

Somewhat like You

Choreographed by MARTIN BÉLANGER
in collaboration with MONTRÉAL DANSE

S T U D Y G U I D E

NAC Youth Commission for Dance
A partnership with the Canada Council for the Arts

National Arts Centre, Dance
2006–2007 Season

Cathy Levy
Producer, Dance Programming



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This study guide was researched and written by **Nicole Turcotte**
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Cathy Levy
Producer, Dance
Programming, NAC
Photo credit: Shin Sugino

Dear Teachers,

Welcome to the fourth commission in our four-year NAC 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, 2004–05 2005–06, and 2006–07 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.

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

Last season’s commission, *Diary / Journal intime*, was choreographed by Hélène Blackburn of Montreal’s Cas Public. *Diary / Journal intime* consisted of a series of duets for ten dancers. Featuring the music of Johann Sebastian Bach played live onstage by pianist Laurier Rajotte, *Diary / Journal intime* revolved around a theme important at any age: love. Intense, energetic, a whirl of movement, Blackburn’s dancers invited the audience to share in the intimacy and power of this most personal of emotions.

This season’s commission, entitled *Somewhat like You/Un peu comme toi*, is presented by Montréal Danse, with choreography by Martin Bélanger. This work explores themes relating to the world of adolescents and pre-adolescents: self-discovery and the discovery of others, confusion, rebellion, fragility, pleasure, joy, and sensuality. Pop culture—primarily hip hop music—is used as a starting point for exploration.

We’re delighted to be partnering with Montréal Danse on this latest initiative and we hope this study guide helps prepare you and your students for the exciting performance you will experience at the National Arts Centre or in theatres across Canada.

Cathy Levy
Producer, Dance Programming
National Arts Centre

NOTE TO TEACHERS

Many of us are used to seeing dance performed on stage, complete with sets and costumes. But what comes before the finished piece? How is a dance work constructed? Where does choreographer Martin Bélanger find his ideas? As spectators, how can we “read” the scenes and movements unfolding before our eyes?

This study guide is designed to provide you with some of the answers to these questions and help you and your students explore Martin Bélanger’s dance piece *Somewhat like You* both before and after attending the performance. The guide is divided into three sections, which you can use separately or in any combination that works for you and your students.

The first section contains information about choreographer Martin Bélanger, his artistic team, and the Montréal Danse company. The second section is presented as a glossary of 15 keywords connected to different aspects of contemporary choreography, particularly Martin Bélanger’s choreography. This section can be photocopied and distributed to your students to be used as a workbook. The third section contains suggested pre- and post-show activities and lesson plans.

Enjoy the show!

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SECTION ONE

The Making of *Somewhat like You*

Somewhat like You, created in collaboration with the young Montreal choreographer Martin Bélanger, is Montréal Danse's first venture into the challenging field of dance works for young audiences. In this work—whose title reminds us that the world of adults and the world of teenagers are perhaps not so very far apart—Martin Bélanger uses teen-friendly elements (hip hop, high tech, etc.) to challenge young people's ideas and sound out their reactions. In familiar language that is directly linked to what they know, *Somewhat like You* encourages young people to step back, take an objective look at the world around them, and experience the honesty and authenticity of the dancers' performance.

Who is Montréal Danse?

Montréal Danse is a dance company based in Montreal, with offices and studios on Sainte-Catherine Street in the heart of downtown. The company's creative approach is non-traditional: instead of showcasing the artistic vision of a single choreographer, Montréal Danse presents a wide range of works by local and international choreographers. The company's mission is to work with numerous guest choreographers to create and develop exciting new work. Founded in 1986 by Paul-André Fortier and Daniel Jackson, for the past decade it has been directed by Kathy Casey. As artistic director, she is constantly on the lookout for talented, innovative young choreographers who, together with the company dancers, are prepared to explore the unknown. Acclaimed for its willingness to take artistic risks, Montréal Danse has become a true research and development centre for contemporary dance. Over the past 20 years the company has created and produced some 40 works by almost as many different choreographers.

Message from Kathy Casey, Artistic Director, Montréal Danse



Kathy Casey
Photo Credit:
Rolline Laporte

Why a piece for teenagers and why with Martin Bélanger?

I have two sons (ages 9 and 13) and I am also very close to my two nieces (ages 11 and 13), and as they are getting older I have become intrigued about finding dance works that capture their imagination. What is dance for nearly grown up boys and girls that speaks to them with honesty, energy and intelligence? There is little dance created for younger audiences, in particular for children over 10 years old, and so I decided to dive into a creative adventure with Montréal Danse.

One thing I knew from the start was that I did not want to make a piece that was cute or sweet, as I feel older children love complexity and have a large capacity to understand and discern subtle as well as bold ideas. I am also not a big believer in art works with morals. I

find that art does best when it exposes without giving answers or lessons.

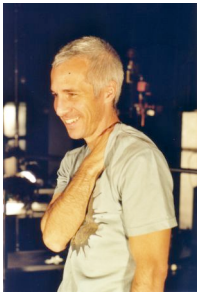
I believe I was around 10 years old when I first saw a performance that “changed my life” in the sense that I started to realize that performances could open doors in my imagination and be an incredible experience. So I recognized I needed a very interesting choreographer to help us make a work that could be entertaining, challenging, funny, beautiful, musical and exciting.

Martin Bélanger has been choreographing for several years and I have really liked his pieces. Often in his works he likes to address the audience directly; he is able to explore complex or intimate subjects with simplicity and intelligence, and he has a wonderful way with words. I also like the way his works have layers that add up as the piece goes along. He can be funny, goofy, super energetic and quiet, so his dances are very full experiences. For all these reasons, I thought he would be a wonderful person to make our first piece for teenagers.

About the Choreographer, Martin Bélanger

“Dancer-choreographer Martin Bélanger has a particular fire: His intelligent, sardonic and droll imagination is matched by his physical ease.”

*Hour magazine
(Montreal),
December 2004*



Martin Bélanger
Photo credit:
Annik Hamel

Martin Bélanger began his career as a stage and television actor before discovering dance. In 1997 he completed a B.A. in dance at the Université du Québec à Montréal (UQAM), where he received the William Douglas Award for Excellence. In 1999 he created *Snap, Crackle, Pop*, an inventive solo that set him apart as a choreographer to watch. It was followed by *L'Ère des ténèbres* (2001), a work about the history of humankind, and *Démonstration n°1*, a hybrid solo that he toured to New York and Japan. Concurrently with his own creative work, he continues to collaborate with other artists in dance, theatre and film. He is part of PME, the Montreal-based experimental theatre collective directed by Jacob Wren, and has worked with such artists as Benoît Lachambre (on *Confort et Complaisance* and *100 rencontres*), kondition pluriel (dance/multimedia), and Isabelle Schad (Berlin). Acknowledged as a leading figure on the Montreal contemporary dance scene, Martin Bélanger draws inspiration from the great European creators—Jérôme Bel, Thomas Lehmen, Xavier Le Roy—whose work challenges traditional concepts of performance.

Spoken word/body, created in 2002 and presented at the 2003 FIND (Festival international de nouvelle danse) in Montreal, is a good illustration of Martin's artistic practice. In this solo, he

explores the relationship between dance and the body, challenging the traditional rules that govern its representation. Addressing the audience directly, the work is a verbal and physical monologue that explores what makes the body socially acceptable. Inspired by the legendary poetry sessions of the Beat Generation and by the writings of Julia Kristeva, Martin invites the audience to join him in his investigation of the everyday physical mechanics of the body. It's a unique performance in which Martin comes across as funny, authentic, appealing and daring—and a superb “mover”¹. This young Montreal choreographer, equally at ease in English and French, follows in the footsteps of others—from Quebec, across Canada, and around the world—who share a need to spark a serious discussion about the art of dance. In an interview for *Voir*, the Quebec entertainment weekly, he explained: “I feel compelled to tear down the veil of inaccessibility and elitism that people have long associated with contemporary dance. Partly because I want to bring dance closer to people, make it more approachable, but also because I think the stage is a site for discussion and exchange.”

In *Somewhat like You*, Martin Bélanger pursues his choreographic investigation, with the all-important element of audience interaction always in mind. To meet the challenge of creating a work for young audiences, he borrows a few elements of their world on the fly... A self-styled “recycler of movements,” he captures, processes, reorganizes and condenses teenagers’ actions and gestures, partly to attract them to the work but also to create an inviting space for “dialogue.”

¹ Stéphanie Brody, *La Presse*, Montréal, 22 septembre 2002

The Creative Team

Choreographer

Martin Bélanger

Dancers/Performers

Maryse Carrier
Annik Hamel
Rachel Harris
Benoît Leduc
Frédéric Marier
Peter Trosztmer

Artistic Director

Kathy Casey

Sound Designer

Éric Forget

Lighting Designer

Jean Gauvin

The Montréal Danse Team

Administrative Director

Claire Ranger

Development Officer

François Prudhomme

Board of Directors

Paul Allard, Peter Georges, Claude Lemay, M^e Robert L. Archambault,
Gilbert Ouellette

Meet the Performers

Six dancers from the Montréal Danse company were involved in creating *Somewhat like You*. All of them have a solid background in dance, and some have experience in other disciplines as well—theatre, film, circus. Multitalented, charismatic, and passionate about their art, these six dancers attract attention wherever they go. When you meet them, you're sure to want to find out more about them. I invite you to do just that, by reading these short summaries of their careers and their experiences while creating *Somewhat like You*.



Maryse Carrier
Photo credit:
Izabel Zimmer

Maryse Carrier
Trained in Quebec City, Maryse danced with Danse Partout for three years. She has worked in Montreal and Toronto with several leading choreographers, including Jean-Pierre Perrault, Tom Stroud and Bill James. From 1990 to 1993 she danced with Montanaro Danse (Montreal), and in the summer of 1992 she was awarded a scholarship to continue her dance studies in New York. Since she joined Montréal Danse in 1993, Maryse has added singing and acting lessons to her dance training and has obtained a diploma in artistic makeup.

Maryse describes how she feels as a performer tackling a new piece: “Learning a new choreographer’s work always makes me very excited and a little bit scared. Finding out how he will structure the piece, what kind of body language he will use to draw us into his universe, how the chemistry between us will work. For this piece with Martin, the first thing was to find hip-hop moves that we could string together into different sections. After that the work started to take more definite shape and Martin took off with it. His approach involves a lot of reflection, experimentation and discussion. How to connect with young audiences by starting with something familiar to them, and encouraging them to see or understand something else? That was our challenge, and I hope we’ve succeeded in meeting it. We can’t wait to find out!”



Annik Hamel
Photo credit:
Paul-Antoine Taillefer

Annik Hamel
Annik has a B.A. in dance from the Université du Québec à Montréal. She joined Montréal Danse nearly 20 years ago, in 1987. She has appeared on film in Gilles Noël’s *Erreur sur la personne*, and on television in Jean Chabot’s *Mack Sennett*. In 1999, she was selected by Montreal’s Danse Cité for its performer development programme, where she created and performed *C’est l’histoire d’une femme*, comprising works by Paula Vasconcelos, Wadji Mouawad and José Navas. In 2001, Annik appeared in the theatre production *Intérieur m.e.s* directed by Denis Marleau for UBU, and performed at the FIND (Festival international de nouvelle danse) in *24 caprices* choreographed by Manon Oligny.

Annik really enjoys the challenge and uncertainty of working on a piece for young audiences. “What makes teenagers tick? What’s on their mind? What shocks them? What turns them on? How can we make them care? How can we make them think? These are some of the questions we asked ourselves... and we didn’t always find the answers. It was a gradual process of basically feeling our way along, with lots of laughter, lots of time—long stretches of time, some good music, a few hip-hop lessons, and the sheer joy of dancing. Putting on a performance is a bit like meeting someone for the first time: it’s exciting and scary at the same time. Personally, I’m really looking forward to this next ‘blind date.’”

Rachel Harris



Rachel Harris
Photo Credit:
Paul-Antoine Taillefer

A native of Vancouver, Rachel moved to Montreal in 1990 and trained at the Ateliers de Danse Moderne de Montréal (LADMMI). She worked in Quebec City with Danse Partout and in Montreal with various choreographers, including Anne-Marie Giroux, Estelle Claretton, Sarah Bill, Benjamin Hatcher and Jean-Pierre Perrault. She joined Montréal Danse in 1998. Rachel is currently working on *Le Projet Coyote*, a new piece for four dancers.

“Working with Martin on the creation of *Somewhat like You* has been a dizzying experience of putting aside what you’d like to project about yourself in order to reveal yourself more completely; putting aside the dancer in order to dance better; examining yourself in order to understand others; observing young people in order to feel old; and listening to their music in order to feel young again!”

Benoît Leduc



Benoît Leduc
Photo credit:
Geneviève Dorion-
Coupal

Benoît is a 1997 graduate of the École Supérieure de danse du Québec. From 1997 to 2000 he danced with Le Jeune Ballet du Québec and Les Grands Ballets Canadiens. He traveled to Argentina and mastered the tango, which he now teaches in Montreal. He has worked on projects ranging from dance works to musical theatre to circus, with such choreographers as Jean Grand-Maître, Jean-Jacques Pillet, Debra Brown (Cirque du Soleil), Luc Tremblay (compagnie Les gens D’R) as a dancer/aerial acrobat, Richard Tremblay (Kalashas Dance Theatre), José Navas, the White Oak Dance Project, Barry Collins (Opéra de Wallonie), and Roger Sinha. Benoît also participated in the creation of Sinha Danse’s latest work, *Apricot Trees Exist*, premiered in 2004 at Montreal’s Agora de la danse. He joined the Montréal Danse resident company in May 2005.



Frédéric Marier
Photo Credit:
Mark McFadden

Frédéric Marier

Frédéric began his performing career as a musician and instructor in a number of drum and bugle corps in Canada and the United States. He studied dance at the Ateliers de Danse Moderne de Montréal (LADMMI), obtaining his diploma in May 2002, and soon thereafter made his professional dance debut as a member of the Montréal Danse resident company. In addition to performing, Frédéric teaches dance for various organizations and programmes, including the Leadership and Music Conservatory of Tarpan Springs High School in Florida.



Peter Trosztmer
Photo Credit:
Elizabeth Langley

Peter Trosztmer

Peter completed a degree in Classics before training in dance at Concordia University in Montreal and at the Toronto Dance Theatre. He worked and taught in Toronto, Victoria and Moncton before settling in Montreal. He has collaborated with a variety of companies and choreographers, including Marie Chouinard, La Compagnie Flak, Pablo Diconca, Catherine Tardif, Jane Mappin, Sarah Febrarro, Jean Grand-Maitre, le Carré des Lombes and Richard Tremblay. Peter has also produced and performed his own solo work and collaborated on several video projects, including *This Fire*, which won an award at the Vancouver film and video festival. He recently returned from Cuba, where he participated in a cross-cultural collaboration with Production Company Tess and Teatro Escambray.

Here are Peter's impressions of his participation in creating *Somewhat like You*: "The process is challenging and unfamiliar. The sensation is that we are attempting new inroads to a destination unknown. Rather than following a paved road, we are bushwhacking and cutting a new trail, further beating down the path and slowly creating a clear trail. The way will be alive and metamorphosing as a trail might be, one day muddy, the next quite dry, with new underbrush always promising to grow in and alter our direction a little."

SECTION TWO

A Voyage of Discovery

Discovering a dance work is a bit like opening a book. A literary work transports you to a unique world where the turn of each page reveals new characters, new settings, new ideas, new feelings. But if you didn't understand the "code" of written language, that magical world would remain closed and inaccessible to you. It's the same with dance. This guide is intended to help "decode" the language of choreography and the vocabulary of dance. This section includes **15 keywords**—"open Sesame" words, if you like—that will open the door to understanding different aspects of the performance and promote classroom discussion. The keywords and their definitions are meant to help students express their thoughts, feelings and opinions about dance, whether as an independent exercise or before or after attending the performance. The aim of this section is not so much to instruct as to encourage dialogue, and to provide answers to some of the questions your students may have about contemporary dance.

The words marked with an asterisk (*) in particular will encourage students to express their reactions and opinions about a specific aspect of the show. Some of these passages include questions that invite further research into that topic.

By agreeing to be interviewed, Martin Bélanger agreed to put his choreographic practice and career into words. As for many creators, his work is often more intuitive than intellectual, and it can be difficult to capture in concrete terms. So let's take advantage of this opportunity to discover Martin Bélanger's creative universe and his approach to creating and developing dance.

Martin Bélanger Talks About *Somewhat like You*

“*Somewhat like You* tries to show that a body can dance simply by moving, that dance can spring from simple, familiar things or can be completely invented. It’s fine when the music is in time with the dance and all the dancers move together, but it can be interesting and enjoyable to explore other ways of combining music and dance. That can create new effects, unique moments and new sensations. You could say it’s not pure dance, but it’s not really theatre either: it’s a combination of both.

“*Somewhat like You* also looks for ways to connect the people on stage and the people in the audience, to see if it’s possible to break down that convention where the people on stage pretend to be unaware of the people in the audience, and conversely, the people in the audience are afraid to react in case they distract the people on stage. At some points in the show, for example, the dancers talk directly to the audience, sharing a bit of personal information to convey a better sense of who the people on stage are and what they are trying to express through the dance.

“All this to demonstrate that the stage can be a tool, a site for encouraging interaction and communication. It’s an opportunity to go beyond words and use anything you want to—dance, theatre, music and language.”

Keywords

Artistic Vision

“Dance is a thermometer for feelings, and is fuelled by emotions of all kinds, from everyday incidents to great human dramas.”²



Martin Bélanger
Photo credit:
Annik Hamel

Like the rest of us, artists are constantly wondering about the world around them: about love, friendship, current events, technology, the environment, accelerating globalization... What sets artists apart, though, is how they use those questions as a basis for a creative career. Maybe their eyes perceive the world and its contradictions more keenly. Today, many dance artists/choreographers investigate how we humans live, react to and interact with our increasingly complex modern world. Contemporary dance is in tune with the times, and its creators strive to reflect and represent current reality, visible and invisible. Artists are like researchers, always pushing back the boundaries of what we know, challenging the status quo, inventing and reinventing.

Martin is one of those artists whose choreographic vision extends far beyond aesthetic or personal success: it includes a desire to change the world, to make a statement, to forge new links between the artist and the audience. Martin wants to reconnect with the roots of dance as a public event, a gathering. The way he sees it, taking your seat in the theatre should be a convivial act, an agreement to participate in a shared experience; that's why he is constantly striving to find new ways of doing, saying, conveying—and most of all, connecting with the audience.

Beauty

Beauty is a very difficult thing to pin down or define. In 1912, when the great dancer Nijinsky performed Debussy's *L'après midi d'un faune*, audiences were scandalized by his “primitive” and “indecent” movements.³ What you find beautiful may not look that way to your neighbour. Beauty in art is extremely subjective: that is, it is defined by the person who is experiencing the work of art, not by arbitrary or external standards. When you attend a dance performance, you experience a range of reactions: you might really like a particular dance move or lighting effect; you might be blown away by the overall feel of the piece, or you might really relate to a particular scene. Often, how you react (and what you react to) depends on your own background, experience and tastes.

² Chantal Pontbriand in the 2003 FIND brochure.

³ Weblink: <http://www.artsalive.ca/en/dan/meet/bios/artistDetail.asp?artistID=52>

In his choreography, Martin seeks to connect with his audience, but there's no one specific way to do that. His definition of beauty is more like this: "I'm less interested in form than in the human side of things, the humanity behind the gesture. I want to connect with the audience in a way that is meaningful for them. Form may have been very important at one time, but it's much less so today. That's where I want to be; that's where, in the end, I find beauty."

Are there certain parts of this work that you found especially beautiful or enjoyable? Compare your answers with a classmate. Can you justify your choices?

Contemporary Dance

Generally, "contemporary" is defined as "present-day," and in that sense "contemporary dance" would be any dance currently being created and performed. That could include hip hop, jazz dance, etc. However, the term "contemporary dance" (also called "new dance"—but not the same as "modern dance"!) is actually used to describe a particular style that is distinct from other forms such as classical, social, and urban dance.

Clear as mud, right?

Contemporary dance developed from the roots of modern dance⁴ as various artists broke away from the forms used by previous generations. Contemporary dance is associated with a specific artistic aesthetic that reappropriates the body and emphasizes freedom of movement. Unlike ballet choreographers, who usually work within an established vocabulary of steps, contemporary choreographers define and develop their own movement styles, creating steps as they go in an ever-changing variety of forms. Contemporary dance is open to other disciplines and often incorporates elements of other art forms such as film, video, and theatre. To enjoy a contemporary dance performance, you need to be open and receptive, ready and willing to be transported to



Dancers in rehearsal
Photo credit:
Annik Hamel

⁴ For a definition of modern dance, see <http://www.artsalive.ca/en/dan/dance101/forms.asp - modern>

a captivating and deeply personal universe.

Martin discovered contemporary dance when he was 17, and quickly fell in love with its approach to the physical body. “I came to dance by way of amateur and semi-professional theatre. I always liked the element of dance in theatre performance: there’s something intoxicating about the free movement of the story and the characters... and contemporary theatre provides such wide creative scope... I loved the liberty of it, like a kind of free verse.”

Creative Process



Dancer in rehearsal
Photo credit: Annik Hamel

A dance develops gradually over time. It starts with a blank page and an idea; then, slowly but surely, the movements, choreographic phrases and scenes start to accumulate. The creative process isn’t the same for all creators. Does Martin have a particular approach? Let’s find out...

For Martin, there’s no single recipe for success. He likes to mix genres, drawing on his background in experimental theatre and film. He likes to shake things up and challenge our assumptions.

Most important for him is being open and responsive to the environment: the context shapes the work. The dancers are human beings who come laden with their own personal and professional baggage; then you have to consider the nature of the project, which can determine how you approach it. For example, as part of creating *Somewhat like You*, Martin and the dancers took hip hop lessons. There are no givens, and each project is unique.

There’s one more element the creative team has to live with: namely, doubt. “We can be totally panicked for two months, but in the end it all works out,” says Martin. As he gains experience, he can step back and study the creative process. “Creation is a very mysterious thing. I like to observe how my creative process operates... it’s an adventure.” Martin is a big fan of improvisation, and he puts a lot of faith in chance. He decides on a particular approach, throws out markers, invites the dancers to explore the concept... and pays close attention to what happens. “There’s a kind of interplay between coincidence, improvisation and me, my brain getting involved,” he explains. And so movements, scenes and ideas take more definite shape.

A one-hour show takes about 200 hours of work. Whew!

Dance Studio



Dancers in rehearsal
Photo credit: Annik Hamel

Dance pieces are “written” in the dance studio; they are assembled, disassembled, constructed and reconstructed in the laboratory of the studio. Every choreographer has their own style, and every performer has their own way of translating the choreographer’s instructions into movement; but every work involves heart, head, body, imagination, intuition and feeling, in a dynamic exchange that results in the finished piece. Many choreographers like to use improvisation:⁵ it’s a great way to explore multiple ideas and movements, and to draw on the dancers’ creative experience. In recent years, dancers have

become much more involved in the choreographic process. Their input often goes far beyond simple physical performance, to the point where they are called “interpreters” and even “co-creators.”⁶ It’s here, in the studio, that the movements and sequences are established and the dancers fine-tune their gestures, always trying to express more, better, more clearly, for you—the audience.

Fact Sheet



Name: Martin Bélanger
Profession: Choreographer
Hometown: Montreal
Studied in: Montreal
Lives in: Montreal

Influences: Filmmaker Stanley Kubrick, Oriental philosophy, music, his friends
Distinguishing characteristics: Silver hair, scientific bent, amateur botanist
Favourite kind of music: A bit of everything—classical, pop, electronic...

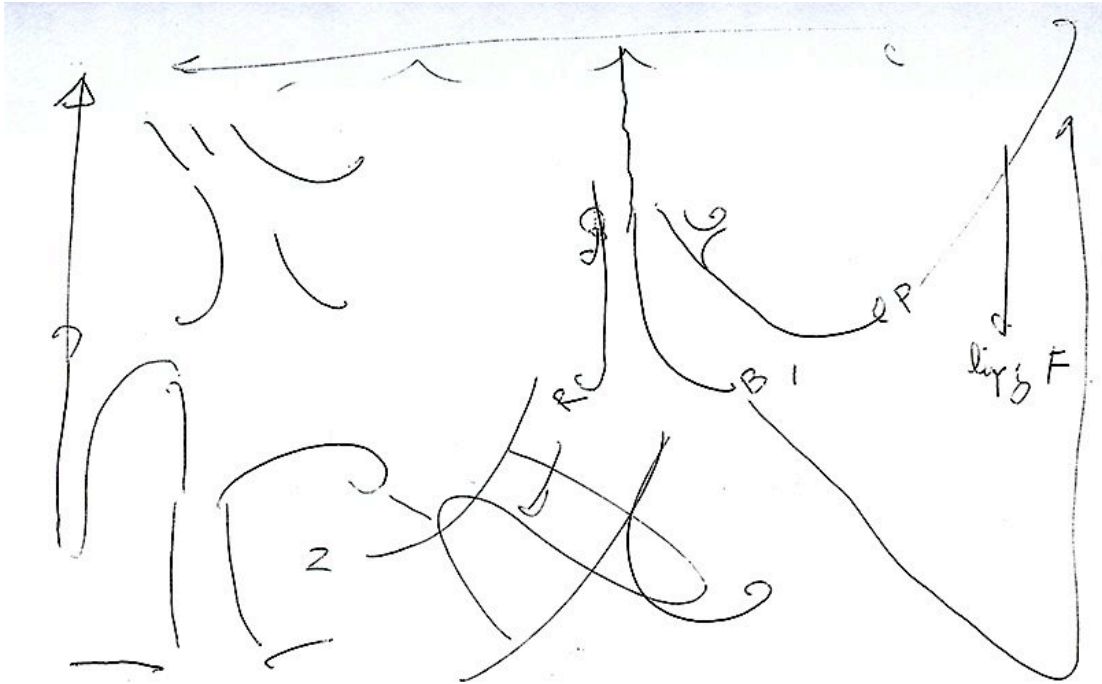
*Section 3 includes a blank Fact Sheet for students to fill in.

⁵ For a definition of improvisation, see <http://www.artsalive.ca/en/dan/dance101/forms.asp#improvisation>

⁶ For more on this subject, see the Study Guide for *Diary / Journal intime*, choreographed by Hélène Blackburn, produced by Cas public, presented at the NAC in 2005.
http://www.nac-cna.ca/en/allaboutthenac/publications/journal_guide_e.pdf

Martin Bélanger's journal

Most choreographers have some kind of system for keeping track of their creative notes and notions. Quick sketches, marginal doodles, memory-jogging phrases, ideas, keywords, and more: a creative journal contains a wealth of information. Take a look at a page from Martin's notebook.



intégrer MA → ginky devant
 loop gline
 W/p
 loop → le côté et un jump

solo fin ?

solo B
 balance hands
 p ↑ un peu au sol / adline
 T achute / chute
 J line
 J balance à balance puis j fouille
 à geras achute à 2 T
 B mais dans la pose
 que de j
 -A-

***Normal/abnormal**

In our everyday lives we're expected to follow certain laws, rules and guidelines. Do this, don't do that—it's wrong! It's not acceptable! Thankfully, the arts, including dance, give us a way to break out of those constraints and create the kind of world we'd like to have. Total creative freedom! And since it's all make-believe, anything goes. We can invent ideal relationships, or become the person we always wanted to be but never dared. As a member of the audience, you share that freedom: you can identify with the performance and enter into the new world unfolding in front of you.

The movements choreographers and dancers use to convey their universe are often new and different ("abnormal"). They are deeply personal, which just goes to show that these artists, from head to foot, are outside the mainstream.

Describe how you feel when you are dancing or creating something.

100% dance

You've probably heard people say, "That isn't dance!" or "I could do that!" Somewhere between the simplest physical gestures and the multidisciplinary mélange of different art forms, is there such a thing as "100% dance"?

Since the early 1990s, many choreographers have been using more austere forms, a leaner physical language, even a narrower dynamic range. While these qualities aren't necessarily true of all contemporary dance, they express these choreographers' desire to explore new approaches to dance and the physical body.

Why do you think this is? Could it be to get us to consider the body in a different way, a less performance-oriented way? Have you ever watched a dancer who was barely moving, yet whose presence was so strong that you felt irresistibly drawn into the emotion of the moment?

For many choreographers, revealing the "inner self" is more important than putting together a display of gestures and movements (see *Beauty*, above). Do you agree?

In fact, in some works dance takes a back seat to the spoken word, theatre, video, etc. How much of *Somewhat like You* would you say is "pure dance": 10%? 50%? 75%?

Seeing

Seeing is more than just looking: it's discovering what is meaningful to you in whatever it is you're looking at. Your gaze is never neutral, particularly when you're forming an impression of something: rather, it seeks to capture and recognize things you can relate to.

Dance is all about bodies in movement, movement that is sometimes graceful, sometimes awkward, sometimes suggestive. Dancers' bodies are much more expressive than the bodies we see in ads or the gestures we use in our everyday lives. You could say they are socially charged.

When you watch a dance performance, some movements may affect you more than others. They may conjure up a memory or an experience from your own life. They offer you a glimpse inside the choreographer's imagination. After all, a dance work is really all about building a connection between the dancers, their performance, the piece, and you. To appreciate a dance performance fully, you can't just be a passive consumer: you have to be open and receptive to what you are seeing on stage. You could think of contemporary dance as a kind of dreaming. When we dream, we travel to different places and experience feelings that aren't necessarily linked to each other in a logical way, but because it's only a dream, we accept it all without question. Watching contemporary dance is like dreaming while you're still awake. You can make some unusual connections and discoveries, to learn more about your own imagination and your own creativity.

In this work, Martin has chosen to include a lot of objects, sights and sounds from the teenage world—break dancing, for example; and yet, he says, "I keep a critical eye." He uses these elements to state his position, to make a comment. For him, an authentic connection can be quite unsettling. "And when it's unsettling, we've gone beyond the simple consumption of popular entertainment. I should add, there's nothing wrong with that, but that's not where we're at with this piece."

Behind the images and movements on stage, much is hidden or implied. It's up to you to discover it!

Self-employed

There are many options for a career in dance: choreographer at the head of your own company, independent choreographer, guest choreographer, independent dancer or member of a dance company, dance company with guest choreographers... Whether by choice or by necessity, most dance artists are not members of a permanent company or creative ensemble. Some choreographers hire different dancers for each new piece, while others prefer to work with the same ones. Making a living as a choreographer or as a dancer isn't easy, but when you're passionate about dance, you find a way to make it work. Dance artists today have found some innovative solutions to the challenges of carving out a career in their chosen field. For example, a group of artists may form a collective that allows them to share the cost of studio space, or split production and marketing expenses; rather than waiting for a casting call, dancers may get together and invite a choreographer to create a new work for them. Today's emerging dance artists are

resourceful and resilient, constantly looking for new ways to keep dance alive and accessible to an ever-widening audience.

Martin is a member of an artists' collective, but he also works alone, and sometimes—as in the case of *Somewhat like You*—he works as a guest choreographer with a group of dancers. He finds the diversity of his job very rewarding. “The way things are, I can’t really think in terms of a permanent company with resident dancers and the whole bit,” he says. “What I actually do is work on one project, then another, and I’ve come to accept that completely. It gives me amazing freedom... I’m an itinerant artist! That is, an independent person, without constraints, moving from project to project and ultimately gaining an incredible wealth of experience because of the many different contexts and techniques I encounter. Sometimes you get to direct a project because you’ve collaborated on it and you know how things work... Sometimes you’re part of the team, sometimes you’re the director—much as in everyday life! I’m a pretty versatile person; I like being the boss, but I also like being the worker bee.”

What have you learned about the Montréal Danse and how it works? This guide contains some background information about the company.

Can you name another dance company in Canada?

“Somewhat like You”

The title of a work tells us a lot: it announces, it prepares, it grabs our attention. Why the title *Somewhat like You*?

Somewhat like You implies “a bit of you and a bit of me.” The dancers on stage aren’t teenagers, and neither is the choreographer, but they must have been interested in teenagers to create this work. Maybe the adult world and the teenage world aren’t so far apart after all...

Somewhat like You is an invitation to learn, to listen, to watch others (the dancers) watching you. As Martin says, “I was a teenager just like you, and maybe I can still remember what that’s like. I’m still Somewhat like You.”

If you had to give this work a title, what would you call it?

Storyline

What about the storyline? Does every dance work tell a story? Might it be conveyed through moments that remind us of our own experiences, impressions, slices of life that we can relate to? Can you appreciate dance the same way you appreciate a painting or a sculpture? Or should you just let your imagination go with the feelings and images the performance suggests?

The history of dance encompasses many different artistic movements that emerged at different times and under different creators. Some forms had very strong storylines, while others—often in reaction—rejected any hint of narrative. From classical ballet with its strong narrative and technical virtuosity, to expressive dance that probes the very heart of modern society; from impressionistic dance that foregrounds the fluid beauty of physical gestures, to cutting-edge works that challenge every rule, all share a single desire: to deliver a message. No matter what the form or style, viewers are invited to enter into the dance—with their eyes, their hearts, their reactions, or sometimes all three.

Often, when we watch a dance performance, we automatically categorize what we are seeing according to our own frame of reference. We unconsciously impose a narrative (storyline) or a meaning on what we are seeing, even if that is not the choreographer's intention. So it's up to us to sharpen our senses, set ourselves free to make new connections and associations, and let the piece unfold in its own way. Let your imagination guide you... anything goes!

In fact, *Somewhat like You* invites us very specifically to enter into the dance and become part of the story. At certain moments in the performance, Rachel, Benoît and the other dancers address the audience directly, as if to say, "Come on, follow us, this is how it's done—we're all in this together!"

Martin compares this work to a painting or a set "with multiple layers that convey hints of different spaces and nameless places, a sense of something beginning, but where are we exactly?... no one can say... It's like adding layers to a painting: you create a lot of different levels of interpretation."

Can you think of certain parts of the performance that caught your eye? Movements that touched your heart? Moments that you really related to? Moments that left you totally confused?

Street Clothes / Stage Clothes



Danseur en répétition
Crédit obligatoire : Annik Hamel

Choosing the costumes the performers wear on stage is no accident. The costumes are as important to the overall effect as the lighting and the music, and require the same intensity of research and design from the creator of the work. In some cases the costumes look just like everyday clothes, and you might think not much effort went into them; but even if they aren't spectacular, the "costumes" have their own identity; they are one more piece of the puzzle, and they contain clues for decoding the universe of the work. In a dance piece that explores everyday situations, ornate and colourful costumes would be completely out of place.

What do the costumes tell us about the characters the dancers are portraying?

The costumes for *Somewhat like You* were selected by Martin and the dancers together. In keeping with Martin's concept of the performance as a site for interaction and exchange—even of conversation, there's no need for the dancers to portray other characters: Annik is Annik, Peter is Peter, they are there in front of you, plain and simple, without pretence. As Martin puts it, "In this work, the dancers don't play other people, so why would they need costumes?"

*Visit the NAC's Artsalive.ca website to view a photo gallery of dance. Notice the many variations and styles of costumes that are used in performance!*⁷

⁷ <http://www.artsalive.ca/en/dan/mediatheque/index.asp>

Studio and stage

The boundary between the studio and the stage is becoming less and less distinct as more and more creators use both venues to explore and experiment with movement—and with the audience relationship. For some choreographers, the process is as important as the finished product, and audiences are invited to watch as a work literally takes shape on stage. Sometimes the audience is part of the performance. Artists are constantly challenging traditional notions of staging and performance: in the 1960s and '70s, for instance, dancers left the theatres and began performing in public—on roofs, in warehouses, in the streets—, giving dance a whole new lease on life.

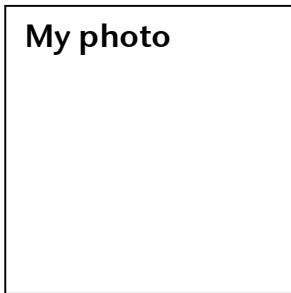
There's a similar subversive quality about *Somewhat like You*. Sometimes the dancers stand motionless on stage, as if they are waiting—or watching, like you in the audience; and you can choose to focus either on the “main event” or on what is happening “offstage.” Suddenly, there's more to the stage than the performance: you discover snippets of the dancers' everyday lives, glimpses of the building blocks of the work, even moments when the performers address you directly and you are all involved in the piece together.

SECTION THREE

Classroom Activities / Lesson Plans

Activity 1: Fact Sheet

Fact sheet:



Name:

Age:

I was born in (name of place):

My school's name is:

I live in (name of city):

Influences:

Distinguishing characteristics:

Favourite kind of music:

Favourite pastime:

Most important thing in life:

Favourite shows seen:

Activity 2: Identity Quest

Subjects: English (or French) and Dance
Materials required: Large space to move, pencils, paper
Theme: Creating (composing) a choreography along the lines of *Somewhat like You*

Somewhat like You features many design elements (technology, music, lyrics, props, etc.) and dance sequences (hip hop, house) that conjure up the world of teenagers. In this activity, students develop this concept further, using their own personal characteristics and preferences as a starting point for creation.

Using grade-appropriate language skills (English or French), have students build on the “fact sheet” (Activity 1) to develop a more detailed questionnaire. The aim of the questionnaire is to create a profile of another student by finding out about their personal tastes (e.g., favourite clothes, favourite kind of music, favourite subjects in school) and character (e.g., type of personality, distinguishing characteristics).

Have the students « interview » each other using the questionnaire.

Once the questionnaires have been completed, group them into “families” according to their common elements, and assign each student to his or her “family”: for example, the music-lovers, the bookworms, the dreamers, the risk-takers...

Divide the students into teams (families) and have them explore and improvise movements that would be typical of that family. Next, have them group the movements into sequences and choose appropriate music to describe their family.

Once the movement sequences have been developed, it's time to add spoken words or phrases from the questionnaire responses. Doing this might disrupt the movement sequences or change the performance space required. Have the students experiment with word rhythms, patterns and repetition to create a rhythmic and melodic line that goes with the music they've chosen.

Finally, have them add visual elements, choosing props or objects that are meaningful to and descriptive of their family.

For the third part of this activity, students develop solos within the overall piece they've created. Each member of the team/family performs a movement that describes their personality; the other members of the team repeat the movement, either exactly or putting their individual stamp on it, as if to say, “We are *Somewhat like You*.”

Activity 3: **Upside-down hip hop: hpiho**

Subject: Dance
Materials required: Space to move, different kinds of music (classical, rock, vocal, metal, pop, funky, etc.)

Choose a few hip hop movements and string them together into a sequence. If you are not experienced teaching hip hop, ask your students to provide moves that they classify as hip hop. Next, put the sequence through a series of transformations (deconstructions):

1. Perform first to a piece of hip hop music. You could ask students to bring in their own music. You could play this music while they are creating their initial hip hop moves.
2. Then, have them perform the sequence to different kinds of music. Emphasize the contrasts and discuss how they create different effects for the viewer.
3. Perform the sequence at different speeds: slow and smooth, fast and jerky, or alternating fast and slow movements.
4. Perform the sequence with a partner, either in its original form or at a different speed. Experiment with different combinations (interactions). Try performing it face to face, back to back, side by side, up and down; try using different points of contact.
5. Another deconstruction could be to mix up movements and body parts: perform the leg movements with your arms, for example. See how this causes the movements and actions to change.

Activity 4: Critic for a Day

Subjects: Dance and English (or French)
Materials required: Paper, pencils, sample reviews and preview articles

There are many different ways to enjoy dance: for example, you can be a dancer yourself, or you can attend dance performances. This latter category includes audience members and dance critics—people with an “expert eye.” Dance critics are like trail guides who help us understand what dance is about, get to know an artist or a dance piece, or situate a work in its cultural or historical context. With their insight and experience, they can help us understand a work better or encourage us to go and see it. In this activity, students take on the role of dance critics to write a dance preview or review.

A preview article is written and published before the show opens, and provides an introduction to the dance work. It should contain information about the choreographer and the company (including previous career credits and highlights); some enticing catchphrases to make the reader (or listener) want to go and see the show; basically “who what when where” information. Have students look up information about Martin Bélanger and Montréal Danse (they’ll find some in this guide) and consult sample preview articles to write their own preview in the manner of a dance critic.

A review, on the other hand, is much more specific and detailed. For this activity, have students use this guide to choose two or three aspects of the work (for example, historical context, costumes, dance style, etc.) to focus on in their article. They can also describe other elements, such as the sound design, sets and props, etc. Have each student write a dynamic review of the piece, relying on their memory and their “expert eye” to describe the work objectively, then subjectively. How did they react? Was it amazing? confusing? thrilling? Why? What worked and didn’t work about the piece? Conclude the review with a brief summary of how the work connected with their eyes, their heart and their senses.

More resources to encourage writing and reading about dance can be found at:
<http://www.artsalive.ca/en/dan/understand/read.asp>
<http://www.artsalive.ca/en/dan/yourturn/write/default.asp>

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Febvre, Michèle. *Danse contemporaine et théâtralité*. Paris: Librairie de la danse, 1995.

Useful websites

Montréal Danse: www.montrealdanse.com

National Arts Centre: www.nac.cna.ca

National Arts Centre arts education website: www.artsalive.ca

Canadian online dance publications

Dance Collection danse: www.dcd.ca

Dfdanse (French webzine): www.dfdanse.com

The Dance Current: www.thedancecurrent.com

Dance International Magazine: www.danceinternational.org

About Study Guide Author Nicole Turcotte

In her ten years as an arts education consultant, Nicole Turcotte has collaborated on numerous cultural and education projects. She has written articles for arts and education publications and developed study guides for performances for young audiences. She was also involved in designing the new high-school arts curriculum for the Quebec Ministry of Education. For the past 15 years she has worked as an Assistant Professor in the Dance Department at the Université du Québec à Montréal (UQAM). Having worked as a professional dancer (with Hélène Blackburn and Jean-Pierre Perreault, among others) and taught high school for 12 years, Ms. Turcotte has a unique appreciation of both the dance and education worlds.