

The 50th Anniversary Celebrations

by Paula Citron

To celebrate Canada's National Ballet School's 50th anniversary, activities are planned to run throughout the year. It has taken the school five years of planning to pull off some very ambitious programming. For example, NBS grad David Allan ('73) is creating a new ballet for the Spring Showcase (May 25 to 29) that features dancers of all ages. There is also the mega gathering of the clan during the NBS Alumni/Homecoming Weekend (Apr. 23 to 25).

The gilded lily, however, is the singularly original event that goes by the convoluted name *Assemblée Internationale, 2009: Collaboration. Choreography. Conference. A Student-Centred Dance Celebration* (Nov. 15 to Nov. 23). It is perhaps the most graphic expression of NBS artistic director Mavis Staines' belief in dance as the global village. Known as AI 09 for short, this dance festival and conference will bring over 120 students from professional training partner schools to Toronto. (A complete list of participating schools is below.)

From the onset, the students will be put into mixed classes that will be taught by a potpourri of teachers from different schools. The rest of the week will be devoted to rehearsals. Four gala performances are planned. Two different concerts will showcase each of the thirteen partner schools in a work that best reflects the ballet tradition of that particular culture. Even more exciting are the performances featuring original choreography by the students themselves. For these two concerts, the program will be the same. After the weekend performances, the one-day conference takes place with students, teachers and invited guests discussing the direction in which the art form and professional practices should evolve. Staines emphasizes the significance of these themes of common interest such as topics like the challenges of entering the professional dance community.

The fascinating twist is that each student choreography will be performed by a mixed cast made up of students from different schools. This is possible through DVDs of each school's original choreography which all the school will receive. Staines has assigned the roles that each school will undertake for each ballet. The DVDs are the tools that will be used by the selected students to learn their choreography before arriving in Toronto. This means that each young choreographer will have an international cast performing his or her own work. Toronto-born, Grade 12 student Rob Binet, 17, is representing the NBS with his work for seven couples titled *Surge*. For his part, Binet looks at AI as networking. "It's a way of getting my name known to an international audience," he says. "I love choreography, and that's what I want to do for a career." Binet also thinks that the original choreography element is important because it provides performance opportunities to learn new work.

"The intent of the week is to provide a rich, educational experience," says Staines. "The students get to take ballet classes and learn choreography with students from outside their own school. They will also undergo different teaching styles and techniques from a wide variety of ballet teachers. It's the joint rehearsals and the collaborative process that is of real importance. I believe that AI 09, by embracing the ideas of collaboration and partnership, will lead to evolution and development in both ballet training and the art of dance in general."

[The thirteen participating AI 09 schools are Canada's National Ballet School and Royal Winnipeg Ballet School (Canada); San Francisco Ballet School (USA); National Ballet School (Havana, Cuba); London's Royal Ballet School (England); Hamburg Ballet School, Stuttgart's John Cranko School, and Dresden's Palucca Schule (Germany); Paris Opera Ballet School (France); Copenhagen's Royal Danish Ballet School (Denmark), Rotterdam's Codarts, Amsterdam's National Ballet School, and The Hague's Royal Conservatory (The Netherlands).]