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## The Globe and Mail's 2012 dance preview

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*From edgy Quebec choreographers to a moving ballet about domestic violence, the country's dance card is full this year*

### What I'm most excited to see

Toronto Dance Theatre artistic director Christopher House understands that dancers in a one-choreographer company need outside stimulation, which is the reason behind its annual showcase called *Four at the Winch*. This year's version (Winchester Street Theatre, Toronto, Feb. 23-March 3) features Quebec choreographers: Estelle Cléretton represents edgy dance theatre with a touch of circus; Lina Cruz is whimsical, experimental and eccentric all at the same time; Deborah Dunn is intellectual and sophisticated; Jean-Sébastien Lourdaux pushes the body to the outer limits.

### What I'm least excited to see

The late choreographer Alvin Ailey created 79 works, but you wouldn't know it given the tendency of the company he founded, Alvin Ailey American Dance Theater, to include his 1960 signature *Revelations* at every performance. To be fair, there will be four other works on the program during its Canadian tour (Sony Centre, Toronto, Feb. 2-4; NAC, Ottawa, April 17; Salle Wilfred Pélletier, Montreal, April 19-21), but new artistic director Robert Battle needs to leave the chestnuts behind.

### The event with the biggest hype

The Bolshoi Ballet (Sony Centre, Toronto, May 15-19; NAC, Ottawa, May 23-26) is, along with the Kirov, the summit of classical dance. The fact that both companies have toured within a year of each other is a balletomane's dream. Nonetheless, the Sony Centre needs to be more adventurous. The Bolshoi is performing *Swan Lake* in Toronto, which the Kirov performed in the city last year. Ottawa, meanwhile, gets Don Quixote by the Bolshoi; last year it got the Kirov's *La Bayadère*. Toronto doesn't need another *Swan Lake* so soon: Whether choreographed by Konstantin Sergeyev (Kirov), or Yuri Gngorovich (Bolshoi), it's essentially the original Pelipa/Ivanov version.

### The event that's under the radar but deserves big hype

*Ghosts of Violence* began as a short work by Igor Dobrovolskiy, artistic director of Moncton-based Atlantic Ballet Theatre of Canada. Originally created for an advocacy group fundraiser, it has grown into a full-length ballet about domestic homicide. The fact that women's groups across the country are clamouring for this piece points to the power of art as an instrument of social change (The Playhouse, Fredericton, Jan. 19; Paul Davenport Theatre, London, Ont., Feb. 22; Bluma Appel Theatre, Toronto, Feb. 25; Imperial Theatre, Saint John, March 15; Confederation Centre, Charlottetown, March 29; Dalhousie Arts Centre, Halifax, May 5).

### The fit boy of the year

Montreal dancer/choreographer José Navas and his Compagnie Flak are better known outside the country for his stunning abstract works that celebrate the beauty of the human body. This year, however, Canadians will get to see what the fuss is about. Not only will Navas present his solo *Personae* in Montreal and Ottawa, as resident choreographer of Ballet BC, he'll unveil his full-length *Bliss* in May. It caught everyone by surprise when BBC's artistic director Emily Molnar appointed Navas, the quintessence of an indie dance artist, as resident choreographer in 2010. A much-praised short version of *Bliss* was unveiled last season, but can Navas sustain a full-length ballet ensemble piece? (*Personae*/Compagnie Flak, Cinquième Salle, Montreal, Jan. 11-28; NAC, Ottawa, March 8-10; *Bliss*/Ballet BC, Queen Elizabeth Theatre, Vancouver, May 10-12)

### The big trend

It's well known that story ballets put bums in seats, so it's no surprise Canadian companies are moving in that direction. This only works, however, if the new works are worthy. The National Ballet of Canada did well in 2011 with Christopher Wheeldon's *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland* and Alexei Ratmansky's *Romeo and Juliet*. This year's offerings include Nureyev's *The Sleeping Beauty* and the North American premiere of Kevin O'Day's *Hamlet*. The Royal Winnipeg Ballet, unfortunately, has had two dud's in a row, with Jordan Morris's *Moulin Rouge* and Mark Godden's *Svengali*. In short, producing notable new story ballets is a crap shoot. Nonetheless, the Royal Winnipeg and Alberta Ballet seem to be moving to a story-ballet-only repertoire, too, meaning that audiences are missing out on being exposed to a range of choreographers in mixed programs. Is it a dumbing down?

### The can't miss list

World-renowned Canadian ex-pat Azure Barton, regarded among the top of New York choreographers, is creating a new duet for Donald Sales and her sister Chence, *Chapter Three: Collaboration* (premiering at the Chutzpah Festival in Vancouver, Feb. 19-21). Sales is a revered former dancer with Ballet BC, while New York-based Chence Barton is a talented dancer, choreographer and actor. The second world premiere on the program, jointly choreographed by Sales and Chence, is set on six excellent Vancouver dancers - Lara Barclay, Leon Felzo-Gas, Jennifer Weisman, Cori Caulfield, Kevin Tookey and Billy Bell.

French bad boy choreographer Mourad Merzouk and his Company Kâfig presents two pieces, *Correria* and *Agwa* (at Théâtre Maisonneuve, Montreal, April 12-14; NAC in Ottawa, April 19-20, and at Fleck Dance Theatre, Toronto, May 2-5). An explosive fusion of hip-hop, samba, capoeira, bossa nova and acrobatics, they are performed by young Brazilians from Rio's Companhia Urbana de Dança.

The great Crystal Pite presents two works, *Dark Matters* (Bluma Appel Theatre, Toronto, Feb. 28-March 3) and *The You Show* (Agora de la danse, Montreal, March 21-24). *Dark Matters* cunningly fuses the curiosity of both physicists and psychologists; *The You Show*, made up of four duets, explores memories of love and separation. Both works are laced with Pite's choreographic invention, demanding technique, droll sense of humour and raw emotional edge. Long-time composer Owen Belton contributes the original scores.

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