

# Choreographer inspired by city's extremes

## Vancouver street scenes provided creative spark behind new work for Ballet BC

BY KEVIN GRIFFIN, VANCOUVER SUN NOVEMBER 17, 2011

A former dancer with the Polish National Ballet who was inspired to defect by the ballets of John Neumeier has created his first ballet for dancers en pointe for Ballet BC's new season at the Queen Elizabeth Theatre.

Since starting his career in Poland, dancer and choreographer Robert Glumbek has worked for companies that include ProArte-Danza and Desrosiers Dance Theatre in Canada as well as Ballet Mannheim in Germany.

His first work for Ballet BC is called Diversion. It's both a contemporary exploration of the battle of the sexes and his observations of the extremes he's seen while walking around the streets of Vancouver.

"I got inspired in Vancouver. I have never seen so many crazy people," he said in an interview at the Scotiabank Dance Centre.

"The other day I was walking and here was this guy in the middle of the day, pants down, peeing on the window of a store. Then I took five steps, and a guy was singing and screaming. It was so surreal. At the same time, it was amazing.

"Those kind of things, they stay in your head and later on you use them. They're so extreme. For me, it is always about how I look at the world, how I look at friends, how they look at me. It's about looking at the outside and the inside. My work is very personal."

Glumbek's intuitive awareness of his surroundings started at a young age. He was enrolled in ballet school in Wroclaw at age nine by his mother. Living under a bureaucratic Communist regime, she thought that the best way for her son to get ahead and have the opportunity to defect was by joining a travelling national ballet company.

Initially, Glumbek hated the school. But within a few years, he started to like learning about the history and music of ballet, the Stanislavski method of acting, and folk and historical dances. He also realized that being one of the few young men in ballet was an advantage.

By the time he was 19, he was a soloist with the Polish National Ballet, the country's main ballet company with 110 dancers. As his mother predicted, he was travelling all over the world with the company, performing as a character dancer.

What changed his comfortable life was seeing the ballets of John Neumeier, the American-born head of the Hamburg Ballet. Seeing performances of Neumeier's *Love and Pain* and *World in the Dream* rocked Glumbek's world.