?" They decided to focus on undocumented migrants as the lead inspiration for a hybrid production weaving together film, journalism and dance, as they had all worked on the subject separately before meeting to collaborate. They agreed that out of all the themes that emerge when empathizing with the experience of undocumented immigrants in the U.S., identity is the most challenging.

What inspired Jolly and Diroy to work with Bates was the realization that, while film and writing best explore one individual at a time, dance is literally and figuratively more flexible when working on a subject that requires a collective focus on many people at once. Bates and Jolly found that the news provoked movement in them, particularly journalism that enlightens a social cause.

"I've always dreamt of bringing journalism to the stage. Essentially, I believe there are stories that are meant to be felt. I've done a lot of reporting and research around news literacy, and how to get news consumers to really enjoy and immerse themselves in the news in a way that stirs them to action or understanding." Jolly explained.

"This was my first time working with Georgina, or any dancer, for that matter. I really trust her judgment and I feel, based on our friendship and shared values, which really come from a strong foundation working and organizing together with the SGI [Soka Gakkai International], a Buddhist community we both grew up practicing with, there was an unspoken sense of creative trust, which is really rare to find when you're just learning to work in another person's medium."

Jolly knew Bates from a Buddhist community, and worked with Diroy at EdLab, a research/media lab at Teachers College, where they produced videos together on education, identity and environmental design. It was a natural collaboration between friends. After presenting a thirteen minute video of the project for the CollabFest at Triskelion Arts, Bates successfully pursued the opportunity to produce it as live multimedia theater at HERE. The trio could not be stopped. They simply understood each other. When Jolly proposed a wild idea, a dance work about ISIS, Bates knew what she meant right away. They enjoyed fantastic off-stage chemistry.

"Diana is one of my dearest friends. She and I have spent a lot of time on projects. I trust her as a documentarian 1000%. We have the sort of relationship where I can be all over the place with ideas, share a bunch of raw material with her, and she just magically knows how to shape it into something that not only makes sense, but is beautiful and exactly what my heart was trying to convey," Jolly explained, relating how Diroy used much of her past material on immigration for the first version of the show, and for the latter version at HERE, she interviewed and reported extensively to visualize the new characters.

"It was more about immigration than the refugee experience, in terms of the actual people we interviewed. I spent time with and spoke with people from various movements and communities and explained exactly what we were trying to do. Some were willing to share their identities and others weren't, which is why you only hear some voices and you see others' faces."

"Because this is art + journalism, I really just wanted to force the audience, in a sense, into sitting through the lived experience of being undocumented, or an 'other'. There was nothing really new - no breaking news or new information. But it's rare that you have the chance to sit through someone else's experience and understand and experience the nuances of it. I think, like a lot of long-form journalism, that's something multimedia can achieve very well, and it's necessary for subjects that have desensitized us because we hear about them so often. So it's a little art, a little advocacy, a little reporting."

*Somehow We End Up Here, Again* opens with an all-American throwback number, "Town Without Pity", an anachronism from the age of crooners brilliantly revived for the Contemporary Stage in the hands of Bates, whose dancers tire of swinging as they hold each other up shoulder to shoulder when not clashing in semi-conscious bouts of jaded apathy, crowded with the boredom of the familiar and the mediocre. And then a video flashes against the background, set to voiceovers by Dreamers, the children of undocumented immigrants. They are Jamaican. They are Chinese. They are from everywhere, and more importantly, they are here now, as American as any citizen.

Dancers step through the light of the screen, emoting under careful voices that recall the experience of growing up with an illegal identity. What is most normal to American citizens, and often most taken for granted, is the subject of international controversy, of lifelong sagas defined by trauma and remembrance, fulfillment and annihilation.

Audiences felt the tragedy, the weight that the dancers expressed with muscular strength. They run to each other to embrace, and sometimes miss. One dancer stands before the audience, "He deserves to live in this country," she says. Tragedy is heavy in stories of family separation through deportation. Mothers and sons are torn apart. Better halves are sent away from a loving home, forced to overcome the ongoing global strife of warring nationalism.

The artistic direction of *Somehow We End Up Here, Again* is a microcosm for the political direction of America, as both are waylaid by seemingly irreconcilable expressions of the universal human struggle to coexist. Demonstrating collaborative integration through the diverse creation of hybrid forms, Bates, Jolly and Diroy produced a multimedia mixtape of live dance theater and storytelling through videography and journalism. Its fusions strengthen the three main disciplines that it employs.

It is a great piece for people who are more inclined to respond to video and journalism than the often cryptic abstractions of contemporary dance. As led by its choreographer, Bates instills a renewed appreciation for contemporary dance, and for its collaborative mediums. Ultimately, as attested by its audiences, *Somehow We End Up Here, Again* is a call to action, to realize new creative movements that will guide the prevailing narrative of U.S. history and current affairs from the heartless stranglehold on migration policy to the integration of migrants with empathic subtlety and grassroots imagination as expressed by all kinds of artists everywhere.

September, 2017

## FALLS THE SHADOW at the Guggenheim

He evokes the pantheon of Russian ballet, Balanchine, Massine, Nijinsky, and dons its legacy with an air as natural as breath, and movement, and shadow. Daniil Simkin has a stage presence that coruscates, scintillant under the wide ethereal room of the Guggenheim Museum. His is a classic artistic and folk heritage, raised by dancers in Russia, where the old imperial aristocracy wined and dined for some two hundred years over one of the most glorious cultural syntheses in art history, Russian ballet.

Wearing costumes designed by Maria Grazia Chiuri, artistic director of Dior, he led dancers Cassandra Trenary, Ana Lopez and Brett Conway through choreography by Alejandro Cerrudo, with all of the understated spiritual grace of the silent, authentic dancer of archaic tradition through the quiet and powerful merging of folklore and modernism for a timeless contemporary style. It was a high event, as the pressed suits and hung garments of fashionable New York tradition came out to peer from above down into the iconic, spiraling foyer by Frank Lloyd Wright.

Amid the architectural naturalism that borders on sheer fantasy, and surrounded by post-impressionist painting collected with unrivaled enthusiasm over lifetimes of dedication to the love of art, *Falls the Shadow* cast its unprecedented fusion of lighting and dance. It is a choral symphony in an unheard medium, a letter of devotion to the visual technician behind the stage, and at the Guggenheim, to projection designer Dmitrij Simkin and interactive media designer Arístides Job García Hernández, looking over the stage from the vertigo-inducing slope.

*Falls the Shadow* amplified the innate beauty of the Guggenheim, as the dancers slid out into view to the synth moods of the entrancing sound sculpture, "A Moment of Grace" by Marsen Jules. "We're using both the architecture and the site as an active element in the piece," said Daniil Simkin, who co-produced the world premiere, in a video interview directed by Ezra Hurwitz. "The video technology acts as a link between the site and the actual dancing."

In his lucid explanation, Simkin ventures into new perspectives on live theater, as viewed from above and in collaboration with technology, as the projections react to the dancers and vice versa. While there is a very fine line separating techno-kitsch with artful imagination, *Falls the Shadow* tastefully conjures the magic wizardry of premodern vision in contemporary form. On the shoulders of his forebears from the era of imperial Russian ballet, Simkin continues to make greater, societal progress through and beyond modernism relevant with his art.

September, 2017

## LA FRESQUE at Zorlu Center PSM

Parisian choreographer Angelin Preljocaj sold out Europe's largest performing arts venue with his modern ballet, "La Fresque" (2016). He walked onstage after the show to receive the Honorary Award from Istanbul's Theater Festival at Zorlu Center PSM.

In the footsteps of his "Snow White" (2008) and "Siddhartha" (2010), he carried the fantastical, folkloric spirit of his ingenious artistic signature in narrative movement with "La Fresque", subtitled after its inspiration from the eponymous medieval Chinese tale, "The Painting on the Wall" also known simply as "The Painted Wall" from the collection, "Strange Stories from a Chinese Studio" by the medieval intellectual Pu Songling, first published twenty-five years after his death in 1740.

Early in the 18th century, the Qing Dynasty recognized the literary achievements of Pu Songling in his eldest years. He was raised in poverty, though ultimately gifted the world his escapist flights of imagination enough to steal hearts and lighten minds in endless varieties of contemporary adaptation.

"The Painted Wall" could be likened to Oscar Wilde's "The Picture of Dorian Gray" in its motifs, only with a simpler tone. The story begins with a visitor to the premodern capital of Peking, where he stumbles into a vacant monastery and is transfixed by the image of a maiden on the wall mural. Her cherry-red lips look ripe for the picking. The ties that would knot her belt for life in marriage are not yet fastened. He is suddenly flung into the air by a mysterious force, and spies the girl herself, staring back at him as she runs away giggling.

Preljocaj Ballet opens the tale similarly, with two friends, fitted in countrified dress under the exquisite eye of costumer Azzedine Alaïa, as they swing about in bucolic bliss. They are removed from the world until a marching column of blackened uniforms advances towards them, at which point all gravitate together in an entrancing balance of diversely costumed hues and tastefully choreographed steps.

From the beginning, the music to La Fresque as composed by Nicolas Godin is hotly contemporary, quaking throughout the theater with downtempo electronica mixed into overt blends of urban noise. The original pair of friends are finally overwhelmed in mutual exasperation by the aesthetic invasion of militantly mobilized newcomers onstage as all collapse into a heap of lifeless men.

The women emerge in a subtle, gaining illumination through the spectacular touch of light design by Éric Soyet, whose sheer foreground facades give way,

transparently, to the head-banging of the female dancers who move in contrapuntal clockwork time to evoke the mythological devices of seductive sculptures come to life.

Principal dancer Yurié Tsugawa is in her element as she takes off and ascends through the visionary scope of purely original cross-cultural introspection. The movements of the women contrast with volatile poise against the initial impressions of the men, who swayed and bloomed as the women rocked and jolted.

There are recurring themes of liberty and imprisonment in “La Fresque” as Preljocaj makes strong statements as concerns the power of human beings to confine themselves and each other in their creations. And when gender segregation combines into an epicene dance to project the ebullient bravura of togetherness, the story then condenses into its pith as the unrequited love affair of a man with his fictive fancy of a woman inspired by art and born of his mind.

With masks creator Michèle Belobradic and set designer Constance Guisset, the masterful choreography of Preljocaj's La Fresque is a conceptual feast to transcend the senses often owing aesthetic debt to the medieval court styles traditional to Chinese dance.

In one sequence, thin rectangular drapes stretch from the invisible heights of the ceiling, bound to the headdresses of the women who appear in high style as from the irresistible illusions of a classic, far-flung era when cultural expression was more naturalist, less mechanical, and more aloof from human practicality.

As the central protagonist and doubly the archetypal chimera in the eye of the beholder, Yurié Tsugawa holds her own with fantastic poise, as she leads the audience through psychological landscapes torn from the tea-stained pages of a premodern Chinese text, complete with all of the timeless characters and beings of exotic, ancient fantasy.

In particular moments, the techniques of his teachers are visible, as by Merce Cunningham in a scene where all ten dancers are bunched into fitful leaps as they wave small, tight circles into the abstract air.

Preljocaj is a seasoned director as he initially founded his company in December of 1984 and has since produced works that have become repertoire for the most important ballet institutions in the world, namely the La Scala of Milan, New York City Ballet, Paris Opera Ballet.

In November of 2016, he released his first feature film with Valérie Müller titled “Polina, danser sa vie” after working with the French filmmaker Olivier Assayas in 2007 to portray his choreography for the auteurist camera.

As immediately influenced by such illustrious collaborators as Karlheinz Stockhausen and Jean Paul Gaultier, he now directs twenty-four resident dancers in the south of France to lead a life immersed in the imaginary plane that once compelled Pu Songling to write his story and daydream of love.

The syncretic narratives that move La Fresque conclude in the eye of Preljocaj with a resounding note of optimism, although not without a tinge of tragedy. The transitory and quixotic figments of beauty and love, romance and youth may have a life on the other side of the perceivable frames of realism, if only for those more susceptible to its capricious presence.

The muse could very well be pining, also, for a mutual touch as it wanders unseen in and out of the reflective fields of pure human creativity.

November, 2017

## MONK AT 100 at Nardis Jazz Club

In 1976, Thelonious Monk stepped off the bandstand at the Newport Jazz Festival and never set foot on a stage again. His closest circle of friends and family, bandmates and patrons remembered the last six years of his life, until his death at the age of 65 with a peculiar, spiritual insight. Monk simply stopped playing altogether. His musical soul departed before his body finally succumbed to death in 1982, the very morning his go-to drummer Ben Riley began recording a tribute album in his name to try and tempt him to return to music.

One of his distinguished contemporaries, the African roots-inspired pianist and composer Randy Weston, who continued touring the world into his eighties, was one of many who attempted to give meaning to Monk's mystifying, internal musical passing. "I just got the impression that the surroundings of the music didn't move with the music. He shut the door," said Weston for his interview in the 1991 documentary, *Thelonious Monk: American Composer*. "He gave so much, and he had to make great sacrifices to give what he gave because he never compromised his music. Monk was almost like a prophet. He was here for a reason. He was here to bring us all this beauty, all this love to the world. He couldn't compromise. He didn't know how."

In 2013, Istanbul hosted the second annual International Jazz Day, welcoming such greats as Herbie Hancock and Wayne Shorter, as well as the preeminent world-class Turkish clarinetist Hüsni Senlendirici. Led by the Thelonious Monk Institute of Jazz in partnership with UNESCO and the Republic of Turkey, the single day of celebrating jazz worldwide had reached over a billion people in its inaugural year in the name of Monk and only continues to influence the entire globe with a truly universal resonance. It has become an auspicious day now famous for organizing every last country on the planet, all 196 of them, with each of the fifty states in the U.S., to play jazz all together inside of 24 hours once a year.

On the evening of October 10, 2017, the premier jazz club in Istanbul known as Nardis echoed with the proud, non-discriminating frequencies of totally original genius performing the instantly recognizable sound of Thelonious Monk. It became standing-only for countless local aficionados who crowded the 120-seat room from the bar to the bandstand. Outside, music lovers swayed under the neighboring Galata Tower, as its shadowy mystic lights stole the reimagined past from the medieval Genovese mind, transplanted onto the core of the greatest Turkish metropolis. Vagrant drunkards sang around the corners, swigging raki and guiding lost taxis into the sparsely ambled night.



Inside Nardis, bandleader and pianist Kaan Biyikoglu opened the music just after its start time as is traditional to the concept of jazz minutes when a little late is right on. They began with Thelonious, the first track on the legendary album "Underground". It's a sound that still transcends mainstream popularity, yet it is uptempo perfection from bebop to hard swing, stride and every nameless and uncategorized expressionism given to absolute improvisation as intended by his irreplaceable pair of ears. Monk trained himself to compose music anew, transforming sonic definition beyond classical and contemporary, traditional and avant-garde. And he was always on the eternal spot, expanding the pocket and riding on waves of scales all his own.

Tenor saxophonist Batu Salliel greeted the audience with a fine wailing in key as he triumphed to a ripe, glorified mode that ascended as it peaked through the bountifully complex chord structures. He took after the most fabled of Monk's horn accompanist bandmates Charlie Rouse, and Sonny Rollins from the "Brilliant Corners" album. And so, Biyikoglu softly announced the title track of that latter recording that spearheaded a new wave of jazz composition where original music by players would become the contemporary standard.

Its opening juxtaposition of harmonies surrounds the listener like a gallivanting army of deserters gawking with implosive, silent laughter. Rhythm section instrumentalists Matt Hall on bass and Ferit Odman on drums slammed and rattled as they poured out oceans of waterfalls of springs of floods of avalanches of blizzards of notes. Elegant, subtle, refined, the beat pulsed gravitating around the orbital firmament of such inner, aural fire as Monk fanned for the people for the ages to hear and stare until dizzy to fainting under a spell of enchanting and salubrious vitality.

Then they played a downtempo version of "Reflections" that warmed the soul to the calm and cathartic vibrations of human power at its softest and artistic, chaos clarified. Salliel rung in to the gorgeous catastrophe of the universe at play, harmonized within the small spaces of the world where people come to listen and tune in to the nearest source of perfection on Earth: pure music.

That was before Sibel Köse stood up to belt out "In Walked Bud" with a genuine powder keg of scat as her grandiloquent vocals pounced and sprang upon her listeners with an animalistic drive that sent ears to the roof, as the standing danced and the sitting tapped and kicked for three hours into the obscure, high night of downtown Istanbul sounding off a centenarian birthday wish for the inimitable and ubiquitous, timeless music of Thelonious Monk.

November, 2017

## SIV JAKOBSEN at Salon

In late August, the Norwegian singer-songwriter Siv Jakobsen released her debut album, *Nordic Mellow*. It received stunning praise from Aftenposten, the largest printed newspaper in her home country, giving her five out of six stars. And everyone from NPR to the BBC praised her sound in waves of genuine, heartfelt adoration.

At Salon IKSU, a premier folk and electronica club in Istanbul, the small crowd who came out to hear her sang sweetly under her softening, nuanced voice. She graced the enigmatic city for just a day to propose the songs of her recent album release, and to also perform some older originals and a couple covers.

She stood onstage behind her soothing guitar beside the well-dressed indie-pop musician Einar Stray who accompanied on a coolly tasteful NordStage2ex electric piano. It made for a quiet, contemplative evening of aural introspection. Through the classic airs of storytelling and music, Jakobsen is a proud heiress of the universal folk tradition that blends in the contemporary sphere with a promising delight from the ambient, wintry calm of new Scandinavian tradition.

Her songs are suffused with the intimate, private and romantic worlds that penetrate to the core of human experience, as all walks of life now step in greater numbers and with an ennobled confidence to hear her live. She animates the rooms of her own music with the warmth of a seasonal nostalgia perfectly timed with the launch of her first album, and simultaneously of her place in the high spotlight where lifelong artists live freely possession of that fabled, infinite creative power that has the potential make the most faithful of dreamers and break more sensitive souls.

Her presence is neighborly, as she speaks with the shy and unspoken gratitude of a reclusive friend who is suddenly and simply happy to be out. It's charming. She tried her tongue at the Turkish word for thank you, which she pronounced as "te-shek-yoor-lar" and laughed, saying that it was the most nerve-wracking moment of the concert.

Almost every song came with an endearing story, such as with "Buried in Treasure" which she wrote as an act of empathy for a hoarder who she felt was heartlessly misrepresented in news media as a subject of mockery. She wrote the song for him, and later recorded it live for Emergent Sounds Unplugged with her 2014 European tour companion Jesse Hanson on violin. They also collaborated on the songs, "Dark" and "I Can't Fix You" which had already become favorites among her Turkish listeners.

Running a modest 30 minutes, her debut album, *Nordic Mellow* is very much the neo-folk masterpiece of its international repute. Her voice rises and falls, ululating with gentle force that pierces through the veil of emotional inhibition. She encourages her concertgoers to enjoy the floor as they will, as most sit and sway overwhelmed with the powerful sentiments and melancholic hush of unrequited love condensed into slow rhythms, simple melodies, new songs.

As she explained, her album was very much inspired by the year she spent in New York, where she created such moving, artistic and topical pieces as "Caroline" based on the fictional story about transgender identity. It was once back home in Norway where she wrote *Nordic Mellow*, and together with the gifted ear of producer Matt Ingram, who has worked with Laura Marling, her voice flies clear over arrangements that unearth the depths of a shared human need with all of the seductive enchantments of each their own secret muse.

November, 2017

## LAHZA at Salon

Two rising, powerhouse instrumentalists, guitarist Cenk Erdogan and drummer Mehmet Ikiz (aka ikiz) met in the blink of an eye in Istanbul and formed the Nu jazz duo LAHZA after the Turkish word for split-second. Strongly nuanced with a stellar array of electronic gear, such as the Nord Drum 3 steadfastly employed by the kit of Ikiz, they have dreamed up a powerful album of original compositions and new folkloric arrangements, and perform them live with mind-bending, intensive perfectionism.

First released digitally in May of 2017 by Kabak & Lin and Stockholm Jazz Records, the self-titled nine-track work explores the perennial ground where the artifices of technology confront the immanence of music. "Rooms" stamps down an infectious melody and groove pairing with high-minded percussive vision. Together they are mixed-media artists at play in the boundless space of creation, having formed beyond the fold of various bands to come together and simply hone the essential art of the sound crafts they have mastered.

ikiz makes his drums sing, fast to the pocket and stretching it wide open for all to hear. Hyper-conscious and deviant, he is a monster in one minute and a technician the next as he taps out meticulous times with his fingers while holding true to a stick in the other. And the variety of sticks nearly matches his seemingly effortless knack for virtuosic diversion. On the other side of the stage, Erdogan exhales funk harmonies drenched in live ambient electronica while breathing in ever so exactly on the constant backbeat with stunning, forceful dynamism. "Water Says" is another defining track, expressing the special talent that Erdogan has on his double-necked and fretless strings for the traditional Turkish maqam scales of his beloved cultural heritage, as shared with ikiz, yet fused with a transcendent feel for European jazz. Riding hotly on rhythms that escalate with the energy of rock and even metal at times, the duo reanimates onstage chemistry with a down-home vibe throughout every cerebral sonic venture.

Familiar, yet original musical pairings come to mind, not the least of which is the Mehliana project, as drummer Mark Guiliana exudes a similar quality with ikiz from his fresh and flashy spring of polyrhythmic ecstasies over the improvisational wonders of pianist Brad Mehldau on electric keys. Another is SQÜRL, the downtempo scratch rock project by filmmaker and guitarist Jim Jarmusch and multi-instrumentalist drummer Carter Logan. In Turkey, LAHZA emerged to float on the Golden Horn horizon and envision new musical tradition with aural gifts from beyond the pale of earthly silence.

December, 2017

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se.na.ne at Borusan Sanat

Borusan Sanat, a premiere venue in Istanbul, and home to the Borusan Istanbul Philharmonic Orchestra, lies in the heart of the famed İstiklal Caddesi. Old-fashioned trolley cars and police cruisers part the frenzied commerce and open-air nightlife, where global citizens and folk artists perform music for the constant, impatient mob.

The liveliest way to Taksim Square from Galata Tower is İstiklal, Anglicized as Independence Avenue (İstiklal translates from the Turkish as independence). Another name for the most-walked street in Istanbul is Rue de Péra, originating with the ancient Greeks who settled the Golden Horn, the Byzantines.

Although the Greek presence has largely passed to memory after mid-20th century political upheavals violently exiled many ethnic minorities, the district of Beyoğlu still hosts the Embassy of Yunanistan (Turkish for Greece), a lofty architectural spectacle in the spirit of Greek antiquity. Where Beyoğlu is shadowed in the 14th century Romanesque Genoese colonial tower of Galata, the once-thriving global marketplace in what was twice the world's largest city has since greatly reduced to "Made in China" plastics, Italian handbags and tokenized Turkish commodities.

Around the same time as Istanbul suffered its most recent and continuously repressive ethnic dissolution, cultural modernism in music went full-steam ahead globally, with especially reflective composers responding to the epochal movements fast burgeoning. Minimalism, Twelve Tone, Serialism and Percussion led the way into a new paradigm of creating and listening to sounds in the human environment.

Beyoğlu is as distracting as it is mesmerizing, as İstiklal is criss-crossed, and parallel to a dizzying kaleidoscope of winding, narrow streets, as steep as they are ancient, and that suddenly open out into impressive restaurant terraces irresistible for serving the aniseed-infused alcohol, *rakı*.

Inside Borusan Sanat, an eager crowd of locals, and a smattering of the ubiquitous foreigner, line up for "West Side Story", the title of a concert series that showcases Western music, featuring a dedication to Leonard Bernstein, Evelyn Glennie, and Bang On A Can All-Stars, among other performances during the weeklong run.

İstiklal throbs with an uptown buzz, interrupted by an anarchist demonstration marching to the amplified call of slogans in Turkish. The encircled "A" is seen from time to time raised above popular streets in gentrified districts like Beşiktaş

and Kadıköy. Immediately following the parade, over a dozen riot police emerge from a heavy transport, walking casually behind.

The globular theater at Borusan Sanat is a perfect setting for the mid-series presentation by se.na.ne. As a six-piece mostly-percussion ensemble, se.na.ne performs original, Turkish, and internationally renowned compositions. Before the Turkish premiere of Michael Gordon's *Timber* for the "West Side Story" series at Borusan Sanat, se.na.ne premiered several prominent works in Turkey by seminal percussion composers Steve Reich, John Cage and Iannis Xenakis.

In fact, se.na.ne's American-born Amy Salsgiver once performed the Irish premiere of Reich's "Music for 18 Musicians" – a staple for classical percussion. Salsgiver, and fellow se.na.ne percussionist Kerem Öktem studied at the Center for Advanced Musical Research, based within Istanbul Technical University, where Salsgiver now teaches.

Michael Gordon himself spoke to the audience through a projected video, expressly wishing he could have been present for the premiere, and praised se.na.ne. He commented on his piece, "Timber", as a sound sculpture in the spirit of architectural creativity. The piece is played with the performers standing in a circle, he said, to create a ritualistic ambiance.

Light bulbs hung decorously in the spherical, two-story hall, flickering to the sound of the twelve mallets striking six wooden 2x4s. se.na.ne themselves crafted the experimental percussion instrument assigned to Gordon's composition, known as a "simantra" after the invention of the modernist Greek composer, Iannis Xenakis.

For the next seventy minutes, "Timber" built metaphysical structures with a decadence to match the architectural glories of Istanbul. Entrancing syncopations beat on and off time in response to a circular logic, often leaderless as the anarchic drive to power, and as subject to revolution as the throne of the sultan. Concurring polyrhythms rose and fell to the pulse of creation, mechanical and artistic.

In the trance-like repetitions of "Timber", the ritualistic conceptions of Gordon are reminiscent of Steve Reich's subtle technique of phase shifting, as with the oceanic throbbing of Terry Riley's "In C" and the harmonic revelations of Philip Glass.

The idea of building as music, conceived in the art of composition, speaks to the bygone, romantic aesthetics of the Byzantine basilica and Ottoman mosque. Imagine an architectural blueprint, written in notated music, as the visionary

fantasies of a mad autocrat, excavating the depths of the mineral earth to the heights of conceptual art.

And then, besieged by the dank, hard stone, encumbered by the enslavements of rude toil, the vision then overwhelms the reach of the human body. In the overworked, unstable mind, the weary builder begins to hear what is not there.

In the endless tapping, thudding, cutting, scraping, knocking, cracking, hammering, pounding, the hands of the city builder tremble to artless soul-exhaustion. The builder sees destruction and creation as one, and the unheard becomes audible. Submerged in stacked stone and tunneled soil, his echoes become independent, and he begins to call, and respond, to the invisible.

Around and around, the unseen sonic trail spirals upward, and out. The sprawling heights of the city skyline are then perceived as more a feast of the ear than the eye – all the more realistic in a city where hundreds of soaring minarets cry out in prayer five times a day. For the audience, patiently seated to experience Timber, the theater furnished the back wall with a neon sign that glowed: “Listen To Your Eyes”.

Yet, for most music lovers feeling the performance of highly intellectual composition can be a chore. That may be the charm for a connoisseur, though judging by the faces of three children listening, and at times almost everyone who attended Borusan Sanat to appreciate “Timber” as performed by se.na.ne, the sound is not necessarily welcoming to newcomers. Comparably, the architectural utility, and aesthetic, or lack thereof, in modern cities is often imposing, and even confrontational.

“Architecture is supposed to serve the needs of the people, not create environments in which people must try to fit,” wrote senior biomedical researcher Alexandros A. Lavdas for the Journal of Biourbanism. “From a mathematical point of view, both music and architecture are ways of combining basic materials to form more complex structures.”

“Xenakis – and dozens of others – does not appreciate the fact that aesthetic criterion, the ‘beautiful’ or ‘ugly’ verdict, is the result of computation – albeit an immensely complicated and subconscious one,” writes Lavdas, in reference to the pioneering work of Semir Zeki, who coined the term “neuroesthetics” as a study of music and architecture, as with all of the arts.

“The idea of a messianic mission to save modern music from the ‘impulse of the moment’, as described by Xenakis, has its exact counterpart in modern architecture.”



In his study, Lavdas adheres to a neuroesthetic approach based on the logic that the beauty of architecture, and music, are originally physiological, and that human experience is a test of authentic beauty, and what is good for humanity, in the arts, as in all aesthetic experience.

“Percussion music is a contemporary transition from keyboard-influenced music to the all-sound music of the future,” said John Cage, often referred to as “the percussion composer” deriving from his experience as a student of Schoenberg, when he realized he had no feel for harmony. “Any sound is acceptable to the composer of percussion music,” he said for the American Masters documentary.

“Percussion music is revolution,” Cage wrote in *Silence*, his timelessly relevant collection of writings and lectures. In a country, and region, provoked to enduring political unrest, a sense of rebellion by making new music that speaks to the future of urban civilization as a source of necessary spiritual fortification.

If the notion of construction as music has any merit, then Cage is a prophet. One of the most impressive, and controversial conditions of modern life in Turkey is the way in which the people endure the ongoing, and unrelenting development overhaul of the largest city in the country, Istanbul.

From the municipal demolition of illegal cafés on the shorefront of Karaköy, at the Golden Horn inlet of the Bosphorus, to the incomplete redesign of Taksim Square, the core of Istanbul proper, the sound of construction is ever-present. Witnessing the premiere Turkish interpretation of “Timber”, originally wrought out of the Euro-American imagination, was like observing a microcosm of greater acculturation through the relatively harmless window of the arts world.

While one audience member, a student of the Advanced Center for Musical Research at Istanbul Technical University, noticed missteps in the performance of the very complex arrangement, especially where cues were applied seemingly impromptu, the musicality of the piece was not lost. As neo-industrial creativity continues to breach the contemporary aesthetics of futurism, percussion music is the global sound of tomorrow. And by performing the works of great percussion composers, the people of Turkey, as with all nations, may advance towards a rebirth of urbanization suffused with a more artful sense of direction.

March, 2016

## The Art of Kuzguncuk

She was new in the neighborhood, and with only the slightest curiosity she killed her every apathetic and jaded assumption that she had moved to a place defined by all things *kıro* (Turkish slang for the kitsch and tack that attracts tourists, weddings, and other groupies).

This new, cynical neighbor walked up the main drag of İcadiye Avenue after seating a friend with Murat, the single-chair barber whose walk-in closet-sized place of business spills out onto the street. Murat offered his fellow company of workingmen a swig of whiskey, all taxi drivers and a fruit seller. No one took him up on his offer. They only sneered at a lottery ticket agent as he passed by with a pasty grin.

As she wandered, she noticed a dimly lit doorway across the street from the Church of Hagios Panteleimon. It read Muhayyer. She slowly sauntered indoors, staring at a strange manikin of a garment worker above the desk where a hefty, bearded man sat and invited her to stay for tea.

“I’m not an antiques dealer, I’m an *eskici*,” he explained carefully, using the Turkish word for a junk collector to explain his unorthodox vocation. “My name is Doğan.”

She asked about his history, what he did before he became an eccentric *eskici* in Kuzguncuk, as she perused a dazzling array of historic items. Many appeared to be fine, even priceless.

“It was something worlds apart from the life I lead now,” he responded. “Look. Nothing in here is for sale. Not everything always has to be bought and sold.”

She picked up a small, round cylindrical box. Its surface was smooth and white, designed with colorful paintings of women dressed in medieval Ottoman style. The material felt like bone or shell. He gave it to her free of charge, as she left with a smile, a story and a sense that there are still places alive with personality, and more, that art is not limited to the exchange of objects.

It was an early Saturday evening this July the 22nd when Kelimat Gallery opened its doors for a new monthly exhibition show. Twenty works of the Turkish painter Özkan Gencer were on display. The artist was himself present and greeting guests with gallery owner Adnan Alahmad. Nearly thirty people filed in and out as the warm summer day waned, sitting along Bostan Street near the entrance to the illustrious and bountiful community garden of Kuzguncuk, which

exists for the pleasure of all due to the hard-earned efforts of the neighborhood association.

Locals know Bostan Street for its open-air markets every Wednesday, where fruits and vegetables are sold aplenty. Recently, the new restaurant Pulat Çiftliği propped up on Bostan Street, advocating farm-fresh and source-conscious fares. Kelimat Gallery began exhibiting art in Kuzguncuk a year ago. Before that, Mr. Alahmad set up shop in Sisli, though he says he is finally happy in Kuzguncuk among its art lovers and revitalized aesthetic.

Before Istanbul, the Alahmad family had two art galleries in Aleppo, Syria. Alahmad's son Karam is an assistant at Kelimat, photographing shows like the one for Özkan Gencer as he converses with guests in Turkish, English and Arabic. His mother is often at the computer browsing the latest collection, and his sister even showed up for the Gencer show too. It's a family affair, and they cook up a fine reception every month, as Mr. Alahmad personally hands out traditional Syrian falafel and hummus to every pair of art-hungry eyes.

Mr. Alahmad has a weakness for the artistic movement known as Art Brut, and is quick to reference French artist Jean Dubuffet as his guide with respect to his forming a certain stylistic taste and curation philosophy at Kelimat. He exhibits artists who fuse Orientalist motifs with Modern concepts. Art Brut is also known as Outsider Art and originates as a term coined by art critic Roger Cardinal in 1972 to identify art made outside the cultural establishment.

The work of Gencer, for example, is a stunning variation on elemental themes, both mythological and psychological, all following a surreal dream logic. An elephant in triangular plaid floats on warped floors and upended skies textured with fragmented backgrounds permitted with geometric, post-realist scenography.

Recurring characters and repetitive imagery jump through subtle color diversities that tell stories in pure emotion. It begs questions of form and reason. And it answers in questions of romance, family, memory, age, place, and travel.

Kelimat exhibits Syrian and Iraqi artists with Turkish artists. Past exhibitions have feature such names as Sema Maşkılı, Ibrahim Alhassoun, Akrem Zave, Sali Turan, and Fatih Urunç. In fact, Kelimat Gallery collaborated with another art house in Kuzguncuk, Mona Art Gallery, around the corner from Bostan Street on Icadiye Avenue, for a collective exhibition dedicated to Fatih Urunç.

"He was always drunk," said Mona Art Gallery owner and curator, Volkan Özgürçan, who regards Fatih Urunç as a late master, yet was sadly unable to

meet him before his untimely passing in 2012 at the ripe age of 46. “He slept day and night, and only woke up to paint.”

Urunç was a master of the weird, the out-of-place. His paintings had an ingenious fervor, with psychotropic colors and infantile forms, shouting into a space beyond life and into visions of raw honest potential. Stepping into Mona Art Gallery, one of the first paintings in sight is an Urunç that looks something like Edvard Munch’s “The Scream” with its bodiless abstract head in faded brown wearing eyes that look drugged whitening over a wide-open blood-red mouth. It’s inscribed with the Turkish for “weightless on Mars” and that’s the unmistakable feeling.

Mona Art Gallery is next to Muhayyer in a historic home formerly inhabited by a Greek family for over a century. Many artworks inside are part of the personal collection of Özgürçan, who says he will never sell them. He has an authentically signed print of Salvador Dali among original works by Yusuf Katipoğlu, Abidin Dino, Adnan Turani, Bayram Gümüş, and even local artist Mine Göker who he often sees walking her dog by the gallery.

Özgürçan is stylistically inclined to exhibit artists who demonstrate a special gift and prospect for fame in the tradition of Naïve Art. Similar to Art Brut, any artist who lacks formal education is a proponent of Naïve Art, and its best known adherents are Henri Rousseau and Frida Kahlo. At present, Özgürçan is placing his bets on Bursa-based Turkish artist Taner Yılmaz, his rising star. Yılmaz is a quick hand with a singular talent for charcoal, and a vivid knack for merging painting and drawing in his visually arresting portraits of women.

Despite the fact that Nail Kitabevi is currently exhibiting a male-dominated series of literary caricatures by the artist Aptulika, the role of women in the arts in Kuzguncuk is not merely as the subject and inspiration for creative men. The beloved novelist Buket Uzuner set her nationally-bestselling and award-winning *Mediterranean Waltz* (in Turkish: Kumral Ada - Mavi Tuna) in Kuzguncuk.

Buket Uzuner is proudly friends with the artist Bihrat Mavitan who crafted a copper relief of her visage for Nail Kitabevi among many icons. It is a certain honor to be so immortalized while still alive. Many fans of *Mediterranean Waltz* are now second-generation readers, who follow the trail of the characters in the novel by venturing down to the shorefront of Kuzguncuk for a shot of *rakı* at Ismet Baba Fish Restaurant and a Turkish coffee at the Çınaraltı Cafe.

Returning from book tours throughout North and South America and preparing for the release of her latest forthcoming novel, *AIR*, the highly personable writer made her way to Kuzguncuk for a dance with nostalgia one fine day this late

July, as she brushed past the haunts of her lettered imagination. She drank in the cool afternoon summer breeze that sweeps in from the Bosphorus under the all-embracing, towering limbs of the elder plane trees, and remembered the true stories of the bygone local communities who inspired her and her colleagues, such as the Jewish-Turkish author Lizi Behmoaras, to write books that have captured the heart of the nation.

And yet while so often celebrated, it is said that it possible to count the remaining Jews on one hand, the Armenians on two, and the Greeks on just three. The people whose lives have inspired legendary art, and whose historic precedent instills the neighborhood with an irresistible name are all but vanished, survived by buildings, cemeteries, and contemporary storytellers.

When the architect and poet Cengiz Bektaş restored the historic homes of his beloved Kuzguncuk, he had a vision of the neighborhood as an art form. Turkish writer Ali Akay echoed his philosophy, identifying Bektaş's architectural revitalization of Kuzguncuk as cultural postmodernism at its finest.

In lieu of the original interfaith and multicultural diversity of the old-time neighborhood, the latest generations of artists, writers, and entrepreneurs inspired by Kuzguncuk are increasingly motivated by the innately diverse, universal pluralism of the creative individual. She is there now, at home on the district's streets with a lot more than hot caffeine in her veins, opening her eyes.

December, 2017