

Why Ottawa dance fans are the luckiest in the country (again) with the new National Arts Centre season

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Every year I pine with envy when the National Arts Centre's new dance season is announced. Ottawa dance fans are the luckiest in the country. Once again, NAC dance producer Cathy Levy has put together four sterling series ranging from traditional ballet to avant-garde experimentation, along with two special presentations.

Just check out the statistics – 20 companies from nine countries, seven of which are presenting works not seen in Canada before. Three companies are exclusive Canadian engagements (Hubbard Street Dance Chicago, Pennsylvania Ballet and Public in private/Clément Layes. "I love everything I bring," says Levy.

The ballet series consists of three full-length works (the National Ballet of Canada's *Swan Lake*, Les Grands Ballets Canadiens' *Rodin/Claudel* and the Pennsylvania Ballet's *Coppélia*), all supported by live music performed by the NAC Orchestra.

Levy is particularly happy about having Les Grands Ballets Canadiens back in the ballet series. Choreographer Peter Quanz's *Rodin/Claudel* marks a return by the company to more traditional ballet technique and a classical-music score. In past years, Les Grands Ballets, long a proponent of off-point, edgy contemporary ballet, has appeared in contemporary dance Series A.

The three contemporary series cover the waterfront from modern dance to the cutting edge of movement exploration.

Series A contains four high-profile, audience-friendly, large companies (Dance Theatre of Harlem and Hubbard Street Dance Chicago from the United States, Cloud Gate Dance Theatre of Taiwan and Argentina's Tango Pasion).

For Levy, the big deal is the Dance Theatre of Harlem. The ballet company opened in 1969 and was a major player for 35 years, until debt shut it down for eight seasons. Now newly relaunched under artistic director Virginia Johnson, former company prima ballerina assoluta, DTH is bringing a mixed repertoire, including a ballet choreographed by Canadian John Alleyne (ex of Ballet BC).

Levy is also excited by Hubbard Street's first full-length work, *One Thousand Pieces*, by rising-star resident choreographer Alejandro Cerrudo. The piece, which was commissioned to celebrate Hubbard

Street's 35th anniversary, is set to music by Philip Glass, and was inspired by iconic artist Marc Chagall's six-panelled, stained-glass *America Windows* series at the Art Institute of Chicago.

Series B features five high-profile, edgier companies – Britain's Akram Khan Company and Wayne McGregor/Random Dance, France's Compagnie Maguy Marin, Kyle Abraham (Abraham.In.Motion) from the United States and Spain's Israel Galvan).

Abraham is making his NAC debut, and Levy considers him among the most exciting contemporary/hip-hop fusion choreographers. He is bringing his piece *The Radio Show*, inspired by the shutting down of a radio station in his native Pittsburgh, which he equates with the loss of tradition. The piece won both a Bessie and Jacob's Pillow dance festival award.

Khan and McGregor are festival darlings around the world. The often outrageous Galvan take nuevo flamenco to new frontiers, while Marin, the queen of new French socio-political dance, takes on issues of war in her piece *Salves* (Salvo).

Series C is for adventurous dance fans (Australia's Lucy Guerin Inc. and Montreal's Compagnie Virginie Brunelle). Guerin's *Weather* explores the body's reaction to sun, wind and rain, while Brunelle dissects male/female relationships. Her quirky sense of humour includes bare-breasted female dancers in tutus.

This series also offers Face 2 Face, which features four solos in repertoire (England's Aakash Odedra, Montreal's Anne Plamondon and Germany's Helena Waldmann and Public in private/Clément Layes). The first Face 2 Face last year, which featured duets, was wildly popular, as audiences were able to catch two to three performances a night in this mini-festival.

The two Special Presentations are the Royal Winnipeg Ballet's *Nutcracker*, and Montreal shockmeister Dave St-Pierre. The latter's *Foudres* continues his in-your-face dance with attitude, which translates into nudity and graphic sexuality.

Says Levy: "We like to follow artists like Kahn and Guerin, and build up a local audience for them by bringing them back to present new work. Our mandate is also to introduce new artists like Abraham, Layes and Waldmann to both Ottawa and the country. Co-productions are important, such as presenting Plamondon's first full-length solo created with famous Montreal actress/writer/director Marie Brassard who worked closely with Robert Lepage. I'm happy to say that we have over 6,000 subscribers, and many of the shows are already sold out."

For a full list of companies, venues and performance dates, visit nac-cna.ca/en/dance [<http://nac-cna.ca/en/dance/2013-2014>].