

# *monumental*

## *STUDY GUIDE*

The NAC-CGI Youth Commission for Dance is a partnership with the Canada Council for the Arts. *monumental*, the second NAC-CGI Youth Commission for Dance, is co-produced by The Holy Body Tattoo and the National Arts Centre. It has been commissioned for a teenaged audience aged 13 and older.

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This study guide has been created to accompany classroom discussions on *monumental*. The text and student activities have been designed for grades 8 and up. Additional copies can be downloaded for free from the National Arts Centre website:

<http://www.nac-cna.ca/en/educationandoutreach/resources/publications/index.html>

### CREDITS

Text, Interviews and Student Activities:

Kate Cornell

Photography:

Chris Randle

# Cathy Levy



Photo: Jim Cochrane

Dear Teachers,

Welcome to the second commission in our three-year NAC-CGI Youth Commission for Dance, a partnership with the Canada Council for the Arts, an exciting new initiative aimed at Canadian youth. During each of the 2003-04, 04-05 and 06-07 seasons, we are commissioning a Canadian choreographer to create a new dance work aimed specifically at teenagers. The goals of this project are to widen the existing Canadian dance repertoire for young audiences, to emphasize our commitment to community and national partnerships, and to reinforce dance for young audiences as part of an ongoing aesthetic education.

The first commission, *Break Open Play*, was choreographed by the young Toronto dancer-choreographer Matjash Mrozewski and was a resounding success. *Break Open Play* was an engaging and dynamic work for five dancers that was beautifully produced and performed. It spoke eloquently to a youth audience about the risk and excitement of creativity itself in a “vocabulary” that was both sophisticated and accessible.

This season’s commission, *monumental*, is choreographed by co-Artistic Directors Noam Gagnon and Dana Gingras of Vancouver’s acclaimed The Holy Body Tattoo. *monumental* is described as an urban, edgy, and very contemporary investigation into issues of alienation and fitting-in. With the company’s signature raw energy, *monumental* explores the physical anxiety of urban culture and the overwhelming human need for intimacy.

We’re thrilled to be partnering with The Holy Body Tattoo on this initiative and we hope this study guide helps prepare you and your students for the exciting performance you will experience at the NAC.

**Cathy Levy, Producer Dance Programming  
National Arts Centre**

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## 1 ~ ARTISTIC CREDITS

# *monumental*

Choreography  
Noam Gagnon and Dana Gingras

Dancers  
Richard Brown  
Sarah Doucet  
David Flewelling  
Andrea Gunnlaugson  
Day Helesic  
Farley Johansson  
Blair Neufeld  
Sonja Perreten  
Sarah Williams

Visual Artist  
Jenny Holzer

Text Translation  
Daniel Canty

Filmmaker  
William Morrison

Lighting Designer  
Marc Parent

Music  
Roger Tellier-Craig and Les Tambours du Bronx

Music Montage  
Dana Gingras

## 2 ~ ABOUT THE HOLY BODY TATTOO NOAM GAGNON & DANA GINGRAS Co-Artistic Directors and Choreographers

**W**riter Max Wyman clearly summarized The Holy Body Tattoo's style and impact in 1999 for *The Vancouver Sun*:

*"For most of the 1990s, Canada's choreographic experimenters have been leading the world of contemporary movement into strange and exciting new areas of discovery. And we're not talking about men in tights. Quite often, in fact, we're talking about people in not very much at all. Take, as a prime example, Vancouver's Holy Body Tattoo, a two-dancer troupe whose style is characterized by a dance-to-exhaustion, floor-flailing, all-sweat style that translates late 1990s urban angst into a teeth-jarring parable of endurance and survival. The Holy Body Tattoo grows out of two generations of our young choreographic tigers who have*

*made an indelible impression on the international dance scene.”*

Attending a performance by The Holy Body Tattoo is a visceral experience. Co-founders and directors, Noam Gagnon and Dana Gingras' choreography flows at a fervent pace that surrounds the audience with its intensity. Dance critics across the continent have enthusiastically described their passionate choreography with ranging descriptions such as: **DARING, BRUTAL, CHAOTIC, INTIMATE, SLEEK, TENDER** and **HOT**.

**T**he Holy Body Tattoo's choreographic style is particular. Their intense physicality and grueling repetition can also be seen in the works of choreographers from Quebec, France and Belgium. But their works are distinct because of the intrinsic relationship between the elements of dance, music and film. Gagnon explains that they try to “create an image that is not defined by dance.” Gingras comments that in group works (like *monumental*), they try as choreographers to challenge the dancers' bodies and minds. Some of their most notable works include *our brief eternity* and *Circa* both of which have toured extensively in Canada and around the world. *our brief eternity* captured nominations in both dance categories of The Dora Mavor Moore Awards in 1997, winning Best Ensemble Performance. The film version of *Poetry & Apocalypse* has been screened in over 16 different international film festivals, winning several awards. *Circa*, which received the inaugural Alcan Performing Arts Award, has been performed over 100 times around the world, including at *Ein Fest in Wuppertal* in Germany at the invitation of Pina Bausch, and at London's Barbican Theatre.

Employing multimedia elements in film, video and music, the work of The Holy Body Tattoo explores the nature of human endurance through ideas of surrender, fragility and broken elegance. Contrasting qualities of receptivity, intimacy and trust with uncertainty, loss and the relinquishing of effort, the company seeks to honour the human capacity for resilience, perseverance and the will required to achieve it.

***THE COMPANY REFLECTS UPON (AND  
REFLECTS OUTWARDLY) THE  
CONCERNS, IDEAS AND ATTITUDES OF  
CONTEMPORARY POPULAR CULTURE,  
LOCATING A SENSE OF CONSCIENCE  
AND HOPE THROUGH INTENSE  
PHYSICALITY AND DEEPLY-SOUGHT  
COURAGE.***

**N**oam Gagnon and Dana Gingras met at an audition for EDAM (Experimental Dance and Music) in 1987. Together, they founded Vancouver-based The Holy Body Tattoo in 1993 with a philosophy to seek “a performance language which gathers a sense of humanity through effort, repetition, scale and humility.” In 1994, Gagnon and Gingras explained to *The Peak* in Vancouver that the name The Holy Body Tattoo refers to the way life's experiences leave indelible marks on our souls. Gagnon explained his and Gingras' mutual desire to start The Holy Body Tattoo to *Xtra West*, “It wasn't so much dissatisfaction with others. But doing other people's work felt like it never used the best part of us – the most powerful places where, when we're out there, we've created something that transcends us.” The two choreographers often perform their works together, although their repertoire includes larger pieces with other dancers. *monumental* is The Holy Body Tattoo's largest work to date.

Gagnon and Gingras worked together at Le Groupe and EDAM. Le Groupe Dance Lab, directed by Peter Boneham, is an international choreographic research centre. The resident dancers work with visiting choreographers while they explore new ideas, technologies and ways of moving. EDAM, a collective dance company under the direction of Peter Bingham, focuses on contact improvisation and experimentation. Le Groupe and EDAM's philosophies of risk-taking influences Gagnon and Gingras' work today.

### 3 ~ CREATIVE PROCESS BEHIND *monumental*

Gagnon explains that *monumental* is about the physical anxiety of urban culture.

The nine dancers struggle with universal themes such as conformity versus non-conformity, finding your voice, and situations of desire.

Gingras describes the piece as “the accumulation of the minute to make the monumental.”



*monumental* is the third work of a triptych choreographed by Gagnon and Gingras.

The first piece, *White Riot*, was choreographed for seven dancers in 1992.

The second piece, *our brief eternity*, was created for three dancers in 1996.

In both works, the dancers are dressed in simple black and white clothes. *White Riot*, inspired in part by American visual artist Robert Longo's work "Men in the Cities", uses podiums lit from below like those in *monumental*. *our brief eternity* considers the pace of modern world and the laborers who work in it.

Lawrence Bommer of the *Chicago Tribune* observed, “Accelerating nearly too fast to follow, *our brief eternity* reaches warp speed near the end, with the deafening music rampaging, the strobes flashing, and the film captions pouring out apocalyptic messages in several languages. Finally, the first caption returns [to the screen above the stage] to complete this anarchic aerobics: *Somehow, continue.*” Gagnon and Gingras wanted to explore the ideas developed in *White Riot* and *our brief eternity* in a much larger work. The result is *monumental*.

#### MOVEMENT

The first image of *monumental* is unforgettable.

The dancers stand frozen, contorted in space, placed precariously on top of illuminated pedestals that together resemble a miniature city. In silence, one dancer begins with stilted movements, as if she is being punched in the stomach. Slowly the other eight dancers conform to the group's will. They simultaneously perform sharp rhythmical movements in groups of varying sizes, such as wrapping their arm over their head in an act of protection, or desperately reaching both hands forward in a

squatting position. Their sharp movements pick up speed. The dancers reach a fevered pitch pushing their bodies to exhaustion while still isolated from each other on these eerie pedestals. The dance finally succumbs to gravity as the dancers explore their relationships to one another on the ground.

The partnering is very athletic. Bodies are flung in space, using the boxes as springboards. Several dancers are caught in mid-air. This section is all about opposites - push and pull, up and down, groups and individuals – and here the audience gets a sense of the characters in this motley crew and their relationship to one another. Some conform and slip into the group, others are isolated and ridiculed, and others rebel against the majority. Partnerships, in this surreal city, come and go.

### TEXT AND FILM

The work of The Holy Body Tattoo often incorporates film, slides, and other visual elements along side the choreography. William Morrison is a regular collaborator with The Holy Body Tattoo; he began working with company in 1994 on the piece *POETRY & APOCALYPSE*. He created films for *Circa* and *our brief eternity* as well. The films of William Morrison have been screened at museums around the world and at international film festivals including those at Rotterdam and Sundance. His projected set designs with renowned theatre group Ridge Theater have won two Bessie awards in New York City.



*monumental* also includes text by renowned American visual artist Jenny Holzer. Holzer's language-based artwork involves phrases projected or replicated on various media borrowed from the world of marketing and advertising such as LED (Light Emitting Diode) light signs. The text will be projected during the performance and is reflective of the themes and physical movement. Here is an example of Holzer's provocative work used in *monumental*: "OBVIOUSLY YOU STRIKE OUT AGAINST PEOPLE WITHIN RANGE. IT'S CATHARTIC TO AFFECT SOMEONE WHEN YOU'RE ANGRY. ALTERNATIVELY, CHOOSE ENEMIES IMPOSSIBLY FAR AWAY SO YOU NEVER HAVE TO FIGHT."



## 4 ~ MEET THE DANCERS

A cast of nine dancers - from across Canada - perform in *monumental*. They range in age from 25 to 43. *monumental* was created with them in rehearsals in Vancouver from 2003 to 2005. We asked each of the dancers general questions about life and dancing, as well as questions about *monumental* and The Holy Body Tattoo.

### **KC: Why did you start dancing?**

### **BLAIR NEUFELD**

BN: I started when I was 20, which is late for a dancer (but male to seriously study dance at a later age). I was studying for my degree in Drama at the University of Alberta when I took some dance/movement classes in the physical education department. I loved to move!!! I really enjoyed the classes and took all of them and then started to study ballet and modern dance outside of the department. After I graduated I started to get dance jobs - as male dancers are far and few - and I thought, "hmmm something is telling me something." So after a year of doing theatre and dance jobs, I enrolled in the dance program at Grant MacEwan College in Edmonton. When I graduated I got my first job in Ottawa at Le Groupe Dance Lab and worked there for 5 years. Then I moved to Montreal and I have worked with many choreographers and companies over the past ten years including Sylvain Émard Danse, the Fondation Jean-Pierre Perreault, Tassy Teekman Danse and many independent choreographers.

### **KC: Why do you like Noam and Dana's choreography?**

BN: I really like the physical aspect of their work; it is very challenging. You get swept up in a whirlwind of movement and you hang on for the ride! There is so much going on around you that you must stay focused and concentrate on what you as a dancer have to do. Focus and clarity of movement are the keys to getting to the end. You give and give until there is nothing physically left in your body and you feel like you can no longer continue ... then you dig down even deeper and find the final bits of energy to finish off the dance! When you are done you feel like you have traveled the world and back - but you don't get travel points (laughs out loud).

### **KC: What do you like to do when you aren't dancing?**

BN: I like to travel, read, ride my bike, and cook. When the time comes to retire from dance I will move on to new opportunities and be very glad that I have had the chance to express ideas and thoughts through movement and to live out my dreams.

### **SARAH DOUCET**

### **KC: What inspired you to start dancing?**

SD: I started dancing at about 10; it's a classic story. I went to see *The Nutcracker* and was blown away. I had no idea something like that existed. But one thing bugged me - I could hear the dancers' pointe shoes on the floor! These tiny little gorgeous things and I could hear their shoes on the stage? Thus was the beginning of a 10-year ballet obsession for me.

### **KC: Why do you like working with Noam and Dana?**

SD: Their work pushes physical boundaries, demands absolute concentration and a lack of physical fear that I've always craved in dance. It's also smart dance. They see the world around them and incorporate it into the work in a way that is not cliché or predictable but smart and slick. It's not pretty dance, it's not dance that appeases or pleases in a traditional way. It begs to answer difficult questions, in dance and everyday life, physically, mentally and certainly emotionally, and not just for the dancer but for the audience as well.

**KC: I understand your other jobs revolve around the arts too. Could you tell me a little about your work?**

SD: Well, I'm half of an arts management company called Insomniac Management. We manage a singer/song writer named Melissa McClelland. We also throw arts events every two months called "Provoke" that showcase up and coming independent artists specializing in different disciplines. I also have a jewellery line called Twitch Designs that is just getting off the ground.

## ANDREA GUNNLAUGSON

**KC: When did you start dancing?**

AG: I started dancing when I was about 3 - going on 4 - years old. I also studied gymnastics, baseball and swimming, but at the age of nine my parents asked me to choose one field of study, so I chose dancing, and stuck with it. It hasn't been an easy decision; it is not an easy career by any stretch of the imagination. Part of the reason I chose to dance is because I honestly couldn't think of anything that would be as difficult for me to do. I was born with a birth defect - my face is asymmetrical - and spent my entire life seeing specialists and surgeons with new machines and new procedures. I have undergone many surgeries, both corrective and biopsy procedures for tumors and bone correction. Surgery and a birth defect are difficult for anyone to deal with in society, but being a professional dancer where your appearance is always being scrutinized has made it a very challenging career choice. In fact, for both rehearsal periods in 2003 with The Holy Body Tattoo, I was in for major surgery only weeks prior to starting. Noam, Dana and the cast were all very supportive and sensitive towards my situation.

**KC: Why did you audition for *monumental*?**

AG: A large group piece does not come along very often, and this was an opportunity I would not pass up. I absolutely adore Noam and Dana - they allow a lot of space in the studio for a dancer to experience his/her own process. They are rich in humour, diversity, patience and creativity.

**KC: Describe your high school experience.**

AG: I went to English high school in Grade ten, after having been a French Immersion student for all of my elementary and junior high education. People can be unusually cruel, especially kids. For most of my education, I was harassed and teased because of my face. I loved learning in school, but hated going because of the cruelty I experienced. In Grade ten, I was suddenly with a whole new group of people, and made friends that are still my closest friends today. In my Grade twelve year, I was accepted into the Royal Winnipeg Ballet School Professional Division. I had to move to Winnipeg and transfer high schools. I was 16, living in my own apartment, studying dance all day - every day, going to high school and working a part-time job. I had chosen my career and had to work my butt off to succeed. I grew up very fast.

## RICHARD BROWN

**KC: I understand you started dancing later in life.**

RB: I took my first jazz dance lesson when I was 26 (after graduating from the University of Western Ontario with a B.A. in English). I felt that learning to dance would give me that "triple threat" (singing, dancing, and acting) in summer theatre. I met a teacher who opened up a dance studio in the basement of an old Biway Discount Store. Fortunately, things worked well in my body and within a year I received a scholarship to go to any dance school for a summer. My teacher recommended the School of Toronto Dance Theatre (TDT) and I went. At the end of the four-week program I auditioned for the full-time training program, was accepted and started the three-year training that fall at the age of 27.

**KC: Can you tell me about the first time you saw The Holy Body Tattoo in performance?**

RB: When I was studying at the School of TDT, I saw The Holy Body Tattoo's piece, *our brief eternity*. It was then that I said "I want to dance for them one day!" Their style of choreography - the way they push the body to its limit and then further - was exactly what I wanted to do. Ten years later when they held auditions for *monumental* I was there! I consider myself very fortunate to work with them and to be dancing with such generous and talented dancers.

**KC: Do you work in any other artistic fields?**

RB: I have begun to branch out into theatre again. Recently, I was on stage at the NAC and the Great Canadian Theatre Company acting in *Hamlet* and *Mambo Italiano*, respectively. I will be back at the NAC in January 2005 acting in *Love's Labour's Lost*.

## DAY HELESIC

**KC: When and why did you want to be a dancer?**

DH: I started dancing when I was 3 years old in baby ballet class. I haven't stopped since. I pursued dance in earnest when I went to Toronto at 13 and saw *Cats*. That inspired me to study dance with the intent of some day becoming a professional contemporary dancer. (Slightly embarrassing, but true.)

**KC: What drew you to Noam and Dana's choreography?**

DH: I wanted to dance with The Holy Body Tattoo because the work that comes from this company is very human. Dana and Noam's choreography contains all the passion, trauma, humour, sensuality, anger and desire that continuously washes over human experience. It's authentic, it's raw - it reaches people in a universal way and it expresses the complications of urban life in a way that is irrevocably honest. Dancing the work feels like being on the edge, being pushed beyond your limits, feeling the highs and lows of human relationships and dancing the urban experience.

**KC: How does *monumental* relate to the high school experience for you?**

DH: I had a pleasant high school experience, living on the edge of cliques and groups, preferring to do my own thing. Many themes in *monumental*, however, circle around ideas of being part of a society, group or clique and being isolated from that society, group or clique, which is an enormous part of high school - the struggle to belong. In the piece we spend a lot of time in isolation, raised on pedestals, struggling to find our individuality and the strength to go on alone. But at a certain point the individuality breaks down and we become a community, rife with dysfunctions, but also with moments of peace and unity. I feel that *monumental* is a micro-cosm of the human experience, and I often think that high school is also a microcosm of the human experience.

## FARLEY JOHANSSON

**KC: Why did you start dancing?**

FJ: I began dancing when I was only 3 1/2 years old. My family doctor recommended ballet lessons to strengthen my ankles and feet - I was practically flat-footed as a young child. I studied Classical and Contemporary Ballet, and Modern Dance at the New Zealand School of Dance.

**KC: What was high school like for you?**

FJ: High school was very challenging for me. I was always an outsider; I got picked on a lot in the earlier years, as I was the only guy in the whole school who did ballet. As I got closer to the end of high school I started to distance myself from other students, I stopped trying to fit in to what they thought was cool. I started to find a stronger sense of myself. I began training more and more; by grade 12, I was doing a half-day program that allowed me to do two classes a day at school, and then go to the studio

after lunch to train. I realized that I was not meant for the conventional path of education. I left high school with few friends but with a very strong sense of identity and direction.

**KC: What are some of your interests, outside of dance?**

FJ: I enjoy cycling, reading, traveling and learning as much as I can about this crazy world.

**SONJA PERRETEN**

**KC: You started dancing at 16 - why then?**

SP: It was a total fluke. I was a gymnast and a skier. Then when I quit gymnastics, I didn't want to be totally out of shape, so I walked down to the Y a few blocks away [in Vancouver]. Anna Wyman had her dance school there and that's where I started. I took a jazz class and then I got hooked.

**KC: Could you describe the rehearsal periods? How do two choreographers work together to create a piece?**

SP: Noam and Dana's dynamics and physical instincts are different. My impression is that they temper each other really well because their tendency is to opposite extremes. So usually they would split rehearsals (in a five hour rehearsal, one would take the first half and one would take the second half). Then as the rehearsal process continued, they would start coming in together and editing each other's work. They each had more control over a particular section [of the dance]. Once they have enough sections going, the piece starts to have its own imperative. Then they finished it together.

**KC: How was working with the boxes?**

SP: Their choreography is intensively physical. There was a lot of material, very fast. My body loved it. We started with tape on the floor, because the boxes weren't made yet. Then we got plywood boxes (these aren't the real boxes, they're mock-ups). The real boxes have a clear top and the light shines up through them.

## DAVID FLEWELLING

**KC: Could you tell me about your first dance lessons?**

DF: I grew up in a quiet, small town in Northern Alberta. I was in high school when I took my first dance class for fun, beginner jazz. After that I took some community classes in the evening while I studied music by day. I changed majors at university and found myself taking another dance class, this time for credit. I also joined Orchesis (the modern dance club) at the University of Alberta and performed with them for three years. I changed my major again when I transferred to the Dance Programme at Grant MacEwan College in Edmonton, (which is now, sadly, no longer). Then I transferred to Simon Fraser University in Vancouver to earn my B.F.A. in dance.

**KC: What do you like to do to relax?**

DF: I teach Contact Improvisation and Yoga. My other interests include Pilates, cycling, traveling and playing on my new computer.

**KC: What do you like about The Holy Body Tattoo's style?**

DF: There are many styles of contemporary dance. I was attracted to the physicality that is distinctive to The Holy Body Tattoo. I was also attracted to their style of partnering. In re-hearsals, I have found the choreography much more challenging than I thought - and I like the challenge. I've learned a great deal and will carry this with me in my future experiences.

## SARAH WILLIAMS

**KC: When and why did you start dancing?**

SW: I started taking adult beginners dance class when I was 17 for exercise, and because my sister had told me that I dance like a wooden spoon. Then I got hooked and started taking as many contemporary [dance] classes as I could find. Eventually, I also wanted to learn ballet so I started with the children's beginner ballet class. I wanted to learn the ballet syllabus in the order that it was generally taught. I felt a little weird taking class with 8 year-olds, but I am glad that I suffered through because it resulted in me gaining a solid ballet technique. Luckily, I quickly moved up to the advanced class with people - still younger than me - but much closer to my age.

**KC: What do you like about The Holy Body Tattoo's choreography?**

SW: I am attracted to their choreography because they portray men and women equally and the many sides of each of us as people. Their choreography provides me with many challenges. It requires focus of the mind and body, strong technique and

prowess. Being part of their work allows me to show strength at times, and at other times, vulnerability.

**KC: Are the ideas and feelings expressed in *monumental* related to what you experienced in high school?**

SW: I was shy in high school and still am which makes trying to fit in a constant test. There are some similarities in *monumental* to school, as well as life in general. I like to be part of a group and fit in and be accepted, but I would never want to lose my individuality. In high school, it took me a while to figure out who I was, as opposed to who I thought I should be or who I should be like.

## 5 ~ PRODUCTION TEAM: WHO'S WHO

Numerous people work to create a dance production. The dancers perform the choreography that is often the result of years of work by the artistic and management team. Each member of the team joins the work at different stages of production. Dana Gingras explained that the idea for *monumental* was conceived before 2001. The dancers auditioned in January 2003; therefore this piece has taken almost two years to complete. Different members of the team are involved at different stages of production. This chapter is organized chronologically.

### *In the Beginning*

#### **CHOREOGRAPHER**

The Choreographer conceives the idea for a work of dance. The Choreographer works with the Dancers to improvise, inspire and create the movements for the performance. Some Choreographers work together, others work individually. The Choreographer collaborates with the other members of the artistic team such as: Dancers, Composer/Sound Designer, Visual Artist, Filmmaker, Technical Director, Lighting Designer, Set Designer, and Costume Designer. The Choreographer will often pitch his/her creative ideas for a work to dance Presenters.

### **DANCERS/INTERPRETERS**

Generally, the Dancers will be chosen at an audition. The Dancers perform the movement designed by the Choreographer in the studio and interpret the Choreographer's vision on stage. Often in contemporary dance, Dancers will improvise during rehearsals. If the Dancers contribute a large number of movement ideas to the overall production, they are often credited in the programme with the Choreographer.

### **PRESENTER/CURATOR**

There are dance Presenters/Curators all across Canada. They choose dance companies to perform in their venue/theatre. If the Choreographers are creating a new work, like *monumental*, the Curator might commission the Choreographers to create the work, as well as pay the company a fee to perform. The National Arts Centre Dance Department has commissioned The Holy Body Tattoo to create *monumental*.

### **GENERAL MANAGER/ADMINISTRATOR**

This staff member is responsible for the day-to-day operations of the company. The Administrator writes grant applications and pays the artists and staff. The Administrator hires and works with other members of the administrative staff, such as the Publicist.

## *Artistic Collaborators*

### **COMPOSER/SOUND DESIGNER**

The Composer writes the musical score. The Sound Designer assembles and masters the music to suit the Choreographer's needs. The Composer and Sound Designer may often be the same person. In contemporary dance, the music is often recorded and can be drawn from soundscapes, instrumental music, electronic music, or previously recorded music. Sometimes the Choreographer will work with the score in the studio, but if it is not complete the Dancers will rehearse to other music – or without music.

### **FILMMAKER**

The Filmmaker works with the Choreographer to create a work of film that compliments and supplements the movement of the Dancers. Films can be shown during transition sections of the dance, or simultaneously with the choreography to achieve different effects. Today, films are a prominent parts of many Choreographers' multi-media contemporary dance productions.

### **LIGHTING DESIGNER**

The Lighting Designer collaborates with the Choreographer to light the performance. The Designer creates a plan to light the stage and the Dancers during the performance using numerous lights and colours. Lighting is an essential artistic element in dance that can focus the audience's attention and set a mood on stage.

### **SET AND COSTUME DESIGNER**

These Designers work with the Choreographer on the style and appearance of the production. The Costume Designer draws detailed sketches for each of the costumes. Once the Choreographer has approved the sketches, the Costume Designer cuts and sews the fabric (or hires a wardrobe seamstress). At least a week before the performance, the Dancers try on the costumes and if necessary

adjustments are made. The Set Designer also shows the Choreographer sketches of a set and/or backdrop. The Set Designer will hire a crew to build the design for the stage. Sometimes, Designers will create the plans for both the costumes and sets.

## *Behind the Scenes*

### **TECHNICAL DIRECTOR**

The Technical Director (TD) organizes the production in the theatre. This staff member arranges the technical rehearsals, dress rehearsals, and performances. The TD works backstage with the Stage Manager, Lighting Designer, Set and Costume Designer and the Choreographer to make sure that everything runs smoothly. The TD could also be the Stage Manager and/or the Lighting Designer if the company is small. The Stage Manager (SM) calls the cues for performance: the SM stands backstage and directs the technical crew to do many things such as raise the curtain, move props and sets, prepare microphones and other technology, play recorded music, adjust the sound, light the stage, and adjust the lighting on stage.

### **PUBLICIST/MARKETING**

The Publicist is responsible for advertising the performance. This staff member contacts the media (i.e. newspapers, radio and television stations) to ensure the Choreographers and Dancers are interviewed and the performance is reviewed by critics. The Publicist ultimately attempts to make the public aware of the show.

### **BOX OFFICE AND FRONT OF HOUSE**

The Box Office staff sells tickets. The Front of House staff, such as the ushers, work with Box Office and the Technical Director and his/her crew to make sure the audience is seated when the performance is about to begin.





## 6 ~ CLASSROOM ACTIVITIES

### *Warm-up*

#### **Gr. 9 Dance Expectation:**

**Explore movement through structured improvisation (e.g., lead and follow)**

Improvisation (improv) is a central element of contemporary dance. This simple warm-up relies on improv by the teacher and students, and is adaptable to any grade level.

- ❖ Ask the students to stand in a circle. Explain this dance as a simple “call and answer” warm-up for the body and the voice.
- ❖ The teacher will move one body part (i.e.: kick the right leg) and make a sound of a letter at the same time (i.e.: oh).
- ❖ Ask three students to copy the movement with sound -- once the students understand this first movement sequence, put on an upbeat piece of music.
- ❖ The teacher will begin with approximately five simple movements and sounds, and the students will repeat the movements and sounds immediately after the teacher has demonstrated each one. (The teacher should demonstrate simple movements, like kicks, punches, wiggles and squats that are easy for all students to perform and will warm-up the entire body, not just the legs.)
- ❖ Then ask the students to think of their own movements with sounds. If possible, have each student show the class this sequence and ask the class to repeat it.
- ❖ Challenge the students to use the beat of the music in their movement (i.e.: three punches to the sounds e, e, ah).
- ❖ This warm-up can continue until the end of the song or until every student has had a chance to contribute. Repeat with different music.

After the warm-up is complete, ask the students to consider these questions:

***How did the music influence the effort they used to create movements?***

***How much space did they use in this warm-up?***

***How effective was this activity in warming up their whole body?***

***How would the warm-up change if the music were different?***

### *Before the Performance: Movement Activity*

#### **Gr. 12 Ontario Curriculum Expectations:**

**Use technique effectively in various ways to extend artistic scope**

**Use technology effectively when creating dance works**

Gagnon and Gingras' choreography often uses gesture and repetition. This movement activity draws the students' attention to these two elements of dance.

- ❖ Ask the students to develop a simple gesture (i.e.: wave), preferably with the upper body.
- ❖ Play different types of music and ask the students to improvise with the gesture: make it small, make it a full body movement, and attempt the gesture with a different body part. Repeat the gesture at different speeds or with different effort qualities.
- ❖ After this improv, ask the students to pick their favourite manner of performing the gesture (considering body part, time, effort and space used).
- ❖ Ask the students to take this formalized gesture and repeat it to music ten times, exactly the same way. Place the students in small groups and ask them to perform and then teach their formalized gesture for the group.

- ❖ Next, provide the students with props such as tables, chairs, and boxes – ask the “choreographer” of the gesture (or one of the dancers in their group) to stand on a prop and perform the same formalized gesture ten times again.
- ❖ Ask the students to perform this movement phrase one after another in their small groups to provoke discussion. When the activity is complete bring the class together to discuss how they felt about the different stages of creation.

***How did the gesture change as the activity progressed?  
 What did the audience see that the performer did not necessarily intend?  
 How did the gesture change when performed by different people?  
 Did the gestures flow together logically in the group?  
 How was the gesture different once elevated on a prop?  
 How did the gesture feel through the repetition? Is it possible to do the gesture exactly the same every time? Why or why not?***

## ***During the Performance: Writing Activity***

***Gr. 10 Dance Ontario Curriculum Expectation:***

***Describe and demonstrate how technology can be used as a tool in the field of dance***

It is vitally important for students to write about their reactions to all forms of art, especially dance. Discussing and writing about abstract contemporary art provides an excellent educational outlet for creative expression. There are no wrong answers when discussing art. Therefore writing about and documenting a dance performance provides a perfect opportunity for high school students to explore stream of conscious writing techniques.

Regardless of expertise, students react profoundly to dance be it positive or negative. Ultimately, art is a very personal experience for the artists and the audience. It is paramount to emphasize the absence of self-criticism at this writing stage. The students should write whatever comes to mind - good, bad or indifferent.

- ❖ Ask the students to bring a journal to the theatre.
- ❖ While in their seats before the performance begins, have the students describe their surroundings on paper.
- ❖ Tell them that spelling does not matter - they are writing to practice writing. They should be encouraged to write through the duration of the piece, until the curtain rises. (If they are stuck, suggest that they write “I don’t know what to write.” They should get bored of that quickly).
- ❖ While the performance is on, it is often difficult to write. Suggest that the students scribble down one-word images or ideas to help them remember the choreography.
- ❖ At intermission and/or the conclusion of the show, the students will write one page about the performance. They can choose their focus (i.e.: choreography, dancers’ physicality, costumes, sets, music etc.). The stream of conscious writing that they produce at the theatre is just for them.
- ❖ When they return to school, ask them to use their theatre writing as the basis for a written assignment.

Here are some sample assignments:

- the students could write about the interplay of dance, music and film in *monumental*
- the students could compare and contrast one movement by the dancers on stage and one movement recorded on film
- the students could hypothesize why the work is called *monumental*

If they are willing, ask the students to share their final writing product with the class to provoke discussion. The discussion can focus on the work or even on the act of writing and how the writing evolved from the theatre to the classroom.

## ***After the Performance: Movement Activity***

***Gr. 11 Dance Ontario Curriculum Expectation:***

***Demonstrate an understanding of the effect of social and political events on the evolution of dance***

Even though the concept for *monumental* was envisioned before September 11, 2001, images of that horrific day can be seen in the choreography. This dance activity uses photographs as inspiration for choreography.

- ❖ Ask the students to borrow a book, magazine, or journal from the library with photos of people (preferably black and white photo journalism from any time period). The students should choose at least three photos and make a copy of each.
- ❖ Place the students in groups of five or fewer
- ❖ Ask each group to randomly shuffle their photos into a pile. This pile of photos is going to be a road map to their dance.
- ❖ First, ask the students to replicate each photos, in order, as a “tableau”. Students may enter and exit the scene as the photos dictate.
- ❖ Once they have rehearsed the tableaux, ask each group to elect a “choreographer” to step out of the dance and blend the tableaux together. (The dancers could also suggest different ways of moving from one photo to another).
- ❖ The choreographer should try and keep everyone on stage and moving. Ask the choreographer to add music to the production.
- ❖ Once each group is ready to perform, ask them to reshuffle their deck of photos and give it to an audience member.
- ❖ After the group has performed, show the audience the photos used as inspiration.
- ❖ Ask the audience to try and order them like the dance (repeat the dance, if requested). Repeat until every group has performed.
- ❖ Repeat the activity but let the students choose the order of the photos, instead of randomly shuffling the photos.

Ask the students:

***Describe how the photographs were inspiring or challenging to replicate?***

***Did the subject matter of the photographs influence the mood of the choreography?***

***How did the dance change when a choreographer took over?***

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Kate Cornell (B.A. History, University of Guelph; M.A. Dance, York University) is a writer, teacher, and dance education specialist. Cornell is currently a PhD candidate in Communications and Culture at Ryerson University. She co-wrote the book, *Toronto Dance Theatre, 1968-1998, Stages in a Journey* with Nadine Saxton. She teaches part-time in the Theatre School and the School of Early Childhood Education at Ryerson University. Cornell also wrote the study guide for the first NAC Youth Commission for Dance, *Break Open Play*, choreographed by Matjash Mrozewski.