MARGIE GILLIS

Thread

PRE-PERFORMANCE INFORMATION
FOR TEACHERS

SCHOOL MATINEE

Wednesday March 10, 2010 ~ 12:30 p.m.

An NAC Dance presentation
DANCE 2009-2010 SEASON
Cathy Levy, Producer
THE NATIONAL ARTS CENTRE

Officially opened on June 2, 1969, the National Arts Centre was one of the key institutions created by Prime Minister Lester B. Pearson as the principal centennial project of the federal government.

Built in the shape of a hexagon, the design became the architectural leitmotif for Canada's premier performing arts centre.

Situated in the heart of the nation's capital across Confederation Square from Parliament Hill, the National Arts Centre is among the largest performing arts complexes in Canada. It is unique as the only multidisciplinary, bilingual performing arts centre in North America and features one of the largest stages on the continent. Designed by Fred Lebensold (ARCOP Design), one of North America's foremost theatre designers, the building was widely praised as a twentieth century architectural landmark.

A programme to incorporate visual arts into the fabric of the building has resulted in the creation of one of the country's most unique permanent art collections of international and Canadian contemporary art. Pieces include special commissions such as, Homage to RFK (mural) by internationally acclaimed Canadian contemporary artist William Ronald, The Three Graces by Ossip Zadkine and a large free standing untitled bronze sculpture by Charles Daudelin. In 1997, the NAC collaborated with the Art Bank of the Canada Council of the Arts to install over 130 pieces of Canadian contemporary art.

The NAC is home to four different performance spaces, each with its own unique characteristics. THREAD will be performed in the Theatre, a 897 seat performance hall.

Today, the NAC works with countless artists, both emerging and established, from across Canada and around the world, and collaborates with scores of other arts organizations across the country. The Centre also plays host to the Canada Dance Festival.

The NAC is strongly committed to being a leader and innovator in each of the performing arts fields in which it works - classical music, English theatre, French theatre, dance, variety, and community programming. It is at the forefront of youth and educational activities, supporting programmes for young and emerging artists and programmes for young audiences, and producing resources and study materials for teachers.
DANCE AT THE NAC

Welcome teachers and students! Welcome to those who are devotees and those who are new to the art form. Dance is a magical force: it can connect to one's heart and soul like a beautiful song or a touching story. Through its largely non-verbal format, it can speak universally to both simple and complex themes, enriching our experience and our lives. Dance can be pleasurable, but it can also be compelling and engaging...even confronting.

I joined the NAC as Dance Producer in 2000, and since then have had the great good fortune of inviting choreographers from around the world to the National Arts Centre dance season, and presenting a broad spectrum of choreographers and ideas.

One of our many priorities is to bring dance to young audiences and support education and outreach to the school community. This will be my third year of presenting dance works for school audiences that are also part of my regular program. Feedback from teachers and our youth focus group for dance, during our youth commission project phase, was instrumental in this development in our programming.

Along with our two matinees for schools this year, there are many performances in our regular season that would be educational and entertaining for your students. We invite you to consider returning with your class to an evening show or enjoy a night out with your own family. Visit our dance page on www.nac-cna.ca to learn about our recommendations for young people and families.

A World of Dance in Ottawa awaits you.

CATHY LEVY
DANCE PRODUCER, NATIONAL ARTS CENTRE
“I choreograph and dance from a place deep inside, in order to make visible the imagery that lives in my body. I endeavour to bring to light and to work with the essential, vulnerable and authentic parts of our nature. I have always been fascinated by the miraculous links that exist between physical expression and the intellect, between emotions and spirituality. Dance... a means to catharsis, transformation and discovery.”

~ Margie Gillis
INTERNATIONAL NOTES

Internationally acclaimed modern dance artist, dancer/choreographer Margie Gillis has been creating original works for over thirty-five years. Her repertoire now includes more than one hundred pieces which she performs as solos and nearly a dozen duets and group pieces.

Born in Montreal to a family of accomplished athletes, Margie Gillis could not have wished for a better environment in which to develop her talent. Showing a passion for dance early in life, she began ballet and gymnastic lessons at the age of three. In her youth, she trained and rehearsed on her own and later continued to learn in classes with such prominent teachers as May O'Donnell, Linda Rabin, Lynda Raino and Allan Wayne. Over the years, this charismatic dancer has developed a remarkable personal style.

In 1979, Margie Gillis was invited to teach and give lectures in Maoist China, thus becoming the first artist from the West to introduce modern dance in that country after the Cultural Revolution. Two years later, she founded her own company, the Margie Gillis Dance Foundation with the mission to support and present her artistic work. Her international tours have taken her to Asia, India, Europe and the Middle East as well as across North and South America.

In parallel to her solo work and on a regular basis, Margie Gillis collaborates on projects initiated by her peers. She participated in the creation of two of Martha Clarke’s major pieces in which she danced principal roles. She has performed with The Paul Taylor Dance Company in pieces created by her brother, the late dancer/choreographer Christopher Gillis. With Les Grands Ballets canadiens de Montréal, she danced the role of Miss Lucy in James Kudelka’s Dracula. She has also been a guest artist with the National Ballet of Canada, Ballet British Columbia and American companies such as Momix and The Bruce Wood Dance Company. She has collaborated with many other important artists in the world of dance, most notably with John Butler, Paul-André Fortier, Pauline Komer, Peggy Baker, Robbie LaFosse, Joao Mauricio, Tedd Robinson, Rina Schenfeld, Paola Styron, Rex Harrington, Risa Steinberg and Emily Molnar. In Canada, she has shared the stage with Quebec soprano, Suzie Leblanc. And, recently, she has toured in Sacred Ellington with the celebrated opera singer, Jessye Norman.

Margie Gillis has been seen on television and in theatrical films on several occasions. Her life and her art have been the subjects of several documentary films, the most notable being Veronica Tennant's Wild Hearts in Strange Times. For her participation in this film, Margie Gillis was awarded the 1998 Gemini Prize for Best Performing Artist on Film. Among other collaborations in film or television projects, Margie Gillis choreographed the Delilah sequence for John Turturro’s film Romance and Cigarettes and danced the principal role in José Navas’ choreographic film Adela, mi amor.

Margie Gillis also creates for other performing artists. She has choreographed works for companies such as Coleman Lemieux & Company, The Bruce Wood Dance Company and the Alberta Ballet Company. In 2006, the Cirque du Soleil commissioned her for two solos for the Las Vegas production of LOVE, a tribute to the legendary Beatles and their music. The world premiere of M.Body.7, a group piece Margie Gillis created to celebrate her 35th anniversary season, was performed in January 2008, at the Festival Montréal en lumière.

Teaching is an important aspect of Margie Gillis’ career. She offers workshops for dance professionals and students in various cities throughout the world, including New York where she has taught at the prestigious Juilliard School.

Margie Gillis is an Honorary Cultural Ambassador for both the Quebec and Canadian governments. In 1988, she was the first modern dance artist to be awarded the Order of Canada. In 2001, she received a Career Grant from the Conseil des arts et des lettres du Québec for her exceptional contribution to Quebec culture. In the Fall of 2008, Margie Gillis was chosen by the Stella Adler Studio of New York to receive their first MAD Spirit Award for her involvement in various social causes, and she was awarded the Walter Carsen Prize for Excellence in the Performing Arts by a jury of her peers at the Canada Council for the Arts. In June of 2009, Margie Gillis was appointed Knight of the Ordre national du Québec.

Margie Gillis is a socially committed artist. She has been spokesperson for a number of organizations dedicated to the fight against AIDS as well as for OXFAM and the Planned Parenthood Foundation.

Over the years, Margie Gillis has won over loyal audiences with her masterful interpretation of the different facets of the human soul. Steadfastly, she continues to develop her work through experimenting, teaching and creating.
The student matinee will consist of excerpts from Margie Gillis’s piece

**Thread**

*THREAD* is a textile metaphor for our humanity, an invitation for us to reflect upon the challenges and miracles like so many threads woven daily into the complex lace of our path towards maturity and letting-go. The connections that fill our lives take on shapes that are as eclectic as they are numerous. **THREAD** follows an essential plot line, exposing the rope that trips us up, the bonds that tether us, the string that attaches us, the knots we sever, the ribbons that glorify us.

**Artistic Team**

- Choreography: Margie Gillis
- Performance: Margie Gillis
- Sets and Lighting: Pierre Lavoie
- Sound Track and Music: Larsen Lupin
- Artistic Consultant: Daniel Jackson
- Costumes: Liz Vandal
- Technical Direction: Alexandra Langlois
- Research + Development – costumes: Anne Dixon
- Creative Assistant: Catherine Bourgeois
- Photography + Videography: Michael Slobodian
- Therapist: Joanna Abbatt

« Exploring the interweaving of the pathways of life, soul, heart, memory and possibility, embracing the mysterious, I create to transform, heal and discover; these threads I also follow. »

~ Margie Gillis
PERFORMANCE HALL ETIQUETTE

Curriculum Connection: Grade 9 appropriate behaviour at performances

Teachers: Help us ensure that everyone enjoys the performance!
As a teacher bringing your students to a performance at the National Arts Centre, please keep in mind that you are responsible for the behaviour of your students. It is up to you to ensure that the students behave in a respectful and attentive manner towards the performers on stage as well as NAC staff. Use the guidelines below to brief your students about behaviour in the performance hall before you attend your NAC performance.

✔ Performers on stage rely on the audience for the energy to perform: audiences need to be attentive, quiet and respectful in order to help create the magic of live performance.

✔ Performers can see and hear everything that you do, just as you can see and hear everything that they do, so:

- Please save your snacks, drinks, candies and gum for another time - the performance hall is no place for eating and drinking.
- Please discuss what you like and dislike about a performance - but definitely do it after you leave the theatre, not during the performance.
- It is important that you be comfortable in your seat - but please don’t leave your seat once the performance has started. It’s distracting to those on stage.
- Be sure to turn off cell phones, pagers and anything that beeps.
- Cameras and video recording devices are strictly prohibited in the theatre.

✔ Dancers love to have their performance acknowledged by your applause, but remember to wait until the whole piece is over. Some choreographers choose to create dance in several sections. It may seem like the end of the piece when the performers come to the end of a dance. If you get confused about when a piece is finished, watch the performers on stage—you’ll be sure to know when the piece is over when the lights fade to black then come back on and the dancers run on stage to take a bow.

✔ Remember that there are a lot of people who work very hard to put on a performance -- not just actors, dancers and musicians, but administrators, front-of-house and technical staff. Everyone will have a different opinion of what they see on stage, but consider that constructive criticism is always appreciated more than purely negative criticism.

✔ Through the performing arts we can explore other points of view, learn new and different things about ourselves and about others. Everyone who views a performance will experience it in a different way. It is important to respect this process of exploration in yourselves and those around you.
APPRECIATING CONTEMPORARY DANCE

The best way to appreciate contemporary dance is without expectations, without judgment. Think of it as your own personal adventure. The combination of movement, gesture, costume, and music all work together to take you on a journey. The adventure begins the moment you sit down. Just as when you go traveling, you may experience many different “landscapes” throughout a single dance performance. And remember, you, the audience, are an essential part of the performance. Without you there the show would not come to life.

Live theatrical performance is different than watching a movie. Don't expect the same experience. A contemporary dance show may or may not have a narrative, a storyline. The piece may be about shape, form and bodies moving through space – think of it similarly to how you would an abstract sculpture at the art gallery or of music.

As an audience member, you may feel you don't understand what you're watching. You're not alone. To avoid frustration and embarrassment because they don't “get it”, many people close themselves off to dance completely. However, they miss out on how dance can be exciting, thought-provoking, creative and enriching. Dance can make you see and think about yourself and the world in new ways.

The key is not to pressure yourself with trying to find “the meaning”. There is no right or wrong interpretation. Whether or not a dance performance suits your particular tastes, if you are open to the experience, you will get something from it.

All in all, enjoying a contemporary dance performance is quite simple: be open to new experiences, and let your intuition and your emotions guide you. Be open and receptive to what you are seeing on stage. Let yourself go: experience the different emotions, mental pictures and impressions the dance calls up in you. The key is not to pressure yourself. The truth is, you really can relax. There is no right or wrong interpretation.

Dance first. Think later. It's the natural order.

~ Samuel Beckett
HOW TO WATCH A PERFORMANCE

Curriculum Connections:

Appreciation and Criticism – grade 9, 10, 11: Create criteria and analyze dance

History and Culture – grade 9, 10, 11, 12: Observe and describe dance

Each person watching may have very different interpretations about what they saw and how they felt. All are valid. Mental understanding is not the key in contemporary dance. Rather than trying to understand intellectually what is going on, instead, relax, take a few deep breaths, then open your body and mind to the dance. You needn’t struggle to find a “message”. Sometimes a performance just leaves you with a vague feeling, like an abstract painting or jazz improvisation.

At the Performance study:

- The movement and emotions expressed by the dancer
- How the dancer uses the space
- Your own moods in response to the show—excitement, anxiety, curiosity, frustration, amazement, sadness
- The combination of patterns and shapes on stage
- The relationship between movement, sound, set and costume

Questions to contemplate:

- How does the dance make me feel?
- Do I recognize any of the gestures or symbols used by the dancer?
- Does the dance remind me of moments or events in my own life?
- What thoughts, ideas or images emerge for me?
- What meaning is there for me from this experience?

Remember, in understanding contemporary dance there are no rules.

Dancing is just discovery, discovery, discovery.

~ Martha Graham
POST-PERFORMANCE ACTIVITY: STRING DANCE

Curriculum Connections:

Creation – elements of dance movement, grade 9, 10: Explore movement through structured improvisation, observe and demonstrate improvisation movement patterns, combinations and group dances, create dance sequences using explored elements,

Creation – composition, presentation and performance, grade 9 - 11: dance composition exploring a theme, composition for small group, cooperation and leadership

Subjects: Dance, Theatre

Materials required: Large studio space, Balls of yarn, Fabric

Theme: Props, connections, use of space

This is a work that introduces abstract dance to the audience. The choreography is the performer and she has created this work by accessing a deep emotional and spiritual space. Her theme for the work is thread. In the piece she figuratively and literally uses thread in her work.

Experiment and gain inspiration from the piece you have seen. Brainstorm and discuss what the image of thread means to the students.

Using balls of yarn or string or lengths of fabric of different colours, textures, shapes and sizes, experiment with how you can move as an individual with the prop and then in groups. How can the thread be used to create openings or doorways through which to travel through? How can the thread be used to create pathways on the floor? How can the thread be manipulated between dancers, to change the space?

Create a dance that begins with the thread in a ball, and then unravels and ends back in a ball, or not? What types of narratives are the students able to create using the yarn? What characters were discovered?

Margie Gillis is a very expressive dancer. She uses large sweeping movements and has brought in rich fabrics to extenuate her movements. Using pieces of fabric, long scarves and the dancers natural movements, experiment with how fabric can embellish a dance. If you have the opportunity to use standing fans or can go outside on a windy day, you can create dramatic effects with fabric. Experiment and let your imagination go wild.
INTERNET RESOURCES

- Margie Gillis Dance Foundation: www.margiegillis.org
- National Arts Centre: www.nac-cna.ca

**Dance and art education websites:**

- ArtsAlive, the NAC’s performing arts education site
  [www.artsalive.ca](http://www.artsalive.ca)
- Council of Drama and Dance in Education (Ontario)
  [www.code.on.ca](http://www.code.on.ca)
- Kennedy Centre (USA)
  [www.artsedge.kennedy-centre.org](http://www.artsedge.kennedy-centre.org)
- Canadian Association of Health, Physical Education, Recreation and Dance
  [www.cahperd.ca](http://www.cahperd.ca)
- ArtsAlive.ca: “A Very Dangerous Pastime”
  A humorous and educational 14-minute award-winning video that aims to reveal the “secret” of how to watch and appreciate contemporary dance.
- Ladanse.net
  History of dance from prehistory to 18th century ballet (in French), France and Belgium
  [http://www.ladanse.net/histoire/accueil.html](http://www.ladanse.net/histoire/accueil.html)
- Chorème
  [www.choreme.ca](http://www.choreme.ca)

**Online Dance Publications:**

- Dance Collection Danse
  [www.dcd.ca](http://www.dcd.ca)
- The Dance Current
  [www.thedancecurrent.com](http://www.thedancecurrent.com)
- Dance International Magazine
  [www.danceinternational.org](http://www.danceinternational.org)
- Dance Magazine
  [www.dancemagazine.com](http://www.dancemagazine.com)